

A SURVEY ON MUD-BRICK USAGE FOR EXCAVATION WORKS OF VAN CASTLE AND THE OLD CITY OF VAN



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ABSTRACT

Mud-brick has been utilized as a fundamental building material in military architecture for bastions and city walls, in religious architecture for churches and mosques, and in vernacular/civil architecture for residential structures across the Lake Van Basin. This tradition reflects the direct architectural influence of the neighboring Iranian/Persian civilization. Mud-brick was consistently employed as a primary building material in numerous architectural structures in and around Van (Tuşba), the capital of the Urartian kingdom. The mud-brick production and construction techniques inherited from the Urartians were continuously maintained by nearly all subsequent civilizations. In terms of mud-brick application, the Van Fortress and the Old City of Van are prominent historical settlement centers in the region.

Although actively inhabited until the early 20th century, the Van Fortress and the Old City of Van were devastated after 1918 as a result of the war. Scientific excavation campaigns have been conducted for the purpose of preservation and restoration of the military, religious, and civil architectural structures located within these sites. Following these excavations, foundational architectural remains were initially uncovered and recorded; however, it has been observed that the restored mud-brick structures suffer severe deterioration and the interventions are largely ruined within a few months following the completion of excavations authorized by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. This cycle continues periodically each year without deriving critical lessons from recurring failures.

The primary reason Urartian mud-brick structures have survived to the present day lies in the superior quality of the original materials and the adequacy of the construction techniques employed; conversely, present-day interventions fail because the contemporary material quality and execution techniques are inadequate and improper. Consequently, the conservation and restoration methods applied during current scientific excavations remain controversial. The palliative measures, conservation, and restoration works carried out post-excavation survive for only a few months at most. As a result, the region's registered cultural heritage continues to vanish progressively despite ongoing scientific efforts.

KEY WORDS: Urartians, Mud-brick, Old City of Van, Excavation, Restoration