

FUNERAL RITE

Complex of actions and rites pointed to construct Geghovit tomb funeral system coincides usual Van-Tospiian funeral rites, particularly to the kind of burials made in rock-cut (cave) tombs with combined version of inhumation and saeconary burial; latter is characterized by collection of the human bones after the flesh has been removed by exposure, which is demonstrated in one instance. Door of the first funeral hall faced east. Right to the entrance corpse of an adult was crouched remained almost whole – on the right side – near north wall before and back to the narrow passageway leading next hall. There is no skull. Adult's skeleton occupied the hall in such a way that obviously blocked any motion in and probably guarded passage to the second main hall. Shards of three vessels – pithos, vessel with cylindrical body and flask – were scattered on the north-west corner of the western wall, not far from the corpse. Skulls and some remains of three men – of the age of 30-35, 45-55 and 50-60, - two women – of 20-25, 25-30, - and a child of 2-2.5 were thrown about the west wall in 1 metre from the vessels up and down, in disorder and without any anatomical integrity, against the door. As the pottery from this hall is synchronous, depended on the concrete stretch of time and both vessels and human remains are unearthed on the same plane, it seems to be a burial made simultaneously within adjacent halls.

Members of guide staff (men, women and some children) have been assassinated stipulated by the dead of principal person, then removed into the first of cave-tomb halls during this simultaneous collective act. This was the basic form of funeral rite. Such a funeral complex with simultaneous act is well known from the archaeological complexes in the Armenian Highland – Artik, Kcti, Voskchask, Horom, Lori berd, Makarashen, Metsamor, Mayisian, Elar, Oshakan, Ycghegnadzor, Golovino, Djirarat and so on - and particularly Sevan basin – Lchashen, Chkalovka, Hayravank, Noratus, Gavar (former Kamo), Mrtbi dzor, Sarukhan, Karmir-gyugh, Ncrkin Getashen, Zolakar, Karchaghbiur, Akunk and so on – and they date from the Bronze and Iron Ages (III-I millennia B.C.).

Comparison of the latters with epic heroes known from the Armenian writing sources, folk legends and national epic as Artavazd-Shidar and youthful Mher; as well as with similar persons and topics of Eurasian mythological systems, makes possible assume that the person of high social rank have been sepulchred in Geghovit cave-tomb, and funeral rite devoted to him have been fulfilled according to the ritual dedicated to the Dying and Raising God and divinity of the Storm and War.

Concluding data given by mythology, archaeology, linguistics and palaeoanthropology, it may be recorded that the rite realized in Geghovit Van-Tospiian cave-tomb had old and deep traditions in the Armenian Highland. Nevertheless quantity and stock introduced in have been changed for a time but attitude, ideology and rite constituting the true essence of this cultural phenomenon have been untouched. Thus it testifies to the absolute interdependency, succession and continuity of ethno-cultural realities characteristic to the concrete area, - Armenian Highland and adjacent regions, - and period – early III millennium B.C. – late I millennium B.C.

TOMB DATING

Two essential facts work on the strict dating of Geghovit cave-tomb:

- a) circumstances of dagger-akinak discovery,
- b) presence of sign done by the principles of the Hittite hieroglyphic writing on the bronze vessel.

Dagger-akinaks are largely spread in the synchronic complexes of the Armenian Highland, Caucasus, South Russian steppes, Crimea, Central Asia and Iranian plateau. Earliest examples of them have been emerged in the last quarter of the VIII century B.C. and continued to be practiced down to the end of the I millennium B.C.

In its own turn, the Hittite hieroglyphic writing is in fact known by the mid of the II millennium B.C.; it have been practiced in the Hittite empire without any interruption, and then in the late Hittite

political units and principalities down to the 1st quarter of the VII century B.C. Thus, deadlines for the akinak's functioning – the last quarter of the VIII century B.C. – and use of Hittite hieroglyphes over Near East 1st quarter of the VII century B.C. – are the most acceptable space for Geghovit cave-tomb dating.

It results from this that the high-ranking owner of the mentioned cave-tomb was, at any rate, the contemporary to one of the following kings succeeded each other on the Van-Tospian throne, either Rusa the I (735-714 B.C.) or Argishti the II (713-685 B.C.). In this case he could be the first-hand participant of the military-political events spread widely in Sevan basin and adjacent regions by this time.

EPILOGUE

Results of the archaeological investigation lasted over a century and information extracted from documentary sources give obvious evidence that Sevan basin was an important sphere for economic-commercial and ethno-cultural interrelations and had remarkable significance in historical processes of the Armenian Highland during Bronze-Iron Ages.

Artefacts discovered in Geghovit cave-tomb as well as paleoanthropological, mythological and linguistical commentaries and reconstructions by themselves promote just deep and more comprehensive investigation on the all-round enterprise of Van-Tospian sovereigns in the north-east regions of the Highland.

Place survey and investigation of cuneiform inscriptions from the Sevan basin allow to make a strong probability that localization of Geghovit cave-tomb is not casual one. In fact it was built along the only way with high military importance, leading from the south-west coastal regions of Sevan Lake basin to the metallurgical regions and metal-ores of Zangezur through the Selim pass. This way was distributed by series of intercommunicating fortresses – as were Kotavank, Mtnadzor, Djodjkogh, Geghovit-1, -2, Alberd, Verin Getashen, Karedzi and so on – with the best fortification system intended for effective defence. Importance of this way and needs of its permanent control were confirmed by the fortlet-post built with exclusive aims by “Vantospians” on a point of high strategic significance, on a mound Alberd attested by the Armenian medieval manuscripts.

It is as yet difficult ascertainment whether the high-rank person buried in Geghovit cave-tomb have been a patron or ruler of Alberd Van-Tospian defensive system. More profound and trustworthy information can be produced by further activities of Armenian-Italian joint expedition which is engaged in Alberd fortification problems since 1994 up to now. Thanks to this expedition, actually it is clarified that both the fortress with exceptional role and environs have been remained as an important bridge-head long after decline the Van-Tospian kingdom. Taking into account artefacts discovered by excavations in the area under consideration with strict temporal frame, this point had very high strategic significance both during the years of native Armenian kings of Orontides (Eruanduni Kingdom), Achaemenid rule, and Hellenistic Age, by the next Armenian dynasty of the Artaxiads.

LIST OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TABLES

Table 1

The map of the Near East (I half of the I millenium B.C.).

Table 2

1. General view of the vantospian (urartian) cave-tomb at Geghovit. 2. Plan. 3. Section.

Table 3

General view of the first hall of the cave-tomb at Geghovit, (after preparation).