Problematising the shifting capitals of medieval Arran: from Bardhaʿa to Janza in the 10th-12th centuries

Abstract

The dominant historical narrative for early Islamic frontier zones such as Arran, in the Caucasus, tends to focus on the administrative centres, the capital cities. As this story of development becomes synthesised and simplified, there has been a tendency to understand this process as the decline of one major centre and the rise of another, almost in the sense of city-states. This paper reconsiders the case of the changing capitals of Arran, to understand how urbanism developed in the Caucasus in the early Islamic period and how this gave rise to the situation as observed in the 10th-12th century when the region is essentially independent from the core Islamic lands, albeit regularly a vassal state. In doing so new archaeological evidence is combined with that from existing historical sources, to propose a new model for the urban settlement patterns of the medieval period in the southeastern Caucasus.

Keywords

The Caucasus, Islamic Archaeology, Urbanism, Shaddadids

Introduction

The city of Bardhaʿa, or Partaw, has been written into the pages of Azerbaijan's history as the capital of the early nation, insofar as it has been labelled the core of the state of Caucasian Albania. While we have woefully little information about the polity of Caucasian Albania in the late Antique period, this provincial city, at least through Arab eyes, was indeed an early regional metropolis; founded around the fifth century CE.[1] After the incorporation of the south Caucasus zone into the Caliphate, Bardhaʿa seemingly remains a natural focal point, and enjoys the position of administrative centre for the province of Arran well into the tenth century. At this point, however, the city is said to fall into decline, and the regional 'capital' shifts to Janza (Ganja), some seventy kilometres to the northwest, on an upstream tributary of the Kura River. While we have several historical vignettes that construct a picture of events in medieval Bardhaʿa and Janza, the details of urban administration, and urban life,

[1] Al-Baladhuri (trans. Hitti) 1916 *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*: 306.

remain elusive. The narrative of the succession between these two capitals has also remained unchallenged, in spite of the fact that the historical reality of political and economic power in the south Caucasus is clearly more complex.

This article revaluates the decline of the city of Bardhaʿa and the eleventh century shift in power to Janza, contrasting the known historical accounts of these cities with new archaeological data. Broader settlement patterns in the medieval Caucasus have largely been overlooked at the expense of individual centres such as these but can also reveal important insights into the networks that traversed this region and their local influence. The starting point for this discussion is the urban situation in the eastern Caucasus in late Antiquity and its legacy before moving to look at the differences between this and how the Kura plain is described by tenth century geographers. These descriptions will then be compared against the physical and archaeological traces of the urban remains within these cities, including recent material from the Archaeological Exploration of Bərdə project (AEB),[2] which has begun to chart the development of the city through excavation in the city centre. The results of this study suggest that there is a need to revisit the urban narrative for this region in terms of shifting capitals, and propose a tentative alternative model.

The legacy of late Antique cities and early Islam

A thorough analysis of the urban situation of the late Abbasid Caucasus requires an understanding of the late Antique[3] and early Islamic cities, which formed the basis for a network that persisted until well after the Mongol conquest. As hinted above, however, the physical evidence for cities of the mid-first millennium is limited, and where it exists, is often masked by later urban redevelopment, not least in the case of Bardhaʿa itself, which is thought to be located underneath the modern eponymous

[2] The Archaeological Exploration of Bərdə Project (AEB) is a part of the Oxford Nizami Ganjavi Programme – a joint initiative of the University of Oxford and Moscow State University, Baku Branch. The Programme was made possible by the generous support and guidance of Professor Nargiz Pashayeva. Professor Robert Hoyland was the first director of the Programme (2014-16). Professor Edmund Herzig is the current director (2016-).

[3] Owing to the problematic nature of demonstrating imperial control in the Caucasus during the first millennium CE, the terms ‘late Antique’, and ‘medieval’ are used throughout the text, to refer approximately to the third-sixth century and the seventh-thirteenth century respectively. While there are issues

town. In general, scholars have attempted to gain an impression of the late Antique settlement pattern through combining the conquest narratives of the Sasanian kings with what limited topographical evidence still exists.[4] Using these fragments it is possible to establish a rough impression of the extent of urban development in Arran, before the expansion of Islam into this area, in order to chart how this changes throughout the medieval period (Figure 1).

Two of the major centres that feature heavily in the early Arabic and indeed Armenian language literature are Baylaqan and Bardhaʿa,[5] both situated on the right bank of the Kura River, about 70km apart. In the account of al-Baladhuri, there is a clear separation between the investment of Kubadh to establish these towns on the plain (along with Qabala), versus the subsequent fortification of the Great Caucasus Mountain range, including the Derbent pass on the Caspian coast. Anushirvan appears to continue the fortification of the mountain zone, founding additional towns, such as Shakkan (Sheki) and further defences.[6] On the plain, however, Bardhaʿa is maintained as a "capital of the frontier", and there is an impression that from its inception the city and those nearby are more than simply defensive forts at the edge of the Sasanian Empire. The administration of these towns, and indeed the rulership of the area rested firmly in the hands of kings, who according to Baladhuri, were appointed by the Sasanian *shahanshah*, and paid regular tribute.[7]

The Islamic conquest of Arran proceeded somewhat separately to that of Dvin and Tiflis, spearheaded by ʿAbd al-Rahman b. Rabiʿa al-Bahili and his brother Salman in the mid-seventh century. Following the short siege and conquest of Bardhaʿa, the city only underwent renovation and refortification about fifty years later, under ʿAbd al-ʿAziz b. Hatim b. al-Nuʿman,[8] who also took it upon himself to rebuild Baylaqan. From this point onwards Bardhaʿa seems to have been maintained as not only the administrative centre of the province of al-Ran (Arran), and the seat of the local

[4] See Buniiatov 1965 *Azerbaĭdzhan v VII-IX vv.*: 59-70 for an overview of the political and socio-economic situation in Arran on thse eve of the Muslim conquests as gleaned from these texts.
[5] Al-Baladhuri (trans. Hitti) 1916 *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*: 305-306.
[6] Ibid. 307
[7] Ibid. 308-9
[8] Ibid. 321

bishopric, as it had been prior to Islam, but developed increasing importance as a trading city. By the time of the Arabic geographers writing in early the tenth century, the town is prosperous and well connected.

Of all of the archaeological sites of the Kura plain associated with late Antique urbanism, that of Baylaqan is probably the most well known. The city has been identified as the long abandoned site of Oren Qala, whereas Bardhaʿa is thought to be located underneath the modern settlement of Bərdə, and thus presents a greater challenge for understanding the urban topography (and is explored in detail below). From the Soviet excavations of Baylaqan, undertaken between 1953 and 1958 with a separate exploration in 1960, a rather mixed and somewhat confused picture emerges about the early urban foundation.[9]

Some Sasanian materials were apparently found during the excavations, although the fact that only two pre-Islamic coins published from the excavations (one of the Emperor Anastasius [491-518 CE] and one drachm of Khosrow II [590-628][10]) suggest that they probably did not reach the occupation levels that pertain to this period. It would seem as though owing to the continued inhabitation of the site until at least the Mongol conquest, little evidence of the earliest foundation have been uncovered at all. The original interpretation of the city walls suggested an initial layout of a large square enclosure (each side measuring approximately 600 metres), with the later ninth-tenth century insertion of a smaller square citadel (around 380-400 metres each side) in the southeast corner. Subsequent re-intepretation of the archaeological sequence suggested that the "citadel" wall was in fact much later—likely a Timurid refurbishment of the town in fact, based on the ceramics found in the layers underneath the inner city wall.[11]

In spite of the minimal evidence of what the late Antique city looked like, is likely that it would have occupied the whole area within the outer square walls, as there is no evidence for a different earlier urban structure. Parallels for Sasanian forts similar

[9] Iessen, A.A. 1959 "Azerbaĭdzhanskaia (Oren-kalinskaia) ekspeditsiia"; Iakobson, A. 1965 "Arkheologicheskie issledovaniia na gorodishche Oren-Kala v. 1957 g."; Akhmedov 1962 "Beyləqan şaherinin sonunçu qala divarı".
[10] Pakhomov 1965 "Monety iz raskopok gorodishcha Oren-Kala": 90.
[11] Akhmedov 1962 "Beyləqan şaherinin sonunçu qala divarı".

in size and form have been found across the northern liminal zones of Iran on both sides of the Caspian.[12] However, following the historical accounts mentioned above, which suggest the late Antique towns of the plain were differentiated from frontier forts, I would suggest that there are strong arguments against the origins of Baylaqan as simply a fortified outpost. It is clear from the texts, and indeed the archaeological remains, however, that the main urban centres in medieval Islamic Arran evolved from late Antique origins, and to some extent were structured by the extant earlier towns. This scenario appears to be true for Bardhaʿa as well, and is confirmed by the presence of a number of late Antique ceramics in amongst the corpus retrieved from later medieval occupation in the city.

Urbanism and the southeast Caucasus in the 10th-12th centuries in historical perspective

In spite of this evidence for urbanism based on a late Antique basis, in a survey of towns in this region from the ninth to the thirteenth century, Akhmedov emphasised that the rise of urbanism in the Caucasus only begins in earnest in the ninth century.[13] His reasons are various but he stresses in particular the role of trade and craft in this process. According to his narrative, it is the development of significant localised skills which enabled large cities to form in the region of modern Azerbaijan, presumably from what had previously been little more than fortified villages and military outposts. His somewhat sweeping narrative is a little over exaggerated—there *is* evidence for substantial occupation of urban sites, for example at Baylaqan, Derbent and Qabala from the Sasanian period onwards. But he does, however, highlight that the state of the Caucasus in the tenth century is one of multiple large urban centres, far more prominent than had ever previously been the case.

In the earliest specifically geographical treatise that has come down to us for Arran (al-Ran), that of Ibn Khurradahbih, the region is presented as a division of Arminia and enumerates seven urban hubs that comprise this general zone: Sisajan, Arran, Tiflis, Bardhaʿa, Baylaqan, Qabala and Shirvan.[14] The text underscores that defining the geographical area and the nomenclature of al-Ran is troublesome and its various

[12] Alizadeh 2001 "Ultan Qalasi: a fortified site in the Sasanian borderlands".
[13] Akhmedov 1958 "Iz istorii nekotorikh gorodov Azerbaidzhana": 111-112.
[14] Ibn Khurradadhbih (ed. de Goeje) 1889 *Kitab al-Masalik w'al-Mamalik:* 122.

parts are often conflated in the sources, but nevertheless it demonstrates that by the end of the ninth century, the Kura plain is inhabited by a sparse distribution of urban centres, including Bardhaʿa and Baylaqan. Few other details are given for the Bardhaʿa apart from that it was apparently built by Kubadh, echoing the roughly contemporary text of al-Baladhuri cited above.[15]

For a more detailed account of the nature of the cities of Arran it is necessary to look to texts collated in the following century, specifically Ibn Hawqal's compilation and expansion of the geography of al-Istakhri, and that of al-Muqaddasi. It is worth noting that these texts are composed at a time when the province of Arran had already been under the control of the dissenter Sajids and was under the administration of the family of al-Marzuban b. Muhammad the Musafirid. The prominence gained by cities in Arran as a consequence of their schism with Caliphal authority is juxtaposed with accounts of the destruction wrought by local infighting, for example the destruction of the wall of Ardabil,[16] and the misjudgements of local rulers. The result is a rather mixed account from geographical sources, describing both the fertility of these lands and how they have apparently been plundered.

Ibn Hawqal describes Bardhaʿa unequivocally as the capital of Arran, specifically in terms of its prominence and its size, comparing it to Isfahan or Rayy.[17] Al-Muqaddasi goes further with his analogy, stating that is the Baghdad of the region.[18] Both authors go on to stress the fertility of the city and its environs, as well as its facilities including the grand congregational mosque. The abundance of fruit and the prosperity of the markets is also noted, and according to Ibn Hawqal the latter located outside the walls of the city, in the suburbs. These laudations, however, are balanced in both accounts by suggestions that they city is experiencing something of a decline by the second half of the tenth century. Al-Muqaddasi indicates general abandonment in both the outer area and the *shahristan* (walled city),[19] whereas Ibn Hawqal tries to quantify the level of change, stating that "only five bread bakeries remain, where

[15] Ibid.: 123
[16] Ibn Hawqal (trans. Kramers and Wiet) 2001 *La Configuration de la Terre*: 326-327.
[17] Ibid.: 330.
[18] Al-Muqaddasi (trans. Collins) 2001 *The Best Divisions for the Knowledge of the Regions*: 305.
[19] Ibid.

there had once been more than twelve hundred."[20] In the latter text, notwithstanding the clear exaggeration, the initial reasons suggested for decline are general vice and misgovernance. A later amended manuscript of Ibn Hawqal's work, suggests that the disruption of affluence in Caucasian cities is due to the increasing associations with Georgians (perhaps the rising Shaddadids), as several additional notes are included to this effect, not only for Bardhaʿa but also Dvin and Tiflis.[21] Seen in this light, it may suggest that at least some of the decline reported in the geographical texts, may be as much literary disparagement as it is observation. Nevertheless, the decline of Bardhaʿa in the mid-tenth century has been cast in modern historical literature as the beginning of its slow death.[22]

One crucial event in the city that is referred to by Ibn Hawqal and in the slightly later text of the anonymous Hudud al-ʿAlam is the sudden arrival of the Rus in 943 CE, who, having sailed up the Kura River laid siege to Bardhaʿa for up to a year.[23] The details of this skirmish are covered most extensively in the account of Miskawayh[24] and his account of the incident has been amply studied,[25] so it is not necessary to summarise it again.[26] A few points from this episode, however, are relevant to the discussion here. First and foremost, in the description of the city and its attack, it is the *shahristan* which plays the foremost role in the urban defences. That it appears to have comprised sufficient space for both the general populace to shelter in, and later to become the base of the Rus, suggests that it followed the model of other eastern Islamic fortified towns—enclosing the majority of the urban area—rather than the equivalent of a citadel or *arg*. Secondly, the city's capitulation was sought not in

[20] Ibn Hawqal (trans. Kramers and Wiet) *La Configuration de la Terre*: 330.
[21] Ibid.: 330-333.
[22] Dunlop 2012 "Bardhaʿa". He mentions the possibility that the city may have revived a little, but not in the long term.
[23] Ibn Hawqal (trans. Kramers and Wiet) 2001 *La Configuration de la Terre*: 332; Minorsky (trans.) 1982 *Hudud al-ʿAlam*: 144.
[24] Margoliouth (trans.) 2014 *The Eclipse of the ʿAbbasid Caliphate* (vol. 2): 67-74.
[25] Polovoĭ 1913 "O Marshrute pokhoda Russkikh"; Zuckermann 1995 "On the date of the Khazars' conversion": 266-267.
[26] It should be mentioned that while there is a persistent local historical belief that the arrival of the Rus caused the demise of the Bardhaʿa in the tenth century, Ibn Hawqal states explicity that this is not the case, going as far to say that it was left in an orderly state (2001 *La Configuration de la Terre*: 332).

terms of booty, but sovereignty,[27] which indicates the continued role of the capital as administrative capital and the importance thereof for the control of Arran.

By way of contrast, the proliferation of sources in the later tenth century also describe the significant prominence of other urban centres in Arran and their continued growth. Comparing the towns listed by Ibn Hawqal (most already included in al-Istakhri) and al-Muqaddasi to the earlier geographical descriptions, there are a greater number of what appear to be large urban centres, albeit notably subordinate to Bardhaʿa, (Figure 1). Among these towns is included the city of Janza, which is absent from the account of Ibn Khurradadbih, which, although mentioned only briefly, is specifically described as being prosperous.[28] This, however, does not appear to be the origins of the city. Numismatic data suggests that there was a mint striking dirhams at Janza between 92-94 AH (710-713 CE),[29] and although this could feasibly be confused with the Sasanian citadel of Ganjak (of the province of Adharbayjan), there is no other evidence to suggest there was an early mint there. Nevertheless, it is not until the Shaddadids take over Janza in the second half of the tenth century that coins again are minted in great volume with this name, and in the intervening years the dominant Abbasid mint is Arran, which is understood to be Bardhaʿa.[30] Bardhaʿa, however, continues to be a named mint until at least the mid-fourteenth century under the Ilkhanid Anushirvan, and so its legacy as a key urban node certainly does not wane. From the period of Shaddadid domination in Arran, that is to say from 971-1075 CE, the limited historical accounts focus not on Bardhaʿa but on Janza, hence the traditional narrative that as one capital declines, the other rises. Certainly, as a centre of power, Janza was established as the Shaddadid stronghold, but the other cities of Arran also appear to have flourished, and by the time the Seljuqs come to dominate the region in the latter part of the eleventh century political events in Arran suggest Bardhaʿa is still one such urban hub.[31] Consequently by the time of the arrival of the Mongols at the beginning of the thirteenth century, Bardhaʿa, Baylaqan, and

[27] Margoliouth (trans.) 2014 *The Eclipse of the ʿAbbasid Caliphate* (vol. 2): 68.
[28] Ibn Hawqal (trans. Kramers and Wiet) 2001 *La Configuration de la Terre*: 343.
[29] Spellberg 1988 "Northern Umayyad Frontier Administration".
[30] The Sajids issued specifying the mint Bardhaʿa and the city name appears to have been used interchangeably with "Arran" from the end of the ninth century onwards (Miles 1975 "Numismatics": 372).
[31] Minorsky 1953 *Studies in Caucasian History*: 65-66.

Shamakhi are all key cities alongside Janza, and their capitulation to the Tatar forces is of prime importance.[32] That all of these places are attested in an Ilkhanid context suggests that in spite of persistent legends of their decline and the destruction of the Mongols, there was at least something which maintained these centres as foci to be rebuilt and remain as the backbone structure of the province of Arran.

From the historical materials briefly described above, we arrive at the following conclusions. First and foremost, there is an undeniable shift in focus from Bardhaʿa to Janza in the literature which occurs in conjunction with the Shaddadid seizure of power in Janza in the 970s and not before. This thread has been amplified to suggest that the capital of Arran shifted at this time, although this was not necessarily accompanied by the exclusive minting of coins in Janza, as it continued elsewhere, including Bardhaʿa. Secondly, it is perhaps significant that the new centres of gravity in the eleventh century, that is to say Janza and Shamakhi are located not on top of late Antique foundations, but at new, younger sites, closer to the Great Caucasus mountains. Finally, there is the suggestion that the cities such as Bardhaʿa and Baylaqan do in fact continue to function as urban centres throughout this period, but about their role we know little, owing to the lack of political events that involved their capture. Archaeological data is well placed to address this some aspects of this lacuna in our understanding of the continued function of these urban spaces and it is to these physical sources that I now turn.

Archaeological material from the city of Bardhaʿa

The descriptions of the historical sources leave us wanting in terms of a real impression of the Bardhaʿa as a provincial capital. Beyond listing its basic components, common to all cities in the region—the markets, mosque and the walls—it is difficult to gauge the structure and the history of the urban space, and its exceptional role. In many similar circumstances, for example at Merv in Turkmenistan, archaeological evidence provides an immediate physical impression of the structure of the urban fabric, and excavations have yielded significant details

[32] Gamqʾrelidze (trans.) 2014 "The Hundred Years' Chronicle": 330-331; Ibn al-Athir "(vol. 3): 220-221. Note that at the time, Shamakhi is under the control of the Shirvanshahs.

about its occupation history.[33] Unlike Merv, however, where the Seljuq city was abandoned in favour of new sites for the Timurid and later occupation, the modern town of Bərdə seemingly overlies its historical predecessor.[34] Visualising the early city is consequently not straightforward, and the only means by which it is possible to glimpse the earlier layout is through intensive archaeological investigation.

Reconstructing the early history of the city has formed the chief aim of the Archaeological Exploration of Bərdə Project (AEB) which was established in 2014 as partnership between the University of Oxford and the Baku Branch of Moscow State University. The starting point for this study was to understand the modern urban layout and determine whether any of the medieval plan survives amidst the current buildings of the town. By comparing the street layout in 1970, prior to the Soviet expansion of the town, versus that of the present day (Figure 2), it is already possible to demonstrate the difference in character of the historical core, suggesting that perhaps the former preserves shadows of a much earlier street layout. From this basic assessment it would seem that the bulk of the early city lies on the northern bank of the Terter River, which flows eastwards to join the Kura. Extant historical remains in the city are rather rare, comprising an isolated fourteenth century tomb tower and two historical bridges, of unconfirmed but possibly medieval date. The presence of a large mudbrick wall enclosing the area around the tomb tower, known in the modern town as Torpaq Qala,[35] has led to the suggestion that this was in fact the citadel of the town,[36] following the sources mentioned above. The grounds surrounded by the walls are currently maintained as a park and so it was possible to investigate the area in greater detail through archaeological excavation, to gain an impression of the sequence of occupation at this central point within the city and test the date of the construction of the walls.

[33] Herrmann et al. 2001 "The International Merv Project".
[34] Limited excavations in the town centre during redevelopment works in the 1980s produced a range of interesting material that speaks to urban occupation from at least the ninth century, although the publication of these findings unfortunately gives little by way of the spatial organisation of the remains uncovered (Nuriyev, A. and Babayev, Ə. 2001. *Bərdə Şəhərinin Tarixi-Arxeoloji Oçerki*).
[35] Literally "Earth Fortress", and not to be confused with several other archaeological sites of the same name, including that near the modern city of Qax in the north of the Republic of Azerbaijan.
[36] Nuriev 1986 *Srednevekovyĭ Gorod Barda*: 24.

The plan of Torpaq Qala is a rough square 125m x 125m (Figure 3), with the tomb tower located in the middle of the western side of the enclosure. As well as being analysed for its decoration and inscriptions, the tower has undergone a series of renovations during the twentieth century, the latest of which aims to replace in full the lost elements of the building. It is comparable to other similar towers of the Ilkhanid period across northern Iran, and is predominantly decorated in turquoise-glazed and plain brickwork arranged a tessellated square kufic motif or *hatt-e bannaʿi*, repeating the name "Allah". Although the inscriptions over the northern and southern portals to the upper chamber do not mention the person for whom it was built, the architect's name Ahmad b. Ayyub al-Hafiz Nakhchivani is given, and a date of Shavval 722 AH (1322 CE). During a series of investigations and renovations throughout the twentieth century of both the upper tower and its empty subterranean crypt, it was established that the building had been placed in an area of earlier archaeological remains.[37] Apart from indicating that there was indeed activity in this area between the ninth and fifteenth centuries, however, the simple structures excavated did not betray anything of the layout of this part of the town or the sequence of occupation.

In the summer of 2015 two new trenches were excavated in the area of Torpaq Qala, one slightly to the south of the middle of the park and one immediately adjacent to the enclosure wall (Figure 3). Over three seasons a total area of around 150 m^2 was excavated down to a depth of approximately three and a half metres, representing the historical occupation of this area from the present day back as far as the eleventh century. The archaeological sequence appears to continue much deeper than this, into the earlier periods of the city, judging by residual fragments of ceramics and coins that date from the sixth century onwards, mixed in with the later layers.[38] Not only does this confirm that indeed the city of Bardhaʿa and Bərdə form parts of a continuous urban narrative, but that significant remains are preserved beneath the present town.

[37] Garnik "Archeologicheskie nabliudeniia"
[38] The continued excavation of the lower part of this sequence is the ongoing project of the AEB.

The smaller of the two trenches ("Trench 2"), measuring 5m x 5m was placed immediately adjacent to the earth wall of the enclosure, and it very soon clear that this wall had undergone several periods of rebuilding, including over the last hundred years as it has been incorporated into the boundary walls of adjacent houses. The earliest phase of the wall is constructed in large blocks of rammed earth, or *pakhsa*, the joins between which are clearly visible. As the wall eroded over time, pits were dug through the steadily accumulating water-lain material seemingly to rob archaeological materials, probably bricks, from the layers below. The wall itself is around two metres thick at its base and was preserved to a height of just over three metres. There is apparently no foundation cut for the wall and it rests over the top of foundations for earlier buildings, which were destroyed prior to the enclosure wall's construction. One of the earlier foundations, constructed from large fragments of re-used reddish-yellow fired bricks runs almost perpendicular to the pakhsa wall, and underneath it (Figure 4).

The superimposition of the wall on top of earlier buildings and features provided the opportunity to obtain a relative date for the wall's construction. In the first instance, material from the layers immediately beneath the wall included fragments of twelfth-thirteenth century glazed stonepaste/frit vessels which provides an initial a terminus post quem for the enclosure wall. Additional ceramics in this layer broadly pertain to the thirteenth or early-fourteenth century, including deep turquoise and blue glazed wares typical of this time. In support of this approximate periodisation, coins found in a large oven which preceded the earlier buildings that lay underneath the enclosure wall included several late eleventh century Eldeguzid *fulus*, those legible dating to the period of Muhammad "Jahan Pahlavan" under the Caliph al-Nasir (r. 1180-1225). All of this evidence taken together suggests that the enclosure wall is in fact not early Islamic, or late Antique, but probably contemporary with the construction of the Ilkhanid tower.[39] Considering the positioning of the tower within the park, its placement makes logical sense, were the original entrance to be located in the centre of the opposite, eastern side, presumably with a walkway that once connected the two.

[39] The hiatus in the dates between the coins found and the construction of the wall is probably due to a genuine contraction in the city's prosperity, seemingly with some dilapidation in the thirteenth century.

Once this is established, it provides a narrative which explains the sudden destruction of the other buildings within the area, which are only represented as shallow foundations constructed from re-used fired bricks. Similar structures were identified in the larger of the two trenches ("Trench 1"), which was located to the northeast of Trench 2, closer to the centre of the park in an open area avoiding the trees.[40] The archaeological sequence in the central was much deeper than by the wall, seemingly through the accumulation of layers laid purposefully to level the area within the park, during successive remodellings of the space around the tower. This is true of the fourteenth century event where the same destruction of buildings was accompanied by immediate burial of the traces of foundations with a thick layer of mixed soil, we can only presume to create a landscaped garden within the enclosure wall. The remains of the structures beneath this levelling event, give us a curious insight into the twelfth and early thirteenth century life of Bardhaʿa, which at that time appears to have been only moderately densely populated, at least in this central area (Figure 5). That is to say, as well as the traces of these structures, informal exterior areas were found which represent small workshops and cooking areas—several ovens were excavated dating to the end of the thirteenth century.

The construction of the buildings, in re-used fired bricks sometimes combined with unfired mudbrick is quite different from what we might expect for this period on the Kura plain, in that there are ample resources to create new fired bricks. This practice of re-use suggests substantial economic decline by the end of the twelfth century and the excavating or robbing of earlier materials in order to construct new buildings, albeit not in a very robust fashion. The ceramic evidence paints a contrasting picture, as fragments of lusterware vessels, some of which may be imports from Iran, were found throughout the occupation layers associated with the buildings, and substantial quantities of high-quality glass.

Comparative evidence from Baylaqan from earlier eleventh-twelfth century buildings indicates that the same style of fired brick, in a reddish-yellow clay approximately 21 x 21 x 4cm was widely employed, but there in a primary context rather than reused

[40] The trench is also a slightly irregular shape owing to this need to avoid established trees growing in this area.

fragments.[41] The quantity of reused bricks in late twelfth century Bardhaʿa not only suggests an economic downturn, but indicates the presence of many buildings of a similar type to those at Baylaqan deeper in the stratigraphic sequence, which have then been robbed later on. These have not yet been uncovered in the excavations, but there are other indicators in the late twelfth century layers of earlier prosperity in Bardhaʿa. The quantity of fine, seemingly locally-made[42] ceramics of the eleventh-twelfth century appearing as residual material in slightly layers is surprisingly high. Most are polychrome glazed earthenwares in mustards, browns and greens, of a type strongly associated with this part of the Caucasus, but there are examples of highly decorative incised and champlevé wares of the twelfth century, including fragments of an exceptional open bowl with a repeating motif of a lion chasing a deer (?) around the flattened rim (Figure 6). Meanwhile, the presence of simple polychrome "splashed" glazed wares and earlier slip painted wares confirms that there is considerable occupation in this central part of the city area throughout the tenth-eleventh century, and a few sherds from much earlier layers.

The continuity of occupation in the urban centre of Bardhaʿa and in fact its prosperity in the eleventh-twelfth century seems to be increasingly evident, in manner very similar to the material excavated in Baylaqan. The excavations in Bardhaʿa are limited at present, however, to a small part of the city and in order to get an some impression of the spread of occupation in the historical city it was necessary to target other areas not currently occupied for systematic surface survey of material. While this method only provides an approximation of occupation, by examining the current agricultural areas immediately around the modern town the high quantity of ceramics indicate that the eleventh century city stretched beyond the current limits of town, covering an area of approximately 2.5km from east to west and a similar distance north-south. While this probably represents much of the surburban area as well as the walled city, alongside the excavation data it underlines that even if the historical

[41] See for example the structures excavated in Area 1 (Iakobson 1959 "Raskopki na gorodische Oren Kala 1952-1955 gg. (Raskop 1)")

[42] The predominant locally made fabric, in Bardhaʿa and across the Kura plain is a fine, hard well-levigated clay, with few inclusions apart from occasional limestone or shell, which fires to a deep reddish-orange. Across the corpus of ceramics (which currently amounts to over 40,000 sherds) the fabrics are highly variable but the process of creating a sequence of these and the diagnostic forms is currently underway.

accounts of decline in the tenth century are correct, there is a substantial and productive urban centre in Bardhaʿa throughout the eleventh and into the twelfth century.

The ruins of Janza

In Janza, unlike Bardhaʿa, the modern city centre is around four kilometres from the historical remains, but as an industrial and commercial hub, development is slowly enveloping the archaeological site, and the train line also bisects the ruins. From a topographic perspective, it is difficult to discern much of the early city plan from the remains that can be seen on the ground today as the upper levels are under plough. An aerial perspective shows some of the remaining curtain wall, but the development of some of the outer areas of the site mean that much has been lost (Figure 7).

The city is clearly divided across a river, the eponymous Gəncəçay, with two substantial walled sections and seemingly rather carelessly placed towers. In fact, the overall appearance of the urban layout is somewhat less than regular, as if constrained by natural features or indeed through the amalgamation of earlier features. Suggestions from limited twentieth century investigations indicate that the eastern side is perhaps a separate unit, walled off also from the river, perhaps as a means to create a citadel. It does not, however, appear to conform to the model of a citadel (*quhandiz*) and a walled *shahristan*. Instead the two halves seem separate, but neither demonstrating a clearly differentiated role. The total enclosed area is approximately 50 ha, although the potential for suburban areas has largely been ignored. Unfortunately, although there were several small-scale excavations conducted in the twentieth century, none is adequately published and the best guide to the remains at Janza remains the small report of Mamedzade and Sarkisov.[43]

Although there is an assumption of an earlier wall, the construction method of the currently visible fortifications looks to be from the eleventh century, in a style that combines fired brick courses and river cobbles and can be seen right up the mid Kura valley.[44] Given the date, the impetus for the fortification (or re-fortification) of the

[43] Mamedzade and Sarkisov 1988 *Arkhitekturnye Pamiatniki Giandzhi*.
[44] The impressive walls at Shemkir are a good example, also from the eleventh century (Dostiyev et al. 2013 *Orta Əsr Şəmkir Şəhəri*: 23-103).

city may well have been the raid of the Alans in 1062, related in the *Tarikh Bab-al Abwab*.[45] We learn that subsequent to this attack the city was encircled by new strong walls and strong gates. By astonishing concidence, a gate with an inscription mentioning this event at Janza and the creation of the defences in 1062 is currently preserved in the monastery of Gelathi in Georgia. The Arabic text of the inscription, published by Frähn, relates how Abul-Aswar commissioned this new gate,[46] presumably as part of the refortifications mentioned in the text following the attack. There is also a graffito at the base of the gate in Georgian, describing how it was carried off by Dmitri I, king of Georgia raided the town and stole the gate after an earthquake in 1139, which explains its current location. Given the repeated attacks which Janza appears to have withstood in the eleventh-twelfth century, it is understandable why it is so heavily fortified, and perhaps consequently why the fortifications survive as ruins, as opposed to the situation in Bardhaʿa where they have completely disappeared.

The better preservation is doubtless also due in part to the materials used, as in Janza they employed river cobbles and fired bricks, whereas in the more southerly regions unfired mudbrick is generally more common. The difference in construction method between the fortifications of Janza and Shemkir versus Bardhaʿa and Baylaqan probably reflects local conditions to a high degree, although the raw materials for cobblestone walls are as plentiful on the Terter River as in Janza. What this does represent, however, is a shift in architectural style which reflects a higher degree of influence from the northern and westerly regions of the Caucasus, than from northern Iran. Compare, for example, the slightly later walls of Rustavi, in Southeastern Georgia, which employ a similar technique but using different stone.[47]

While it is necessary to be cautious about using changing style as a proxy for political motives, it is clear that seen in the light of other contemporary events, the influence of the northern and western connections in the reorientation of the eastern Caucasus cannot be ignored. From an economic perspective the purposeful decision of the

[45] Minorsky 1953 *Studies in Caucasian History*: 20-21.
[46] Frähn 1835 "Erklarung der Arabischen Inschrift des Eisernen Thorfluegels zu Gelathi in Imerethi".
[47] Pachikashvili 2014 *Ancient Rustavi*: 114-5.

Shaddadids to base their capital in Janza speaks to far stronger connections via the routes leading north and northwest, than had previously been exploited. If we were to look at the material culture from these cities in greater detail, this shift may be apparent too, but the corpus for contemporary sites in Azerbaijan has not yet been fully exploited in this respect. Political relations were clearly antagonistic across the Georgian-Shaddadid boundary, and continued to be so under the Ildgezids, but perhaps there is more to be uncovered in terms of their comparative political distance from the Caliphate. So too can we envisage the demonstrable ideological shift from the old administrative centres of the late Antique and early Islamic world, to new, more isolated locales, but more integrated in local political spheres.

A proposal for a working model

Taking a regional perspective and thinking about the nature of the cities, both from geographical descriptions and from archaeological data, I would propose the following tentative model of the growth of the capitals of Arran, which must needs be improved or indeed refuted as our knowledge of the archaeology of the eastern Caucasus continues to grow. The establishment of large cities on the Kura plain in the late Antique period should be seen as an action set apart from the maintenance of a fortified frontier in the mountains to the north. While both represent parts of the frontier, these early cities clearly constituted much more than simply military mechanisms and were purposefully located in the fertile and poorly defensible zones. After the consolidation of vassalage in Arran under the Abbasids, the cities adapted from pre-Islamic foundations were continuously occupied but not expanded or refortified in any substantial way. An administrative centre at Bardaʿa provided a central focal point and mint, and this led to its economic prosperity and growth as compared to the neighbouring settlements. As the regional politics grew more fragmented, at the beginning of the tenth century, the cities grew more prosperous, they all increased in size and relatively new foundations (Janza, Shemkir) flourished along major connecting routes to the west and in fact to the north (Shamakhi and also Baku). This, I would argue, can be seen of as much an political as an economic shift, although with greater study of material exchange across the region we may be able to unpick this idea further. Meanwhile although we may think of Janza as a nominal subsequent capital in the eleventh-twelfth century, there was in reality a constellation of cities all of whom wielded considerable regional power.

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Figure 1: Map of the eastern Caucasus, showing the location of the city of Bardhaʿa. Major cities mentioned in sources relating to the late Antique/early Islamic period are shown as filled circles; major cities only appearing in sources from the tenth century onwards are indicated by unfilled circles. Patterned areas indicate upland zones, chiefly the Greater Caucasus range in the north and the Lesser Caucasus in the southwest. The two rivers indicated are the Kura and the Araxes, north and south respectively.

Figure 2: Corona satellite image of the modern town of Bərdə, taken in 1970 (courtesy of USGS). The white-hatched areas indicate zones which have subsequently become built-up. Major roads are highlighted as black lines.

Figure 3: Plan of the enclosure known as Torpaq Qala in the centre of Bərdə, showing the location of the fourteenth century mausoleum and the trenches excavated by the AEB in 2015-2017.

Figure 4: View of an excavated section of the Torpaq Qala wall, showing its construction in blocks of rammed earth (pakhsa). Running underneath the wall, perpendicular to it, is an earlier construction in broken fired bricks.

Figure 5: Overview of the external workshop area uncovered in Trench 1 in Torpaq Qala looking west. Traces of hearths and tandir ovens and a fired brick construction surrounded by a coarse made surface can be seen on the furthest side of the trench, with storage/refuse pits in the foreground.

Figure 6: Fragment of a rim of a glazed earthenware bowl excavated at the site of Torpaq Qala. The wide, open bowl is decorated with incised (*sgraffiato*) designs, cut through a pale slip, covered with polychrome glaze (greens, yellows, browns and reds). The design around the rim is a repeated motif of a lion chasing what may be a deer, with scrolled vines using champlevé technique for the interior.

Figure 7: Schematic plan of the ruins of the medieval city of Janza (Gəncə) showing the eponymous river and the outline of the fortification walls. Prepared from 1970 Corona satellite imagery.