

A BIAYNESE GRAVEYARD IN YEREVAN

S u m m a r y

In 1984 in time of construction work within the compound of the "Car Assembly" factory on Orjonikidze Avenue in Yerevan, a graveyard was discovered which was subsequently dug out by the archeological team of the Institute of Archeology and Ethnography of the Armenian Academy of Sciences. It was established that the sepulchres, dating back to the period of Biayna, were dug in a large and old graveyard. Apart from the sepulchre under study, another, so-called stonecoffin burial place of the Early Bronze Age, was discovered, in addition to a Middle Bronze Age barrow, lying next to the former. The pit, excavated during the construction work in the area contiguous to the graveyard, contained pottery ascribed to the beginning of the I millenium B. C.

The excavated Biaynese sepulchre, 3.46m long, 1.97m wide and 2.15m high (the inner dimensions) is a rectangular structure of north-south direction (with a 10° westward deviation).

The sepulchre is floored with polished black, red and dark-brown tuff slabs, with caches fitted out in the basement. The five-layered walls are made of well-trimmed tuff. The sepulchre has also five niches, three of which (0.50 x 0.50 m) are mounted in the western wall, 0.44m above the floor. Another niche of the same dimensions is built in the southern wall. The eastern niche is longer, again mounted 0.44 m above the floor. It is spanned by a big tuff beam supporting most of the weight of the slabs, roofing the sepulchre. The niche is 2.06 m long, 1.22 m high and 1.01 m deep.

The uppermost layer of the walls of the

sepulchre is slightly moved forward (0.13-0.18 m) in the form of an eave embracing nearly all the circumference of the cell, overlaid (on the northern side of the sepulchre) with five big tuff beams, (0.37-0.64 m high and 0.45 m wide), spanning the width of the sepulchre in a west-east direction. The niche has a roof of its own made up of two similar stone beams running along the sepulchre in a north-south direction. The four beams of the southern roof of the sepulchre are perpendicular and firmly affixed, on one side, to one of the beams of the main roof, while the other side leans on the eave and the masonry of the northern wall.

The entrance (1.29 m high, 0.75 m wide, and 0.45 m deep) made in the northern side of the sepulchral chamber, is hermetically sealed with a huge polished tuff-stone. The shape and dimensions of the dromos, lined with small boulders, remain unidentified, as it lies buried under the pillar of the workshop of a modern factory.

Artifacts in profusion were brought to light from the sepulchre. Thus each of the three niches of the western wall contains an urn filled with the fragmented bones of men, animals and birds. The big eastern niche holds a large clay vessel, decorated with the heads of three bulls, in addition to a bowl the base of which is adorned with a rabbit-effigied stamp. The remaining earthenware of the sepulchre, comprising a pitcher with a lion-headed spout, an ewer, a lampion and a number of small and large bowls, lay in the north-eastern corner of the sepulchre.

The first of the three caches was unearthed under the floor slabs of the western wall of the sepulchral chamber. It contained fragments of bronze quivers, a bowl, agate beads, a weightshaped seal of black stone engraved with the effigies of a griffin and the crescent. The second cache was discovered under the floor slabs near the eastern wall of the sepulchre. The finds comprised only a few bracelets wrought with snake heads. The third cache was built under the floor of the eastern wall niche. Lying in the cache were the remnants of three different straps and trappings, snake-head-shaped bracelets, an iron sharp sword, knife and daggers, bronze nails, a bucket and other artifacts.

As to shapes and decoration, the high-quality pottery discovered in the sepulchre depicts two distinct features: the first group comprises five, wide-mouthed, oval, slender-bodied, spoutless vessels with broad bases, relatively high necks and protruded lips. The bodies of all those vessels are marked off by "projecting belts". Three triangular holes are bored in each of the three jugs, while the other two have two openings each. Similar urns have been brought to light in other parts of the Armenian Republic and in Western Armenia. The urns found out among other Biaynese artifacts have not been made specially to contain the ashes of the dead; these spoutless, or two-and threehandle vessels were used for various household purposes (Yerevan, Chermes /Altin Tepe/, Igdir, Oshakan), jugs (Nor Aresh), outsize jars (Arguishtikhinili, Chermes). Significantly, apart from the earthen vessels, three oval bronze urns were also uncovered in one of the sepulchres of Chermes.

The second group of vessels unearthed from the sepulchre comprises two, high-quality vessels, wrought with animal-shaped figurines, one of which is wide-mouthed and round-bodied with its neck and protruded lip similar to the ewers of the first group, its body adorned with three belts. The statuette of a lion decorated the upper part of the vessel reminds one of the sculptured lion gracing the well-known stone chest found in Karmir Blour. The lion figurine on the vessel served also as an outlet, being connected through a tubular passage with the oval body bored with four

holes at the base of the vessel. Similar locally made vessels have been unearthed also in the basin of lake Sevan and in Garabagh.

The second vessel of this type is a round-shaped ewer, without handles, but with a protruded body. It is also provided with a wide, concave, horizontal spout, the entire circumference of which is adorned with furrows. The rim of the vessel is girdled with two parallel concave lines. Three symmetrically sculpted bull heads grace the edge of the ewer. Those elaborately wrought vessels were of common occurrence in the kingdom of Van, in the fortress and habitation site of Karmir Blour, in Dvin and Badnots. Clearly, they are replicas of the respective bronze vessels, widespread in the kingdom of Van.

Comparatively ordinary earthenware made up of oval, somewhat elongated, wide and high neck, forms a large part of the remaining pottery. These are pitchers, two large bowls (the base of one of them is engraved with the pictures of hare), and roundshaped sides, well-cut lips and doublepartitioned champions, the parallels of which, dating back to the 8th c. B.C., were discovered in Erebury.

A large portion of the articles interred in the sepulchre consists of weapons, of which a 0.90 m long iron sword should be singled out for mention. Again, three daggers, made in the style of their so-called Near-Eastern counterparts, were also brought to light. They were made in Armenia from the Mid-Bronze Age to the 8th c. B. C. Besides, a smooth, broken-edged, short-handled knife was also found out, reminiscent of similar knives discovered during the diggings of graveyards in Igdir.

The heads of three spears placed in the sepulchre are leafshaped. Such spears are common in Karmir Blour, Arguishtikhinili and Chermes. Two arrows discovered in the sepulchre are almondshaped and straight-edged. Such arrows were current in the kingdom of Van in the 8th c. B. C.

The quivers (0.55m long) look like bronze tubes narrowing in the upper ends (0.25 m is the diameter of the upper end and 0.09 m is that of the lower end), with two rings nailed on each, to fix them on the belt (Plate XI, figs. 1,2). These quivers were unusual for the kingdom of Van, where big-

ger, straight quivers were dominant, many specimens of which were discovered in Karmir Blour. Semi-oval, bronze parts of bows, unearthed from the sepulchre, with hooked edges and tin apertures are also rarely met with in Biayna monuments; they are reminiscent of bow parts discovered by B. A. Kuf-tin in Treghk.

A large number of trappings were uncovered in the caches of the sepulchre: harnesses, headstalls, bells, cheek pieces and backbands. Only a number of curb chains have been preserved. One side of the headstall is a narrowing, table-shaped bronze plate, ornamented with two horizontal and one vertical concave lines. Two holes are made in the headstall used for fixing it to other trappings of the horse. Now a great number of richly ornamented headstalls, from the period of the kingdom of Van, have been uncovered; some of them are adorned with mythological topics and the researchers often rate them as brilliant specimens of the applied art of Biaynili.

The first of two bronze bells is embellished with five horizontal, concave lines, four rectangular openings bored between the second and the fourth lines. The bell is crowned with a circular ring. The iron mouth of the bell is preserved. The second bell differs from the first by the plain form of its shoulder and waist. Such bells were current in the kingdom of Van and its northern contiguous regions. Particularly noteworthy are these bells engraved with cuneiforms—two from Karmir Blour (carved with the inscriptions of Arghuishti I and Sardour II) and one from Alishar (bearing the inscription of Arguishti I).

Apparently bronze-made, conical throatlatches with nail-shaped tops (2.5–4.5 cm high and 6–8 cm the diameter of the base) with inner spans, have also formed part of the trappings. Such throatlatches, attributed to the 8th–7th cc. B. C., were discovered in Igdir, Karmir Blour and Alishar.

Two big (6 cm in diameter) and one small (4.2 cm in diameter) trappings are also among the finds. The bigger buckles are circular in form, with a slightly concave surface and are provided with spans. They are adorned with beads and protruding lines. The small buckle is a plain replica of the bigger ones. Aside from forming part of trappings, such buckles occurring in profu-

sion in Biaynese and local monuments of the Armenian Upland, could have also been used as components of the soldier's breastplate.

Inserted in the sepulchre were also six, bronze-made, round-headed nails, used as furniture attributes, the likes of which were found in Kayali Dere, as well as the hollow bull-hoof-shaped bronze legs of a throne.

The other group of bronze-made objects uncovered in the sepulchre of Yerevan include a bucket, a bowl and the handles of a cup. The bucket is made of a thin plate of bronze with an upward widening body. Fixed below the lip of the bucket are two circles, with outward curved, round, bronze-made eyes crossing both circles. Now these bronze- and silver-made buckets are quite large in number. The museums of Switzerland and Les Arts are in possession of buckets, one of which is engraved with an inscription mentioning King Ispouinhi, the sovereign of the kingdom of Van in the last quarter of the 9th c. B. C. and his grandson Inoushpoua, while the other records only Inoushpoua. Both artifacts are valuable since Biaynese findings of the 9th century are very few in number. Comparing the data of this inscription to other cuneiforms, associated with the name of Inoushpoua, we can presume that the latter's reign over Biayna was short-lived. Special mention deserves also the fact that we often come across deities holding buckets in their hands in Biaynese murals and sculptures on mythological topics.

The bowl has a slightly oval, widening body and a protruding rim. Save for the circular base and the sides, the entire vessel is adorned with three rows of flower-leaved rosettes. Similar bowls were unearthed from the excavations of Karmir Blour and Golovino. The holdings of the museums of Les Arts and Mainz also contain such bowls, dating back to the 9th and 8th cc B. C. and unearthed in Western Armenia.

The bronze handles belong to different vessels: the first is big and elongated, while the second is somewhat smaller, and oval with two small projections on the curvatures. At first sight those handles seem to have formed part of Biaynese cauldrons, quite familiar from the diggings of Igdir and Karmir Blour. However, as is known, the handles of those small cauldrons are fitted

out with two projections each, designed in the shape of beast heads. But in our case, we deal with one plain projection, and this circumstance leads us to the assumption that they could not form part of cauldrons but belonged to twin-handled longish-bodied, high-necked plain or protruded bowls, common in the kingdom of Van. Thus far we are in no possession of similar intact two-handle metallic vessels. However, evidence of their existence is offered by the above handles and also by that detail of the famous Persepolis high-relief of Xerxes I (486-464 B. C.) which depicts the Persian king levying taxes from the Armenians. The latter are pictured presenting sumptuous objects to the king, among them a valuable metal-made two-handle vessel, a replica of the above-mentioned bowls.

Ornaments in profusion made of bronze and semi-precious stones are also among the artifacts discovered in the sepulchre; noteworthy among those finds is a bronze pin adorned with the high-relief of four ram heads. Similar pins were also uncovered in Karmir Blour, Armavir, Oshakan, Nor-Aresh, Igdir and other sites. Remarkable among the above finds are eight bracelets decorated with the heads of snakes. They are all big-sized and massive, broken to pieces and twisted before placing them in the grave. Such bracelets were uncovered among vestiges in Soviet and Western Armenia and they belong to Biaynese (Armavir, Karmir Blour, Erebuny, Igdir, Artskeh, Badnots) and to local (Moukhannat Tepe in Yerevan, Astghadzor, Atarbekian, Kamo, Vardenis, etc.) cultures. In addition, twenty-eight big, finepolished, drilled and twelve ball-shaped agate beads, three diskshaped bead partitions were brought to light. Similar ornamental beads have also been dug out during the excavations of Karmir Blour and Erebuny.

Figuring among the ornaments of the sepulchre are also the fragments of a small bronze tube and a pendant.

Three belts unearthed from the sepulchre arrest our attention; the first is broken into many pieces; it is 19 cm wide and about 20 cm long. Its edge is bored with many openings that served to sew it on a leather base. Externally the entire surface of the belt is chased with pictures of chariots, riders, bulls, horses and lions

as well as hunting scenes, presenting lions attacking the chariots and lionchasing riders.

The second belt is of the same width but shorter in length. It was broken into parts before laying into a grave. Pictured on the belt are mythological animals: racing winged bulls, winged horses with lion paws, winged lions with female faces and with beaks or horse tails, birds with fish tails and lion paws. Here, too, hunting scenes are chased: hunters fighting with lions and bulls (riders or warriors standing in chariots), apart from horse-and-bull, bull-and-lion, horse-and-lion fights.

A large collection of identically ornamented Biaynese belts, discovered in Western Armenia, is preserved in the regional museum of Adana.

The third belt is patterned only with geometrical designs; it has reached us in five small fragments with a total length of 26 cm and a width of 9.5 cm.

Another artifact found out in the sepulchre is a black-stone-made weight shaped seal, the lower part of which is engraved with the picture of a bird and a snake near its beak. A similar scene is depicted on the seal of a Biaynese jar, discovered in Arguishtikhinili. Such scenes of bird and snake fights are likely to reproduce the concept of the Universe's eternal fight between good and evil forces, current in Urartean mythology. At present a large number of Biaynese seals are available in different museums of the world. As to form, these seals are divided into four varieties: cylindrical, weight-shaped, bell-shaped and animal-shaped figurines. Weight-shaped seals (to which the specimen from the sepulchre of Yerevan belongs) occurred in Erebuny, Arguishtikhinili, Teyshabaini, Bastam and in Western Armenia.

A bronze ingot has also been unearthed from the sepulchre, in addition to a bronze article of unspecified use, two bronze threelegged stands and an obsidian chip.

An examination of the artifacts found out in the sepulchre clearly indicates their dating - 8th c B. C. This conclusion is supported not only by the metallic objects, the likes of which can be attributed also to a later period, but by the earthenware as well. This collection of finds from the sepulchre of Yerevan, together with those

of earlier date discovered in Erebuny and Arguishtikhinili, form but a small part of the values that give us some idea of the material and, to a certain extent, of the spiritual culture of the kingdom of Van in the 8th century B. C.

It is hard to ascertain thus far the city, the residents of which lie buried in the sepulchre in question. The thing is that the sepulchre is located rather far from Erebuny. Besides, there is reason to believe that the graveyard must have taken up the area of the presentday living quarter of Nor Aresh. On the other hand, Tey-shebaini, the other Biaynese city known to us, was not yet founded in the 8th c B. C. Therefore we are likely to expect, albeit with a small degree of probability, the existence of a third habitation within the limits of Yerevan, the more so that small Biaynese monuments have reached us from the residential quarters of Charbakh, Noragavit and Tumanian Street, all of them in Yerevan.

As to desing and form, the sepulchre of Yerevan has few likes. In this respect it is closer to the graveyards of Chermes (Altin-Tepe). However, the burial sites observed here are common to a number of other Biaynese monuments.

The custom of burying the human being testifies to the given society's concepts of the soul and the other world, those notions being reflected in the recorded sources of the Urartean religious system. This circumstance permits, albeit in broad outline, to reproduce the reflection of Urartean concepts on birth-life-death-the other world in religion, the most significant element of which is the burial rite.

G. A. Ghapantsian was the first to refer to this problem; he believed that the Urartu god Adaruta had been the symbol of birth, Irmoushini stood for deasease, life and health while death was emblemized by the deity that "transferred the souls". The inscription on Mher's door mentions all the deities of the Urartu pantheon enlisted in their semantic sequence.

The very existence of a god "transferring the souls" attests that the Urartians had their own notions and legends about the soul, the other world, the boundaries between this and other worlds, that the soul alone could not cope with the problems. Apparently man's soul met with another god on

the borderline of the other world — Shebitu, who, like his Mesopotamian counterpart Sabitu-Siduri, guarded the entrance to the other world.

The notions about the other world in the kingdom of Van were associated with water — the ocean or the sea — an example of which was Lake Van. As the Armenian traditions, persisting in the basin of Lake Van and linked originally to Biayna, indicate, life in the other world was similar to earthly life (save for the fact that it was reversed as in a mirror), i. e. it was the soul that was in need of food, clothing, arms, implements and traffic means in the other world.

Khoutouini, the fourth deity in the pantheon as master of man's destiny, ruled supreme in the other world.

The concept must have prevailed in Biaynili that the road leading from the earth to the other world passed through caves and grottoes in the rocks and, apparently, through "gates", too. This is borne out by the forms of burials in rock openings or in manmade caves. Significantly, even if the deceased was buried in an earth cell, the latter was covered with a stone "shield" which fact was revealed also during the diggings of the graveyard of Yerevan. This phenomenon is an expression of the similarity with rupestral burials. Importantly, it was believed in the kingdom of Van that the deities emerged from the rocks to maintain contacts with the human world. The habit of dedicating "gates" (manmade hollows dug in caves) to one god or another (mainly to the god of Khaldi), current in Biaynili, is also believed to have been associated with the above phenomenon. This holds true for the gate of Mher (the Khaldi gates of Biayna) preserved in Armenia until recent times. It was a "gate" through which Little Mher had entered the rock to isolate himself from the world. Legend has it that its emergence was connected with the notion of perspective universal well-being.

In spite of the seemingly general concept about the other world, prevailing in the kingdom of Van, the burial rites are markedly dissimilar, apparently accountable in terms of unhomogeneous ethnic, social-economic and cultural factors.

Thus far three basic burial rites are noticeable within the kingdom of Van: burial

of the body, cremation and dismemberment, practised in various ways.

"Burial of the body". This rite has been practised in all the stages of evolution in the Armenian Upland. The following were the variants common in the kingdom of Van: 1. burial in manmade caves: body sometimes was put into a sarcophagus (Van, Bostankaya, Kayali Dere, Lich, Mazkert, Badnots, Artskeh, etc.), 2. Burial of the body in a sarcophagus in subterranean stone-made one or several sectional graves fitted out with dromos (Chermes, Zivieh) 3. Burial in a rock opening (Igdir) 4. Burial in a stone-coffin (Arguishtikhinili, Oshakan). 5. Burial in a large, stone-walled grave (Oshakan). 6. Burial in an earthen vessel (Arguishtikhinili). 7. Burial in the earth (Lich, Yerevan).

The rite of cremation, originating in the Armenian Upland in the Mid-Bronze-Age, persisted until the introduction of Christianity in Armenia. The following variants of this rite are met with in the kingdom of Van: 1. The corpse containing the vessel is laid in the opening of the rock (Igdir). 2. The corpse-containing vessel is buried in the earth (Nor Aresh, Arguishtikhinili). 3. The corpse-containing vessel is laid in the burial cell made up of several sections and fitted out with a dromos (Chermes, the graveyard of Yerevan, Lich, Artskeh, Badnots). 4. The corpse-containing vessel is laid in a man-made cave (Artskeh, Alishar). 5. The corpse containing vessel is buried in a stone-coffin (Lich).

The corpse-dismembering rite originated in the Armenian Upland in the Late Bronze Age and persisted until the early Middle Ages. In graveyards of a remote date this rite was practised by the removal of certain bones from the skeleton or by a dismemberment of the latter, when the bones were not collected in urns. But in the kingdom of Van they are invariably placed in urns with openings on their shoulders. In the kingdom of Van they are invariably placed in urns with openings on their shoulders. In the kingdom of Van this rite was practised in the following forms: 1. The urn was placed in a stonemade coffin, 2. The urn was placed in a stone coffin 3. The urn was buried in the earth (all such graveyards have so far been unearthed only in Arguishtikhinili). The urn was placed

in the wall opening of a stone-structured burial cell in the earth, provided with a dromos (the graveyard of Yerevan).

However, it does not follow that the funeral must have necessarily been patterned on one of the above burial rites in an iven graveyard or even a grave. Thus both cremation and body burial have been discovered and studied in the graveyard of Igdir, whereas all three rites — burial, cremation and dismemberment-have been found out in Arguishtikhinili and burial and cremation — in the graveyard of Lich. The same phenomena were observed in the graveyards of Dedeli and Artskeh. As to some graveyards dug out in Chermes and Ziukuni of Biaynili (on the northern shore of Lake Van) cremation and burial of bodies have been observed in the same grave. A similar picture unfolds in the Yerevan graveyard under study, where the burial rites were cremation and body dismemberment, which fact is likely to be explained in terms of the ethnic situation of the kingdom of Van. As is known, from the very outset the kingdom of Van was ethnically and culturally unhomogeneous. The state was populated with different peoples who spoke mainly Hurrian-Urartean or alarodian and languages of the Indo-European family. The latter included the Armenians, the Hittites, the Luvians, the Iranians and so on. On the other hand, this does not mean that each of those peoples was confined to one particular locality. Migration was of common occurrence also in those days, all the more so that it was a state-promoted policy.

To consolidate the state and its political and economic structure, the kingdom of Van undertook, as from the last quarter of the 9th c. B. C., a whole range of reforms in the economic, administrative, military and religious domains. In addition, under Arguishti I's reign, a tendency of ethnic stabilization is observed in Biaynili. This refers to the transmigration of the population to the country's different regions, a circumstance which promoted the formation of national managements, and stimulated the country's unity (migrating to a new region the new-arrivals contributed to the consolidation of the central authority) and the amalgamation of different ethnic groups. As G. A. Melikishvili remarks, during their invasions the Biaynese displaced the local

population to settle it on state-owned lands. The re-settlers were required to serve in the army, pay taxes and discharge other obligations. Thus Argishti I re-settled about 280.000 inhabitants and Sardour II — 197.000. This ethnic reform had a profound impact on the country's cultural peculiarities, bringing about the differentiation of "Biaynese culture" from "local culture" within the kingdom of Van.

Referring to "Biaynese culture" the present study has in mind the way of living peculiar to the population inhabiting mainly the surroundings of Lake Van, the products being exported to the newly-founded administrative centres or produced there by Biaynese models.

The notion of "local culture" implies the way of living characteristic, for the period under discussion, of the natives who inhabited the present-day territory of Republic of Armenia. There are, among the artifacts discovered in this region, many exported goods, brought over from Biaynese cultural centres as well as from other "local cultures" of Western Armenia, since the local Biaynese monuments of the same period are very few in number and inadequately studied. Nevertheless, the availability of "local" and parallel Phrygian finds in Norshoon Tepe and the existence of monuments rich in Hurrian and Phrygian traces in a number of areas bordering on the southern and western regions of the Armenian

Upland, enable us to presume the existence of "local" cultures and their alternatives also in this area. On the other hand, the artifacts (9th-7th cc. B. C.), available in Armenia Republic, are indicative of a strong influence of Biaynese culture on its "local" counterpart. This phenomenon is clearly visible in weapons (particularly in certain new models of swords and knives) and earthenware (involving the application of certain vessels provided with handles and lips, typical of Biaynese culture. The same phenomenon is observed also in spiritual culture). The "local" deities are included in the all-Urartean pantheon whereas the cult of Biaynese deities is practised in the country's outlying provinces.

Thus, emphasis should be laid once again on the widespread concept in Urartology that the amalgamation of different peoples (Hurrians, Biaynese, Indo-Europeans—mainly Armenians) was an ongoing process in the kingdom of Van. This fact is proved, on the one hand, by the presence of Biaynese, Hurrian, Hittite-Luvian words, terms and deity-names in grabar (Old Armenian) and modern Armenian dictionaries, and, on the other, by the strong influence of Biaynese culture on its Armenian counterpart even after the downfall of the kingdom of Van.