

## MATERIAL CULTURE OF DVIN 4th—8th CENTURIES

The vestiges of the capital city of Armenia, Dvin, the one time centre of trade, crafts and culture, lie some 35 kms. to the south of Yerevan. The city was founded in the thirties of the fourth century by the Armenian king Khosrov II of Kotak, a descendant of the Arshakoony dynasty (332—338 A. D.). Valuable information on the foundation of the city is available from the historians Pavstos of Byuzand (4th c.) and Movses Khorenatsi (5th c.) (see the latter's „A History of the Armenians“). They attest that king Khosrov undertook construction work on a hill called Dvin where he transferred the court from Artashat and afforested in the vicinity of the new capital.

As the greater part of Armenia came under the rule of the Persian Sassanid dynasty<sup>1</sup> Dvin turned into the residence of the Persian governor. It also became the seat of the supreme patriarch (the catholicos). Dvin developed and thrived till it grew into a hub of international transit trade.

Feudal relations were dominant all over Armenia throughout the 4th—5th centuries. Armenian feudal culture began to take shape with strongly flavoured Hellenistic traditions.

During the 5th—7th centuries Armenia witnessed a cultural upsurge. It coincided with the struggle for the country's independence: the Armenian alphabet—the fountainhead of spiritual culture—had already been coined at the time.

<sup>1</sup> Four-fifths of Armenia had come under Persian sway, ruled over by a Persian governor, while the remaining one-fifth was annexed to the Byzantine Empire.

It was a potent means of preserving the country's independence. This invention resulted in the institution of national scholarship with the consequent emergence of scholarly writings on historiography, religion and theism. Moreover, as Armenian culture was developing in early Christian milieu, it still bore the imprint of heathen thinking and concepts. Armenian material culture also scored considerable advances. This is particularly true of architecture, sculpture, the crafts and the applied arts.

In mid-7th century the Arab caliphate established its sway over Armenia; it lasted to the end of the 9th century. In the meantime the country's economy constantly dwindled. The backslide in husbandry and stock-raising, the suspension of construction work, the policy of exacting heavy tolls had their adverse effect on culture too.

The cities became military-administrative outposts where Arab legions had stationed.

Dvin was in the focus of those complicated historico-political, social and cultural events since it was virtually the only city in mediaeval Armenia of major economic and cultural consequence.

The archaeological investigation of this famed city was begun at the close of the past century but it was only in 1937 that regular, long-term excavations were launched that have been going on to date. The diggings resulted in rich findings that relate to all the domains of Armenian material culture and are of great scientific value. The following discoveries were



made in the citadel and living quarters of the city: palatial and church structures, buildings meant for economic and communal facilities, invaluable specimens in profusion betokening the various products of mediaeval Armenian craftsmanship, imported goods, coins, etc. Spade work revealed that the origins of life on the hill of Dvin go back to the æneolithic period. Its duration prolongs up to the 13th century.

In early mediaeval times Dvin went through three stages of development. The first period envisaged the span from the 30's of the 4th to mid-5th centuries. The citadel of Dvin is topped by a number of structures of which the pillared, mortar-floored, smooth, four-walled hall is of prominence. It is reminiscent of the 4th—5th century Armenian basilica structures. During the 5th—7th centuries the hall served for conferences and as office building. This view is upheld by several dozen seals uncovered in the locality. The preliminary edifice of the cathedral in the central area is one of the original buildings of Dvin. It was a huge three-nave basilica with 7 pairs of pillars.

The archaeological finds of this period are notable for their originality. Most of the pottery and glass-wares bear markedly traces of the previous, Hellenistic period.

The second period comprises from the mid-fifth to mid-seventh centuries when Dvin was a thriving city. Construction advanced on a large scale. The cathedral was re-built twice, with a central cupola, and was cruciform in plan. It was at this time that the unique monument of Armenian temporal architecture—the palace of the catholicos (the 60's of the fifth century)—went up in Dvin, in addition to a caravanserai and other buildings in the living quarters of the city. The pottery unearthed in the area is in quantity; it displays characteristic designs. Sculpture of the time bore on the patterns drawn on the earthenware. The manufacture of tiles and water-mains was started on a large scale.

During the 5th—7th centuries Armenian mediaeval glass-making originated. It bears, more than pottery does, the imprint of antique glass-making and forms an organic continuation

of the latter. Thick glass vessel fragments were discovered in profusion; they were marvered with circular and oval designs. The metal goods found out during the excavations is of local make and testifies to the skill and ingenuity of the Armenian craftsmen of those days.

The third period encompasses the time that lies between mid-seventh and mid-ninth centuries. Dvin was at the time under Arab domination; it was the centre of the administrative unit called Arab Armenia. Nevertheless, the city continued to develop to a certain measure. Its role was now particularly great in international transit trade. One of the notable buildings of the time was the big structure of adobe uncovered within the citadel of Dvin; it must have been the palace of the Arab ruler. Another building was discovered in the central part the construction style of which relates to the 8th—9th centuries.

Pottery is monotonous in form and almost deprived of any artistic value. Glass, on the other hand, is luxuriant. Dvin turned into a glass-making centre of the Near East. To quote the historian, it remained a major centre of weapon making also in Arab times.

Metal made objects are among the more significant archaeological findings of the 4th—8th centuries. Various tools of labour were brought to light in Dvin (sickles, plow shares, cleavers, etc) weapons, ornaments and so on. The weapons, especially the arrows, lances and defence objects, manifest features peculiar not only to Armenia but to neighbouring countries as well. The subdivision of arrows and the dating of particular types are established by comparative data from neighbouring countries. Despite their local features, the metal objects, particularly the silverware, reveal traits common to the manufacture of metals under the Sassanids.

The 5th—8th century earthenware of Dvin is roughly divided into two groups: for construction and for domestic use. The former is profuse in Dvin. Originally designed baked bricks and adobes in quantity and the great variety of water-mains and tiles evidence that as far back as in early mediaeval times Dvin



used to be a major manufacturing centre that supplied, in addition, the neighbouring areas with its production.

Tile-baking that originated in ancient times was produced in quantity during the 5th—7th centuries. The monumental buildings of Dvin were mostly tile-roofed. The tiles are for the most part coloured and incised. Water-mains were extensively used in the complex system of water supply and other municipal services.

A rich collection of 5th—8th century earthenware of Dvin is now available. It comprises vessels of varying shape and use, from outsize jars to small cups and perfumery flasks. A close examination of the earthenware has revealed the fact that it had preserved the best traditions of the preceding epoch adding at the same time features peculiar to feudal times. Findings at excavation sites attest that the production of earthenware must have been of a high standard during the 8th—9th centuries.

One of the key problems in Armenian archaeology is the origin and development of glass-making. The great number of flasks discovered in the vestiges of ancient times, the technology of their manufacture and diversity of form bear testimony to the fact that in Armenia glass-making began to take shape as a craft of its own at the threshold of our era exhibiting, in particular, the strong influence of Syrian glass-making. The early mediaeval glass of Dvin in the chain that forms a stepping stone from ancient to advanced mediaeval glass-making.

As to the process of production, the 5th—8th century glass of Dvin can be split into several groups. The most widespread and ol-

dest form is the thick-walled, incised glass with round and circular handles. Cool marvering is characteristic of that period and is helpful in ascertaining the dates of the archaeological finds. Mosaic glassware, limited in number, comprises imported specimens. Mold-blown, thin-walled flasks, also those made by free blowing, available in great quantity, are local makes. In 1964—65 hundreds of fragments of glass vessels were dug out from the 8th—9th century level of the central part in Dvin. They point to their mass production and local origin.

Dvin, that important city rich in mediaeval Armenian fine-arts products that played a key role under „marzpan“ (mediaeval governor) rule and continued its economic significance under Arab sway, is a unique landmark the excavations of which make it possible to draw a picture of Armenian 5th—8th century culture, of its evolutionary stages and peculiarities and to get an insight into the salient changes in mediaeval culture as a whole.

The archaeological data of Dvin relating to the 5th—8th centuries are markedly original; they shed also light on the economic and cultural relations of Armenia with her neighbours, especially with the countries of the Caucasus, Iran, Mesopotamia and the Byzantine Empire.

The excavations of Dvin show that in early mediaeval times (4th—8th centuries) material production and culture marked certain, though very slow, advances and changes. This was preliminary to significant economic and cultural gains of the feudal society as from mid-ninth century when the country regained its independence.