



“ARCHAEOLOGY OF ARMENIA IN REGIONAL CONTEXT”

**EDITED BY P. AVETISYAN AND A.
BOBOKHYAN**

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In 2021 the second volume of “Archaeology of Armenia in Regional Context” was published by the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, NAS RA. It sums up the results of discussions at a conference dedicated to the

60th Anniversary of the Institute held in Yerevan in 2019. The volume consists of 432 pages and contains 30 articles. The articles are presented by the representatives of 30 scientific and educational institutions (8 of which from the Republics of Armenia and Artsakh) from 10 countries. The volume reflects recent achievements of Armenian archaeology realized by local and international specialists. It includes studies from the Stone Age to the Late Middle Ages. The papers are listed in chronological order and, according to their content, can be divided into two major groups: research history and research results.

Research history seems to be very important in considering the continuous and rapid development of archaeological research methods. The article entitled “The Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography: Past and Present” (Avetisyan, Bobokhyan, 7–25) opens the present volume. As reflected in the second part of the title, the article presents not only the fruitful activities of the Institute beginning from the moment of its foundation, but also its present plans and projects. The structure of the institute, its function, research scope, achievements and future perspectives are given in detail. All types of research conducted by the Institute are directly related to the socio-political, economic, educational and cultural spheres of modern Armenia. The scientific center is, in fact, a link between the state and the society. In this regard, the importance of restoration work, the creation of tourist zones and the museum work presented in this article cannot be overestimated. In the volume there are also articles dedicated to the scientific heritage of certain researchers (Tumanyan, 255–258; Zhamkochyan,

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Hakobyan, 427–431), the value of whose contribution is presented in the context of new data.

Research results are reflected in the presentation of excavations, surveys, as well as case studies.

The discussion of the *excavation results* in a certain context is the basis of any historical-archaeological reconstruction. Such works circulate new data on the one hand, and broaden possibilities of interdisciplinary discussions on the other. There are seven articles in this subgroup. These papers have a definite structure and content load, common to all of them. The content key components (excluding the abstracts) of the papers are: the research history of the site and the historical overview (in case of historical archaeology), the location/ landscape, the purpose of the archaeological works, the process, the results (architecture, stratigraphy/ chronology, artifacts, auxiliary research (archaeobiology), the discussion and conclusion. Depending on the characteristic of the topic (chronological affiliation of the site, goal of the works and volume of works performed), these components may be added or, in some cases, reduced. It should be noted that the papers are not limited to the presentation of the results of the excavations. They are discussed in a specific context, emphasizing the relevance, achievements, and perspectives.

So, the excavations of the multi-layered Margahovit site (Lori province) provide new data especially for the studies of the Bronze and Iron Ages. Considering the site within the surrounding landscape, the authors assume “the community that settled in Margahovit during the Early Bronze Age was most likely specialized in craft production” (Gevorgyan et al., 87).

One of the famous sites of the South Caucasus is Metsamor (Armavir province). Excavations show that the settlement of the lower town was active throughout the Iron Age (Jakubiak, Piliposyan, 171), and the overall layout as well as internal arrangements have changed constantly (Jakubiak, Piliposyan, p. 179). These changes prove that the settlement functioned during both the Urartian and Post-Urartian periods. This means that “the Urartian invasion of Metsamor during the reign of Argishti I did not devastate the settlement.... the Urartians installed a form of subjugation and political control over the town rather than brutal, military force” (Jakubiak, Piliposyan, 179).

The first excavations of the Fortress and necropolis of Veri Berd (Shirak province) show that further works may provide new data in the framework of

Archaeology of the Late Bronze-Iron Age and Classical period of Armenia. It should be noted that here the excavations of the settlement and the necropolis are combined, which allows both to supplement the data and to document the connection between the two (Vardanyan et al., 189–200).

Armavir Hill (Armavir province) is a multi-layered complex, the systematic excavations of which began in 1962. This paper presents the main results of the work of the recent 10 years. The authors single out some significant discoveries especially in the Urartian and post-Urartian periods. The foundations of the sanctuary mentioned in an inscription of Sardur II found in Armavir in previous years have been opened. Excavations have shown that it acted also in the Classic stage. In this period the Urartian susi-type temple was reconstructed and reused (Karapetyan et. al., 284).

Another important site is Dvin (Ararat province). The works lasting more than half a century show that the area of the Medieval city was inhabited since the Bronze Age (Petrosyan et. al., 340). This article summarizes the results of archaeological excavations of the recent ten years, first of all aimed at completing and clarifying the existing data for the restoration of the site and the preparation of a tourist zone.

The three-nave basilica of Yereruyk (Shirak province) is one of the monumental complexes not only of Early Christian Armenia, but also of the Eastern Christian world. In 2009-2016 the Armenian-French expedition worked here in the area of the temple and the adjacent territory (Donabédian, 345). Among these works, of particular interest are the excavations of Christian burials, which present new data and questions within the framework of the topic.

The fortress of Dashtadem (Aragatsotn province) is one of the few standing fortresses in the territory of Armenia. Extensive archaeological works were carried out here in 2005 and 2018. The aim of the excavations was to complete the general structure of the inner defensive wall to carry out a reconstruction project. Among other discoveries, it is important to note the adjustment of the phasing of the castle's habitation (Babajanyan et al., 373).

Among the articles in this group there are also studies in which the results of excavations are considered within a specific topic. So the aspects of Neolithization in the territory of modern Armenia, and the Southern Caucasus in general are continued to be debated, and recent excavations at Lernagog 1 (Armavir province), Areni 1, 2 (Vayots dzor province) allow clarifications. Researchers

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suggest “breaking the Early Holocene archaeological sequence, which is predating the Late Neolithic sequence of the 6th millennium BC, into two chronological groups or steps: Group 1 – 11,000 – 7,300 Cal and Group 2 span between 7,300 – 6,200 Cal BC” (Petrosyan et al., 27–28).

The Kura-Araxes culture of the Early Bronze Age is one of the most studied topics in the prehistoric archaeology of the South Caucasus and the Near East. For a whole millennium it ruled throughout the Armenian Highlands and spread to the neighboring regions. To date, the subject of discussion is the emergence, spread, elimination of culture, and various other issues of the social system of its bearers. Following the example of Shengavit (Yerevan), one of the fundamental Bronze Age sites of the South Caucasus, one of the articles in the volume discusses the above-mentioned questions in the context of present data (Rothman, 52–67).

The issues of origin, spatial distribution, chronology, cultural and ethnic affiliation of pithos burials have been the subject of scholarly discussion for a long time. The number of pithos burials that were opened during the excavations in Artsakh and are already known, allow us to generalize this phenomenon of the Late Hellenistic period of Artsakh and Utik. Here the pithos burials became predominant at the end of the 1st century BC and 1st century AD. A detailed discussion of pithos burials of Tigranakert reveal essential details in this context (Petrosyan et al., 303).

Surveys are also an integral part of archaeological research. During the survey, the sites are documented, mapped, measured, ortho/photographed, also test excavations are carried out. Each survey adopts a specific methodology according to the objectives and goals set. As a result of surveys new sites are discovered, which are registered in the “List of the Immobile Monuments of the History and Culture of the Republic of Armenia”. The volume considers the results of four different survey projects.

In the paper “Archaeological Investigations in Kotayk Region as Part of the Kotayk Survey Project (KSP). A Glance at Selection of Fortresses (2013–2019)” 23 archaeological sites (Early Bronze Age to Middle Age) are described and discussed, almost all characterized by fortifications with various architectural features, functions, dimensions and geographical locations (Petrosyan et al., 137).

The investigations of the Tavush Archaeological Project differ in methodology. Tavush region, being mostly densely forested, makes it quite

difficult to carry out both surveys (particularly by means of flying devices) and excavations. Eventually the expedition “decided to implement a hybrid survey method, based of course on classic archaeological survey protocols, but adapted to the specific environmental conditions of Tavush province” (Perello et al., 156). In this way, an attempt was made to carry out relatively systematic work to understand the archaeological picture of a still poorly studied region.

With contextual discussion the explorations around Al Lakes (Republic of Artsakh) (Avetisyan et al., 201–214) and Vayots Dzor (Babajanyan, Franklin, 397–413) are especially important. The discussion of the typological data and the distribution area of the sites leads to the restoration of the unified sacred landscapes in one case and the Silk Road in the other.

The volume also comprises various *case studies* in wide chronological and thematic boundaries. The initial source of those papers are field, laboratory and comparative studies. In this case, the group of specific sites and artifacts are observed.

F. Knoll and H. Meller singled out three petroglyphs in Syunik, which depict throwing weapons bolas or slings. “The use of slings and boleadoras is depicted in two different contexts. Firstly, integrated in hunting or herding scenes and secondly, associated with representations of warriors who are, however not explicitly involved in warfare” (42). These petroglyphs are discussed in the context of similar artifacts and petroglyphs.

The Anthropomorphic stelae of Artsakh are still under discussion. These are rectangular, flat elongated slabs, which were given an anthropomorphic form by three-dimensional treatment. The slabs are divided into three parts by means of two horizontal grooves, accentuating three parts of the body. Recent research has identified the initial locations of previously known, relocated stelae and their cultural and archaeological environment (Yeranyan, 254).

The territory of modern Armenia is quite rich with cemeteries dating to the 2nd millennium BC. Among them there are quite lavish burials speaking of the social position of the deceased. Verin Naver is one of such cemeteries where the symbolism of power has been reflected among others also in appearance of the spoke-wheeled chariot and the horse (Simonyan, 96).

A large number of seals (Late Bronze Age to Early Classical Age) were found in necropolis of Lori Berd. Based on the stylistic and contextual analysis an attempt has been made to track the social aspect of the use of the seals. In the

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community of Lori Berd the seals were used for the representation of social status and/or as personified amulets applied in burial practices (Devedjyan, Davtyan, 215).

Most of the artifacts found in archaeological sites represent ceramics. Due to the fixed stratigraphy in the settlements, the ceramic material serves as a basis for relative chronology and contacts (see Korenevskiy, 89–95, in the context of Maikop culture). In addition, the examination of the spatial distribution of pottery can reveal functional details on using the space (see Iskra, 180–188, in the context of Metsamor). The comprehensive research of ceramics as a separate object of study can also reveal a number of aspects of the technical-technological development and economic relations of the given society (see Gyulamiryan, 286–292, concerning Artashat).

Archaeology is closely related to a number of other sciences, especially geology and archaeobiology. This relation is reflected in two articles in the volume. *Vishaps* (dragon stone), like *khachkars* (cross stone), are found only in the Armenian Highlands. The results of the archaeogeological survey of the vishaps located in the area of the southern slope of mount Aragats are represented in one of the articles. “The survey identified the petrographic and petrochemical features of the rocks from which the vishaps were carved. The results indicate that the vishaps were produced from rocks found nearby, consistently favouring the softer tuff lava and tuff over the harder-to-work basaltic andesites” (Hovhannisyan et al., 115). Trepanation is one of the most ancient medical “treatments” on living humans. The anthropological investigations of skeleton remains from various periods and areas provide information on the medical practices in Armenia. The author of the paper “A Review of Trepanations in the Armenian Highland with New Cases” discusses the cases of trepanation in Armenia, based on fourteen skulls (Late Bronze Age to Classical period) (Khudaverdyan, 259).

Epigraphic studies are important in historical and archaeological reconstructions. The medieval Armenian culture has rather a rich heritage of epigraphs, which is summarized in the volumes of “Corpus Inscriptionum Armenicarum”. The replenishment of volumes continues today. For example, recent fieldwork in and around the famous medieval monastic complex of Tatev has uncovered a new batch of epigraphic inscriptions that provide new insights into the region’s history (Harutyunyan, 141–426).

Christian burials are among the topics that deserve a lot of attention in Armenian archaeology. The author of the article “Christian Funerary Archaeology in Armenia” explains it “largely due to the difficulty of removing the upper layer of monuments and especially by the absence of the grave goods” (Mirijanyan, 366–372).

Historical archaeology is the observation of archaeological material in the context of history. Such discussions in this volume can be found in the following articles: “The Metsamor Project: Results Following Six Seasons of Field Excavation” (Jakubiak, Piliposyan, 169–179), “The Fortress of Aramus in its Historical Context” (Kuntner et al., 234–247), and “Categorie des sanctuaires en Arménie antique selon leurs emplacements: Étude historiographique et archeologique” (Parsamyan, 305–330), etc.

Conclusions concerning the volume “Archaeology of Armenia in Regional Context” allow to highlight several features and key points. The title itself implies a discussion of the issues under investigation in a wider context, and this is entirely justified. Some of the topics are considered in regional, some in Armenian, Caucasian or Near Eastern contexts. It is obvious that the territory of modern Armenia which has its local peculiarities, was an integral part of the socio-political, economic and cultural developments of the region.

The volume is pretty diverse in its topics and presents Armenian archaeology in its entirety, in an international language and niveau. Above all, it reveals the interdisciplinary aspects of Armenian archaeology. This publication includes articles dealing with all periods, various research histories and bibliographies, hence, among other merits it can also serve as a handbook. The volume can justly be identified as an essential contribution of the Armenian archaeological school.

MARIAM AMIRYAN

Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, NAS RA
amiryanm@ymail.com