

# Sacred landscapes of Syunik during the Bronze and Iron Ages

H. Avetisyan, A. Gnuni, G. Sargsyan, A. Bobokhyan







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Archaeological survey

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Sacred places have played a significant role throughout human history. Often, social life was formed and developed around them. The present work examines the sacred places of historical Syunik within the broader context of the Armenian Highland, aiming to identify the specific features that have shaped the sacred history of this region. Accordingly, the authors discuss theoretical issues, address the natural-historical environment and the history of research, attempt to classify the sacred places of Syunik, and explore the peculiarities of their topography. The book is intended for archaeologists, ethnographers, cultural historians, art historians, as well as for a wider audience of readers.

The cover photo depicts the *longue durée* of the sanctuary at Aghavnadzor (Ulgyur). On the rear side is the drawing of the “Okhty Ororotsi Kar” at Karahunj - a rock platform with later medieval carvings (Photo by A. Bobokhyan, drawing by M. Petrosyan)

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## Introduction

Historical Syunik is one of the key areas of the Armenian Highland and is very rich in archaeological sites. These sites have been studied since the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Y. Lalayan, S. Lisitsyan, S. Yesayan, L. Barseghyan, O. Xnki-kyan, A. Ayvazyan, H. Simonyan, P. Avetisyan, B. Gasparyan, V. Hovhannisyan, M. Zardaryan, A. Piliposyan, et al.) and reveal the significant potential that this region has from the point of studying the Bronze and Iron Age realities of the Armenian Highland.

Since 2013, as a result of scientific expeditions carried out by the Department of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Yerevan State University, the study of Syunik archaeological sites has received a new impetus. The goal of the project implemented within the framework of the scientific topic “Historical Syunik in the Bronze and Iron Ages (according to the latest archaeological data)” of the Higher Education and Science Committee of the Republic of Armenia is to present the process of early cultural developments in historical Syunik during ca. 3500–500 BC, to clarify the significance of that region in the local (Artsakh, Utik), regional (Armenian Highland) and supraregional (Caucasus, Near East) context. This research is based on excavations, surveys, and the study of museum material, which were carried out in the Syunik, Vayots Dzor, and Gegharkunik regions of the Republic of Armenia, as well as in the Kashatagh region and the Karvachar district of the Shahunyan region of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.

This volume includes a part of the work done, dedicated to the sacred landscape of Bronze and Iron Age Syunik. The work aims to consider the Syunik sanctuaries in the context of the general sacred places of the Armenian Highland, to identify the features that conditioned the peculiarities of sacral history of this zone. Accordingly, after creating a theoretical basis, presenting the natural and historical environment as well as the history of research, the authors try to classify the Syunik sanctuaries, and then to address the peculiarities of their topography. Research is attached to the work, which complements the issues under discussion in the form of separate questions.

Sanctuaries have played a significant role throughout human history. Often, social life has been shaped and developed around them. Meanwhile, it is impossible to correctly understand the essence of a sanctuary without taking into account the characteristics of the landscape in which it developed. After all, it is in the process of adapting to the environment that the value system of the community, its

sense of identity, and behavioral characteristics emerge. The presented work attempts to clarify the role of the sacred landscape of Syunik, taking into account the above-mentioned characteristics.

We hope that this volume will at least partially answer the complex questions of the perception of the sacred landscape and prepare the background for further, more fundamental research.

Taking this opportunity, we would like to express our deep gratitude to a number of organizations and individuals for their support during the writing of this work, including the Higher Education and Science Committee of RA, the Institute of Armenian Studies of Yerevan State University, the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the NAS RA, the Scientific Research Center of Historical and Cultural Heritage of the Ministry of Culture of RA, the Local Lore Museum of Yeghegnadzor, the Historical and Ethnographic Museum of Etchmiadzin, the Local Lore Museum of Kapan, the Local Lore Museum of Kashatagh. We also express our gratitude to archaeologists Husik Melkonyan for providing information about the sites of the Yeghegnadzor region, Boris Gasparyan for data on the rock-cut structure of Aghavnadzor, and to Gagik Khachatryan for information about the cemetery of Harzhis. We are grateful to Anzhela Davtyan from the Laboratory of Archaeological Research at the Institute of Armenian Studies of Yerevan State University, for making the drawings, and to Zorayr Yrkoyan, editor of the local newspaper "Meran" for a number of photographs related to the Kashatagh region of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. We wish to extend our special gratitude to the All Armenian Foundation Financing Armenological Studies for support in publishing this book.

# Chapter I

## Research issues

### 1.

#### **The natural environment, cultural context and the history of research**

*The natural environment and cultural context.* Syunik was one of the provinces of historical Armenia, extending across the northeastern part of the Armenian Highland and bordering the regions of Ayrarat, Vaspurakan, Artsakh, Utik, and Gugark<sup>1</sup>. According to medieval sources, Syunik consisted of twelve provinces (Arevik, Kovsakan, Dzork, Baghk, Tsg huk, Haband, Yernjak, Chahuk, Aghahejk, Vayots Dzor, Gegharkunik, Sotk: sometimes the province of Nakhijevan was also associated with Syunik).

The region under consideration was known by two names: Syunik and Sisakan. Although the relationship between these names is not entirely clear, it is generally believed that the toponym Sisakan appeared later (it is also present in Persian-Arabic sources, in the latter as Sisajan), whereas Syunik has an ethnic origin<sup>2</sup>.

If we try to restore the changing borders of historical Syunik based on medieval sources, it will turn out that in the northwestern part it was separated from the Ayrarat province by the Geghama Mountains. The southwestern border ran along the tips of the mountain branches south of the Vayots Dzor mountain range, in an almost straight line from northwest to southeast, to the middle course of the Yernjak River, then from there it turned northeast, passing through the watershed of the Yernjak and Gilan Rivers, to the intersection of the Syunik and Barkushat Mountains, from where its border headed south, passing through the watershed heights of the Syunik mountain range, reaching Yeraskh near the village of Goghtn. From Goghtn eastward to the confluence of the Yeraskh and Hagar Rivers, Syunik was separated from Atrpatakan by the Yeraskh River. On the eastern side, the border of Syunik ran along the Hagar River, near its sources it turned westward and reached the northern part of the Syunik Mountains<sup>3</sup>. Then, along the watershed heights of that same mountain range, it headed north and reached the eastern Geghama mountain range, and from here, along the peaks of the latter, it headed

northwest, closing the basin of Lake Geghama (Sevan) from the northeast<sup>4</sup>. In its far northwestern part, Syunik bordered the Varazhnunik district of Ayrarat<sup>5</sup>.

Syunik is a mountainous country and extends to the southeastern side of the Lesser Caucasus mountain range. The Lesser Caucasus gave off numerous mountain branches in this part, which, intersecting, divided the area into numerous closed regions. Despite being mountainous, there are regions in Syunik that are favorable for the development of agriculture from a soil and climate point of view (the basin of the middle and lower course of the Vorotan River, the valleys of the Voghji and Arpa Rivers). The natural conditions of Syunik are particularly favorable for cattle-breeding. Grasslands and alpine meadows are widespread here (especially in the highlands of Geghama, Vardenis, and the Syunik Mountains).

There are quite forested areas in Syunik, where walnut, pear, apple, plum, and other trees grow. It is also rich in fauna (various types of birds, fish, and animals).

The area is abundant in water: numerous rivers pass through here (Araxes, Aghavno, Trtu, Hagari, Hochants, Vorotan, Voghji, Gavaraget, Argichi), there are a number of lakes, the most important of which is Sevan.

Syunik is particularly rich in natural resources: building stone, numerous mineral springs, and deposits of copper and other non-ferrous metals, which have been exploited since ancient times.

The climatic conditions of Syunik are also diverse, where we encounter subtropical (Meghri River valley, middle and lower stream of Kapan River, lower stream of Hagari and Araxes valley) and high-mountainous cold (upper stream of Vorotan, most of the Lake Geghama basin, high-altitude regions of the Syunik Mountains) climatic zones. Syunik experiences severe cold and heavy snowfall, which in the past made most roads impassable in winter. Syunik receives a considerable amount of precipitation, with an average annual total of 300–700 mm.

The geographical location of the region facilitated the passage of important transit routes through its territory. Medieval sources mention two major roads connected to Syunik, which are believed to have existed since ancient times. One of them was the Dvin–Nakhijevan–Vardanakert–Paytakaran–Caspian Sea route. Shaghat, the residential city of Syunik, was connected to this road via Nakhijevan. The Shaghat–Nakhijevan road was of important economic importance for Syunik, connecting it to the Dvin–Paytakaran and Dvin–Nakhijevan–Tabriz roads.

The next route was the Dvin–Partav transit road, which passed through proper Syunik. This road branched out from Dvin in two directions. One went along the shores of Hrazdan, then turned east to Berdkunk (on the shores of Lake Sevan), from where it continued east along the shores of Lake Sevan and reached the village of Kot. The second branch, leaving Dvin, reached the Sisijan station (probably near present-day Norashen), then from here it headed north, along the Arpa River and through the Selim mountain pass to Kot, Sotk, and from here, over Haterk and Kaghankatu, to Partav<sup>6</sup>. Most likely, the Artaxata–Sanora bypass road

also passed near the southeastern shores of Lake Sevan<sup>7</sup>. The Syunik region lay on the main North–South road. The road passed through the Angeghakot Valley, the Sisian mountain pass, then entered Nakhijevan, crossed the Araxes and continued into Iran<sup>8</sup>. Many of the currently used inter-community roads were known in ancient times. This fact is evidenced by the concentration of fortresses and observation posts along them<sup>9</sup>.

The natural conditions of Syunik dictated the nature and directions of cultural developments. Accordingly, Syunik, both during the Bronze and Iron Ages (textual Tab. 1) and later on, exhibits the same patterns of historical and cultural developments as the central regions of the Armenian Highland. However, as the main “gateway” of the highlands connecting to the Eastern Caucasus, it has also undergone certain Caucasian and later Iranian influences.

**Stages of research.** The ancient sites of the historical Syunik region are repeatedly mentioned by Armenian historians<sup>10</sup> and in folk traditions<sup>11</sup>. However, the scientific study of them began in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The history of the research of these monuments can be conditionally divided into three main stages, which include the pre-Soviet, Soviet, and new Armenian statehood periods, respectively.

Stage I: 1870–1920: As early as 1870, the inspector of the salt mines of Nakhijevan, F. Bayern, discovered stone tools in the same mines, the first information about which was published by the inspector of the city schools of Nakhijevan, K. Nikitin. In subsequent years, numerous discoveries were made in this area, which were widely discussed in scientific journals of the time<sup>12</sup>. In 1896, a “Greek-type bronze lamp, the upper part of which represents a Greek theatrical mask,” was accidentally discovered near Mount Lachin and handed over to the St. Petersburg Archaeological Commission<sup>13</sup>.

The most systematic research was of a fact-finding nature. Thus, Bishop Hovhannes Shahkhatunyants and Bishop Mesrop Smbatyants describe the Berdi Glukh fortress in Gavar. The latter mentions other Cyclopean fortresses<sup>14</sup>. Gh. Alis-han mentions the spacious residence of Sultan Keghesi, which he by mistake refers to as historical Moz<sup>15</sup>.

In the following years, Y. Lalayan conducted research in the region<sup>16</sup>. Lalayan rightly notes the existence of an ancient fortress in Sultan Keghesi<sup>17</sup>. In addition, he mentions the tombs of Herher, Shaghat, and Shaki, including the pithos burials, the Harzhis fortress, and the Zorats Karer site<sup>18</sup>. The most complete references to the archaeological sites of the Gegharkunik region belong to A. Ivanovskiy, who also provides an extensive geological description of the region<sup>19</sup>.

Excavations of the sites in the area began already at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1896, the monks of the Karmir Vank discovered vessels in the area of monastery. In 1896, the cemetery was explored by N. Fyodorov, whose excavation materials were published by A. Spitsin<sup>20</sup>. In 1898, A. Rossel conducted excavations of burial mounds not far from the village of Tegh in the Goris region<sup>21</sup>. In 1904,

Period	Divisions	Chronology, BC	Cultural traditions	Main Sites		Main events
				Other regions of Armenia	Historical Syunik	
Early		3500–2900	Kura-Araxes I	Elar, Aragats, Gegharot	Sotk 2 (Gegharkunik), Oghlan kala, Ovchular tepe, Makhta (Nakhijevan)	Formation of a cultural zone of black polished pottery in the Fertile Crescent, establishment of societies characterized by early complexity, use of arsenical bronze
		2900–2500	Kura-Araxes II	Shengavit, Mokhrablur, Karmut	Tandzaver (Zangezur), Yelpin, Areni (Vayots Dzor), Lchashen, Sotk 2 (Gegharkunik), Duzdagh, Vorotan*, Yeznagomer*, Sonasar*, Mirik* (Khashatagh), Ali Bayramali (Karvachar), Kyul-Tepe 1, Kyul-Tepe 2 (Nakhijevan), Lchashen (tomb 55) (Gegharkunik), Kyul-Tepe 2 (Nakhijevan)	
	2400–2100	Kurgan	Mayisyan, Stepanakert, Khachenaget	Sisian (tombs 10, 13), Sisian (tomb 1-3, 1E, 2E), Aghitu, Zorats karer (Zangezur), Shatin, Moz (tomb 1, 2) (Vayots Dzor), Lchashen (tombs 120, 123), Sotk 10 (tomb 1) (Gegharkunik)		
Bronze	Middle	2100–1850	Trialeti-Vanadzor 1	Karashamb, Oshakan, Uzerliktepe I	Sisian (tombs 1-3, 5-7, 9) (Zangezur), Noratus (tomb 1) (Gegharkunik), Mirik*, Aghvesahaki*, Yeznagomer (Kashatagh)	Cultural diversity, distribution of various groups of black (early periods) and painted (developed and later periods) pottery, intensification of a semi-nomadic lifestyle, interactions toward Asia Minor and the Aegean world, use of tin bronze
		1850–1700	Trialeti-Vanadzor 2, Sevan-Artsakh 1	Vanadzor, Aygeshat, Lori Berd	Akhlatyan (Zangezur), Yelpin (Vayots Dzor), Lchashen (tomb 6), Gavar (tombs 1-3), Sevan Hydro-Electro Station, Nerkin Getashen (tomb 21) (Gegharkunik), Kyul-Tepe, Karmir-Vank (Nakhijevan)	
Late		1700–1500	Trialeti-Vanadzor 3, Sevan-Artsakh 2, Karmir-Berd, Karmir-Vank		Vorotnaberd (Zangezur), Lchashen (tombs 1955/1, 1956/2, 5, 191-193, 196, 197, 200-203, 207, 209, 211-213, 215, 228), Unpp 2 (Gegharkunik)	Transitional period, marked by the disappearance of the heterogeneity characteristic of the previous period, and the emergence of cyclopean fortresses
		1500–1400	Lchashen-Metsamor 1	Aparan II, Harich, Shirakavan	Angeghakot, Khndzoresk* (Zangezur), Nerkin Getashen, Lchashen, (Gegharkunik), Kalajik-2, Yeznagomer* (Kashatagh)	A period of internationalism, the emergence of local kingdoms (Hayasa), active trade, cultural, and political relations with Hittite-Hurrian and Mesopotamian centers, use of tin bronze, lead, and cinnabar

Iron	Early	1200–900	Lchashen-Metsamor 4	Metsamor, Dvin, Horom	Tandzaver (tombs 2–5), Mach, Aghvani, Norashenik, Lernadzor, Khnatsakh, Kapan-Shahumyan (Zangezur), Joj Dar (Vayots Dzor), Norabak tomb 1 (Gegharkunik), Arvakon, Keren*, Keren (tombs 3, 54 A, 93), Duzdagh, Gyaur Damer (Kashatagh)	Militarization of society, “Cyclopean fortresses” with outer towns, cultural and possibly political unification of the tribes of the Armenian Highland (Nairi, Etiuni), use of iron
	Middle	900–700	Lchashen-Metsamor 5 and Biainili	Metsamor, Erebuni, Argishtikhinili	Shikahogh (tombs I–III), Kapan-Shahumyan (settlement), Aghitu, Khndzoresk*, Khnatsakh, Harzhis (Zangezur), Moz (Vayots Dzor), Herik, Keren (tomb 62) (Kashatagh)	Emergence of a Near Eastern-type state system around Lake Van (= Biainili-Urartu) and its expansion into the territory of present-day Armenia (= Etiuni), use of cuneiform and hieroglyphic writing, widespread use of iron
	Late	700–600	Lchashen-Metsamor 6 and Urartian	Karmir-Blur, Oshakan, Aramus	Sznak* (Zangezur), Getap, Malishka, Aghavnadzor (Vayots Dzor), Spitakajur (ruined tomb), Geghrovit (Gegharkunik), Herik, Keren (tombs 1, 46, 106) (Kashatagh)	Period of integration (koine) between local (Lchashen-Metsamor / Etiuni) and Biainili cultures, marked by the widespread use of iron
		600–400	“Early Armenian” / Ervandid	Astghibilur, Berd, Erebuni	Kapan-Shahumyan (settlement), Shikahogh (Zangezur), Ulgyur (Vayots Dzor)*, Yeznagomer, Herik, Keren (main group of tombs) (Kashatagh)	Decline of Urartian influence, broad penetration of Iranian traditions, and a reduction in urban life

Table 1. Periodization and chronology of Bronze and Iron Age archaeology of Syunik in the general Armenian context

Periodization and Chronology according to: P. Avetisyan, R. Badalyan, S. Hmayakyan, A. Pilibosyan, On the Issues of Periodization and Chronology of the Bronze and Iron Ages in Armenia, RFAW 1993–1995, 1996, p. 8–12; P. Avetisyan, Chronology and Periodization of the Middle Bronze Age in Armenia, Candidate Dissertation Abstracts, Yerevan, 2003; cf. also A. T. Smith, R. S. Badalyan, P. Avetisyan, The Archaeology and Geography of Ancient Transcaucasian Societies, 1: The Foundations of Research and Regional Survey in the Tsaghkahovit Plain, Armenia, OIP 134, 2009, p. 33–36; P. Avetisyan, A. Bobokhyan, Archaeology of Armenia in Regional Context: Achievements and Perspectives, Archaeology of Armenia in Regional Context, Yerevan, 2012, p. 18, Fig. 2

\* The sites marked with an asterisk are those known only from surface materials

Lalayan initiated the excavations of Kyul-Tepe, one of the key sites of Nakhijevan<sup>22</sup>. In 1906–1908, Lalayan studied more than 500 tombs in the Sevan basin<sup>23</sup>. A. Ivanovskiy carried out small excavations on the eastern borders of Syunik, on the Vank-Chorman road (present-day Vank village of Martakert region and Chorman village of Kashatagh region of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic), excavating one tomb<sup>24</sup>.

Stage II: 1920–1990: In the 1920s and 1930s, in number of publications an attempt was made to consider the archaeological material of ancient Syunik in the context of the general Armenian and Transcaucasian archaeology<sup>25</sup>. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the works of S. Ter-Avetisyan, in which the author attempts to consider the burial mounds of the Syunik-Artsakh region (Trtu Basin, Sevan and Khachen Plain, Aghavno Basin) within the boundaries of a single cultural zone<sup>26</sup>. In 1926, I. Meshchaninov initiated an archaeological visit to Nakhijevan and Nagorno-Karabakh. In the same year, excavations of the Karmir vank resumed<sup>27</sup>. A. Alekperov's works in Norashen (Oghlan Kala fortress), Shor-tepe were of great importance<sup>28</sup>. I. Jafarzade conducted speleological research in the southeast of historical Syunik, studying both natural and artificial caves<sup>29</sup>. The residential caves of the village of Tegh in the Goris region were already noted by S. Ter-Avetisyan, who, along with modern residential caves, also mentions "the caves that served as dwellings in the prehistoric period"<sup>30</sup>. In the 1920s–1950s, M. Hasratyan conducted regular excavations in the Sisian region, studying a number of important sites (Zorats Karer, cemeteries of Lor and Akhlatyan)<sup>31</sup>. The excavations of the tomb of the Tolors village were of essential importance<sup>32</sup>.

The excavations of Kyul tepe resumed by O. Abibulaev in the 1950s were of great importance in the archaeological study of Syunik<sup>33</sup>. In the 1950s and 1960s, archaeological works related to the lowering of the level of Lake Sevan intensified. First of all, it is worth mentioning the works in which an attempt was made to observe the archaeological monuments of the region in the context of fluctuations in the level of Lake Sevan, including archaeological and geological research in the Norashen settlement<sup>34</sup>. During the same period, the study of the fortresses of the Lake Sevan basin was of great importance<sup>35</sup>. Excavations of burial sites discovered during the lowering of Lake Sevan played a crucial role in the periodization and dating of the Bronze and Iron Age cultures of Armenia<sup>36</sup>.

The study of the sites of Davit Bek, Kajaran, Shinuhayr, and Harzhis was essential for the study of Iron Age sites in Syunik and the revelation of regional connections<sup>37</sup>. In the same years, H. Israelyan studied two tombs in the area of historical Moz<sup>38</sup>. It is worth noting the materials typical of the 7<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC discovered in the Teghut district of Kapan and preserved in the Local Lore Museum of Kapan, some of which were studied on site by R. Torosyan<sup>39</sup>. In 1972, the first comprehensive article dedicated to the early sites of Syunik was published, which brought together all the known materials related to that region<sup>40</sup>.

In parallel, the organization and publication of museum materials was also underway. H. Martirosyan published the materials of the Ltsen tomb preserved in

the Local Lore Museum of Goris<sup>41</sup> and the samples of ancient sculpture preserved in the Local Lore Museums of Sisian, Goris and Kapan<sup>42</sup>. S. Yesayan and M. Pogrebova published the Scythian-type arrowheads preserved in the Local Lore Museum of Nakhijevan<sup>43</sup>.

The sites of historical Syunik are also mentioned in the works of L. Azaryan, S. Barkhudaryan, H. Yeghiazaryan, V. Khachaturyan, A. Shahinyan, H. Petrosyan, P. Muradyan, V. Avetyan, O. Xnkikyan<sup>44</sup>. It is especially worth mentioning the name of O. Xnkikyan, who has studied dozens of sites in the region since the 1980s, and his monograph on the archaeology of Syunik is the most comprehensive work to date. His research covers almost all regions of Vayots Dzor and Syunik provinces, including materials from such key sites as the cemeteries of Sisian, Zorats Karer, Khnatsakh, Shikahogh, Shvanidzor, and Joj Dar<sup>45</sup>. The ancient settlements of the region (Yelpin, Tegh, Harzhis) have also become the subject of research<sup>46</sup>. The author has published and interpreted in detail the Urartian sites of Yeghegnadzor<sup>47</sup>.

In the 1970s–1980s, excavations of tombs continued in the Lake Sevan basin: in particular, the cemeteries of Lchashen, Kanagegh, Geghhovit, Mrtbi Dzor, Nerkin Getashen, Kray, Sarnaghbyur, and Karchaghbyur were investigated<sup>48</sup>. In the context of archaeological research in Nakhijevan, it is worth mentioning the excavations of the settlements of Kyul-Tepe II, Gyaurkala, Oghlan Kala, Chalkhan Kala, Ghazanchi, Vayhit Gyaurkala<sup>49</sup>, and the cemetery of Ghalajik<sup>50</sup>. A number of interesting sites were studied in the eastern parts of Syunik. It should be mentioned, in particular, the excavations of the Ali Bayramli settlement in the Karvachar region (currently the Shahumyan region of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic)<sup>51</sup>. In the eastern region of Syunik (present-day Kashatagh region of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic), research was carried out at the Arvakan cemetery, the Msheni and Arvakan fortresses<sup>52</sup>. Brief references were made to other sites in the region<sup>53</sup>.

The exploration of the mines of Syunik was essential: the copper mines of Kapan and Kajaran<sup>54</sup>, and the salt mines of Nakhijevan<sup>55</sup> were subjected to geological studies.

The decipherment and interpretation of the Urartian inscriptions of Syunik was of great importance. The first research in this direction in Gegharkunik was carried out in the 1860s by Archbishop Mesrop Smbatyants. Later, the cuneiform inscriptions were studied by A. Ivanovskiy and M. Nikolskiy<sup>56</sup>. In 1927, T. Avdalbekyan discovered the Urartian inscription of the Berdi Glukh fortress in Gavar<sup>57</sup>. This and another inscription from the Lake Sevan basin were studied and published by A. Kalantar<sup>58</sup>. In the following years, the cuneiform inscriptions of the Lake Sevan basin were completed<sup>59</sup>. Of particular interest are the finds of bronze objects with Urartian inscriptions from Gavar<sup>60</sup>. While the cuneiform inscriptions of the Lake Sevan basin were known since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the discovery of the cuneiform inscription of Sisian in 1970 was a novelty<sup>61</sup>.

Stage III: 1990–2014: In recent years, both survey expeditions and regular excavations have been carried out in Syunik. The works of the Armenian-Italian ex-

pedition in the Lake Sevan basin were of great importance: all the fortresses known to date were studied, typified and dated, and the natural conditions for the emergence of settlements were observed<sup>62</sup>. Among the survey expeditions, it should also be mentioned the researches of S. Kroll<sup>63</sup>, the Scientific Research Center of Historical and Cultural Heritage, and the expedition team of Yerevan State University<sup>64</sup>. After the liberation, numerous survey expeditions were carried out in the Karvachar district of the Shahumyan region of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and in the Kashatagh region by the expedition groups of the Historical and Cultural Heritage Research Center (headed by H. Simonyan)<sup>65</sup> and the Tourism Department under the Government of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (headed by G. Sargsyan)<sup>66</sup>.

Among the regular archaeological works, it is worth mentioning the excavations of the Godedzor multilayer site<sup>67</sup>, the cemetery of the Sisian Experimental Station<sup>68</sup>, the Urartian fortress of Getap<sup>69</sup>, the Middle Bronze Age settlement of Shaghat<sup>70</sup>, the Middle Bronze Age settlement of Geghakar<sup>71</sup>, as well as the Bronze and Iron Age settlements and cemeteries of Sotk and Norabak<sup>72</sup>. Excavations of Kyul-Tepe II, Ovchular Tepe and Makhta continued in Nakhijevan<sup>73</sup>. Excavations have also been carried out in the Kashatagh region of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (the multi-layered settlement of Yeznagomer, the Arvakan cemetery and the Keren cemetery in the south of the region, on the Kapan-Kovsakan road<sup>74</sup>).

In recent years, museum material has also been studied. In particular, objects preserved in the museum of Kashatagh region as early as 1980 have been published in parts<sup>75</sup>. Separate publications include materials preserved in the museums of Stepanakert, Tigranakert, Kapan, and Yeghegnadzor<sup>76</sup>.

*The history of research of the sacred landscape.* Historical Syunik is rich in sanctuaries and it is no coincidence that a number of authors have addressed the role and significance of the relevant sites.

The cultic sites of Syunik in the context of the landscape were studied by Y. Lalayan at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There is also an extensive overview of the relation between landscape and historical sites by N. Adonts. He not only mentions the megaliths of Sisian (perhaps referring to Zorats Karer), but also provides data on the megalithic monuments located on the top of Mount Kachalak in the Shushi region. Analyzing the megalithic stelae, the author also mentions circular walls located on the mountain slopes, descending from the heights and enclosing one another<sup>77</sup>.

An important researcher of cultic sites of Syunik was S. Lisitsyan, who observed the Navel Stone of Sisian<sup>78</sup>, the Zorats Karer site (which the author interprets as a cemetery<sup>79</sup>) in a historical and archaeological context. Other authors who have referred to the latter, in particular M. Hasratyan, have emphasized the role of that site in the context of the entire highland<sup>80</sup>.

There are also other cultic sites in the Syunik region, such as the settlement and cultic complex of Ali Bayramli in the Karvachar region (currently the Shahumyan region of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic)<sup>81</sup>.

Cultic sites also include rock carvings and corresponding complexes, which were discovered in the Syunik<sup>82</sup> and Geghama<sup>83</sup> Mountains, Karvachar<sup>84</sup>, and Nakhijevan<sup>85</sup>.

The vishap/dragon stone stelae have been an important component of the sacred landscape of Syunik. Moreover, historical Syunik is one of the epicenters of the distribution of vishaps. Considering this circumstance, the history of the study of Syunik's vishaps is presented in the context of other regions of the Armenian Highland. Thus, if we do not take into account A. Yeritsyan's 1879 report on the discovery of perhaps vishaps – 2-meter-high, conical, ornamented monolithic stones resembling a hood – in the Sarighamish forest, on the peaks of the Metsrants Mountains, between Ayrarat and Tayk<sup>86</sup>; or Atrpet's information on vishaps in various regions of the Armenian Highland (from 1885 and later); or the data provided by V. Teptsov<sup>87</sup>, Y. Lalayan<sup>88</sup>, I. Rostomov<sup>89</sup>, and E. Tokaishvili<sup>90</sup> on certain vishaps in the Tsalka-Javakheti region, then the first serious study of vishaps should be attributed to N. Marr and Y. Smirnov. In 1909–1910, they documented 19 vishaps in their original locations in the Geghama Mountains<sup>91</sup>. In 1912, G. Ghapantsyan alone<sup>92</sup> and later, during 1924–1927, A. Kalantar and T. Toramanyan, as part of the expedition of the Committee for the Preservation of Antiquities<sup>93</sup>, as well as in 1936, B. Piotrovskiy, as part of the Anberd expedition<sup>94</sup>, recorded five new vishaps in the Aragats mountain massif, one in the Geghama Mountains, and later, five more near the bay of Artanish on the northeastern low-lying shore of Lake Sevan. In 1963 and 1967, L. Barseghyan, Zh. Khachatryan, and A. Kalantaryan documented three more vishaps in the Geghama Mountains and re-examined the previously recorded ones<sup>95</sup>. This was the last attempt at a systematic field study of vishaps. Notably, L. Barseghyan's descriptions and classification of the vishaps of the Geghama Mountains remain the most comprehensive to this day. A detailed description of vishaps is also found in S. Yesayan's monograph "The Sculpture of Ancient Armenia", where vishaps are considered within the context of Middle Bronze Age sculpture<sup>96</sup>.

In the course of archaeological excavations, two vishaps were discovered. Specifically, in 1963, one was found in Garni at the foundation of a 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD palace complex<sup>97</sup>, and in 1980, another was uncovered in Lchashen within the context of a Middle Bronze Age tomb<sup>98</sup>.

Since the 1960s and up until recently, several partially contextless and reused vishaps have emerged. Some of them (Aghavnadzor/Ulgyur 1–2, Attash 1, Selim 1, Pokr Gilanlar 1) have been published<sup>99</sup>, while others (Dashtadem 1, Davtashen 1, Sarnaghbyur 1, Verin Sasnashen 1, Vosketas 1, Goght 1) have not, although the latter have been included in the State register of archaeological sites. Between 2003 and 2005, the Armenian-Italian archaeological expedition, which studied the antique and medieval historical-cultural sites of the Upper Azat Valley (led by Zh. Khachatryan from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia and G. Traina from the University of Lecce), documented both previously known and newly discovered vishaps. No-

tably, H. Petrosyan played a key role in this documentation<sup>100</sup>. A total of 16 vishap photographs are presented in the book “Wine in the Traditional Culture of the Armenians”, where they are referenced as “vishaps from Aragats, the Geghama, and Vardenis Mountains” without specifying their exact locations (except for Ulgyur 1–2). Four of these vishaps were photographed in their original locations in the Geghama Mountains and on Aragats in the early 2000s<sup>101</sup>.

Here, we would like to specifically highlight the work of the interdisciplinary expedition of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR, which studied caves and rock carvings in 1967–1968. The team researching rock carvings included H. Martirosyan, R. Torosyan, and H. Israelyan. Although this expedition was not directly focused on the study of vishaps and did not discover new ones, it was the first to consider certain well-known vishaps in the broader context of their archaeological surroundings, including tombs, settlements, and rock carvings<sup>102</sup>.

Outside the Republic of Armenia, in other regions of the Armenian Highland, a total of seventeen vishaps (and vishapoid monoliths) are known in Trialeti and Javakheti<sup>103</sup>, two in Nakhijevan<sup>104</sup>, and five in Western Armenia<sup>105</sup>. This count does not include Atrpet’s reports of “more than 30” vishaps in the Chorokh River basin<sup>106</sup>.

Overall, it must be acknowledged that the attitude toward vishaps in Armenian reality – both at the scientific and state care levels – has followed a regressive trajectory. During the initial phase of vishap interpretation in the 1920s–1930s, the pioneers of Armenian archaeology approached the subject with a strictly scientific methodology, a stance that was also reflected in state policy. For example, the cataloging efforts and fundamental research conducted by the Committee for the Preservation of Antiquities in the 1920s laid the foundation for the committee’s special program on vishaps, titled “The Cult of Water in Ancient Armenia and the Problem of Vishaps”<sup>107</sup>. As part of the cataloging of Armenian antiquities, a questionnaire was even developed to systematically describe vishaps. Unfortunately, the Stalinist repressions uprooted the “golden age of Armenian archaeology,” leading to the loss of much of the collected material along with the brilliant scholars who compiled it, leaving many findings unpublished.

Recently, vishap research has gained new momentum. Under a new program, previously known stelae are being reexamined, new ones have been discovered, and systematic excavations of vishaps have begun<sup>108</sup>.

*Recent research.* The Department of Archaeology and Ethnography of Yerevan State University has been conducting regular studies in the Syunik region in recent years. During survey expeditions, several sites have been examined, including the following (textual Tab. 2).

The Yelpin cemetery stretches along both sides of the Yerevan-Yeghegnadzor road. During road construction, several tombs were destroyed, which led to the discovery of the cemetery. Based on the damaged section, the burial structures appear as burial mounds covered with a cover made of small-sized stones.

The surface shows traces of cromlechs, and scattered obsidian artifacts are found in the area. The site was also domesticated in the medieval period, as evidenced by the pottery materials from the 1–13<sup>th</sup> centuries. This site is newly discovered and is absent from the State register of archaeological sites.

The expedition team visited the Joj Dar cemetery and located the tombs excavated by V. Hovhannisyan. These tombs mainly consist of cists surrounded by small mounds of earth and large stones. The covers are either flat or in the form of a false vault. It is clear that there was an ancient settlement in this area, as evidenced by the existing traces of walls. The surface pottery materials are characteristic of the 2<sup>nd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> millennia BC, although the area was also inhabited during the medieval period. The name of this site is absent from the State register of archaeological sites.

The next newly discovered site is located in the village of Aghavnadzor. It consists of a rock-cut niche (see Tab. 5) situated at the top of a rocky section of a hillside, which is typical of the Urartian period. The niche has an irregular square shape, rounded on the northern side, and is well-crafted on all sides. Traces of fire activity are visible on the upper part. This niche is absent from the State register of archaeological sites (as indicated by B. Gasparyan).

The next research target was the historical region of Ulgyur, located above Aghavnadzor, where we visited to clarify the Bronze and Iron Age archaeological context. Here, at an altitude of approximately 2000 m above sea level, and about 3 km apart, are the historical zones of Nerkin Ulgyur (within the administrative area of Aghavnadzor village) and Verin Ulgyur (within the administrative area of Rind village), which were known medieval settlements with religious and secular structures, many of which have been preserved. The fact that this historical area could have been inhabited during the Bronze and Iron Ages is evidenced not only by the architectural features of certain structures and pottery characteristic of the mid-1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, especially collected from the Verin Ulgyur area, but also by the vishap stelae. Two of the vishaps, Ulgyur 1 and 2 (see Tab. 21, 22), were previously known, while the others, Rind 1 and 2 (see Tab. 29, 30), are being presented as such for the first time. These refer to vishaps and vishapoids turned into khachkars in the Middle Ages, some of which have been relocated from their original sites<sup>109</sup>.

It should also be noted that, with the aim of restoring the sacred landscape, we studied the vishap in the Momik Park of Yeghegnadzor and clarified the details of its relocation. Detailed research was conducted on the sanctuaries of Khnatsakh, Harzhis, Ishak Meydan, Selim Pass, and Karedzi pasture, as well as the corresponding menhirs and vishaps.

The expedition team also worked at the Geographical Museum of Yeghegnadzor, which houses a rich collection of archaeological and ethnographic artifacts (around 8000 items). The archaeological collection consists of both accidental finds and materials from regular excavations, primarily related to sites such as

Name	Type of the monument	Size, cm	Coordinates
Atash 1	Vishap	200x65x46	N 40.02196°, E 045.17730°, 2245 m a.s.l.
Atash 2*	Vishap	112x70x26	N 40.02319°, E 045.17626°, 2247 m a.s.l.
Atash 3*	Vishap	80x48x14	N 40.02311°, E 045.17428°, 2247 m a.s.l.
Atash 4*	Vishap	120x68x52	N 40.02794°, E 045.19450°, 2239 m a.s.l.
Aghavnadzor*	Rock-cut niche		N 39.79377°, E 045.23003°, 1573 m a.s.l.
Aghvesahaki*	Fortress		N 39° 41' 52.6", E 046° 15' 59.9" 1560 m a.s.l.
Arvakan	Cemetery		N 39° 45' 33.1", E 046° 17' 33.7" 1993 m a.s.l.
Arvakan *	Statuette 1, 2	60x45x20 / 66x40x30	N 39° 45' 33.1", E 046° 17' 33.7" 1993 m a.s.l.
Berdik*	Cemetery, complex		N 39° 41' 49.1", E 046° 16' 28.4" 1619 m a.s.l.
Yeznagomer*	Cemetery		N 39° 44' 39.7", E 046° 14' 44.7" 2002 m a.s.l.
Yelpin*	Cemetery		N 39.80970°, E 045.06790°, 1742 m a.s.l.
Zirik*	Cultic structure		N 39° 38' 48.8", E 046° 26' 36.9" 1613 m a.s.l.
Ishak Meydan*	Platform with cup mark depressions		N 39.51725°, E 046.30919°, 1902 m a.s.l.
Khnatsakh 1	Stele turned into a khachkar	85x70x25	N 39.60250°, E 046.38989°, 1423 m a.s.l.
Khnatsakh 2	Menhir	150x48x48	N 39.58617°, E 046.39437°, 1606 m a.s.l.
Khnatsakh 3*	Megalithic alignment		N 39.59122°, E 046.40768°, 1595 m a.s.l.
Khnatsakh 4*	Fortress		N 39.60102°, E 046.41285°, 1519 m a.s.l.
Hak 1*	Cemetery and fortress		N 39° 43' 38.6", E 046° 15' 22.7" 1871 m a.s.l.
Harzhis 0	Fortress		N 39.47163°, E 046.21827°, 1925 m a.s.l.
Harzhis 1	Menhir, within the cromlech	170x42x40, hole 9	N 39.47020°, E 046.23504°, 1919 m a.s.l.
Harzhis 10*	Menhir, within the cromlech	280x88x40, hole 7	N 39.46835°, E 046.18377°, 1872 m a.s.l.
Harzhis 11*	Menhir, within the cromlech	110x75x24	N 39.46835°, E 046.18377°, 1872 m a.s.l.
Harzhis 12*	Menhir	330x60x25, hole 12	N 39.46889°, E 046.21431°, 1862 m a.s.l.
Harzhis 13*	Menhir	263x47x43	N 39.43362°, E 046.22368°, 1691 m a.s.l.
Harzhis 14*	Menhir	77x45x37	N 39.43362°, E 046.22368°, 1691 m a.s.l.
Harzhis 15*	Menhir	238x38x42	N 39.43362°, E 046.22368°, 1691 m a.s.l.
Harzhis 16*	Menhir, in the old village (Nerkin Yayji)	263x47x43	N 39.42640°, E 046.22491°, 1437 m a.s.l.
Harzhis 2	Menhir	180x55x36, hole 10	N 39.46888°, E 046.21865°, 1866 m a.s.l.
Harzhis 3	Menhir	175x40x36, hole 10	N 39.46902°, E 046.21611°, 1855 m a.s.l.
Harzhis 4	Menhir, within the cromlech	185x65x25, hole 10	N 39.470140°, E 046.20644°, 1861 m a.s.l.
Harzhis 5	Menhir, within the cromlech	220x64x28, hole 5	N 39.47045°, E 046.20462°, 1864 m a.s.l.

Harzhis 6*	Menhir, within the cromlech	236x90x35	N 39.47054°, E 046.18244°, 1902 m a.s.l.
Harzhis 7*	Menhir	250x50x20, hole 3	N 39.47072°, E 046.18169°, 1901 m a.s.l.
Harzhis 8*	Menhir, within the ruined cromlech	220x50x30	N 39.46892°, E 046.18116°, 1894 m a.s.l.
Harzhis 9*	Menhir /vishap	88x67x33	N 39.46831°, E 046.17949°, 1892 m a.s.l.
Herik*	Cemetery		N 39° 41' 07.6", E 046° 16' 41.9" 1805 m a.s.l.
Kalajik 2	Statuette	150x50x35	N 39° 39' 49.2", E 046° 21' 45.7" 1470 m a.s.l.
Msheni*	Cemetery		N 39° 41' 43.5", E 046° 22' 03.6" 1733 m a.s.l.
Shrvakan*	Cemetery		N 39° 46' 29.3", E 046° 14' 09.7" 1944 m a.s.l.
Ulguyur 1	Vishap turned into a khachkar	353x93x40	N 39.81246°, E 045.20632°, 1950 m a.s.l.
Ulguyur 2	Vishap	250x80x49	N 39.81246°, E 045.20632°, 1950 m a.s.l.
Ulguyur Verin	Settlement		N 39.81460°, E 045.19991°, 1920 m a.s.l.
Portakar	Rock-cut platform		N 39.53726°, E 046.13100°, 1923 m a.s.l.
Joi Dar	Cemetery and settlement		N 39.759110°, E 045.34100°, 1286 m a.s.l.
Rind 1*	Vishap	187x101x39	N 39.81406°, E 045.19887°, 1941 m a.s.l.
Rind 2*	Vishap	198x70x29	N 39.81406°, E 045.19887°, 1941 m a.s.l.
Selim 1	Vishap	270x110x35	N 39.95614°, E 045.23444°, 2340 m a.s.l.
Selim 2*	Menhir	217x50x40, hole 10	N 39.95847°, E 045.23570°, 2349 m a.s.l.
Sotk 10	Cemetery		N 40°12,636°, E 045°56,190°, 2151 m a.s.l.
Sotk 15*	Complex		N 40.218290, E 045.903900, 2135 m a.s.l.
Sonasar 1*	Fortress		N 39° 41' 47.1", E 046° 23' 01.7" 1856 m a.s.l.
Spitakajur	Cemetery and fortress		N 39° 46' 58.1", E 046° 15' 31.7" 1865 m a.s.l.

Table 2. List of the main sites studied during 2013–2014

\* Newly discovered sites are marked with this symbol; a.s.l. – above sea level

Moz, Yelpin, Getap, Joj Dar, St. Spitakavor, Shatin, and other sites. The museum's materials chronologically cover the entire Bronze and Iron Age period.

The artifacts from the Mokhrot settlement are dated to the Early Bronze Age<sup>110</sup> and are represented by fragments of black-polished pots (inventory № 1294/3747, 3738, 3744, 3746)<sup>111</sup>.

The sites of the Middle Bronze Age in the region are represented by the excavation materials from the Moz tombs and the findings from Yelpin. The materials from Moz tombs 1 and 2 are characteristic of the 22<sup>nd</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries BC<sup>112</sup>. The materials found in Shatin also belong to the same period, the Middle Bronze Age<sup>113</sup>. The materials discovered from the village area and its surroundings are represented by coarse handmade pots, bowls, and stone tools (LLMY 581/938, 1113/1670, 1668, 1674). The materials from the next phase of the Middle Bronze Age, the 19<sup>th</sup> century BC, are represented by the painted bowls found in Yelpin (LLMY inventory № 1251/3372, 3373, 23/28). Of particular interest is the bowl decorated with bird motifs (LLMY 23/28).

The pottery characteristic of the early 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC is known from Yelpin, Shatin, Joj Dar, and Moz. Notably, the museum preserves spouted vessels, which are presented in short cylindrical form (LLMY 1324/5551 from Moz and 1321/5214 from Joj Dar, Tomb № 23) and with a beak-shaped, semi-tubular spout (LLMY 1324/5567 from Moz<sup>114</sup>). In the Iron Age collection of Yeghegnadzor, animal-shaped vessels hold a special place. These include a ladle with a ram-shaped handle (LLMY 1287/3679 from Moz<sup>115</sup>). Among the archaeological materials not only from Syunik but also from all of Armenia, the animal-shaped vessel discovered in Areni (Tab. 14) takes a special place. The depiction of a bear is deeply nature-worshipping in character, yet ornaments are absent. The spout of the vessel is located at the head of the animal. Additionally, there are perforated holes near the nose and eyes. The studied region from the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC was part of the Kingdom of Van. This is evidenced not only by the excavations of the Getap Fortress<sup>116</sup> but also by the collection from the Urartian tomb in Yeghegnadzor<sup>117</sup> and the assemblage from the tombs of Joj Dar (excavations by V. Hovhannisyan in the 1980s). Urartian materials have also been found in Yelpin (LLMY inventory № 1386/6580,6581).

Thus, historical Syunik is one of the key regions of the Armenian Highland, which is extremely rich in archaeological sites, including those of a cultic nature. These sites have been studied since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The available information allows for the reconstruction of the main phases of the region's archaeological history. Accordingly, during the Bronze and Iron Ages, Syunik was closely integrated into the corresponding developments of the Armenian Highland (cf. textual Tab. 1). But what was the main role of Syunik?

Recent studies show that different subregions of the Armenian Highland, which share similar geographical and climatic conditions, were closely interconnected during the Bronze and Iron Ages. They shared the same value system and

can be defined as part of a unified cultural sphere. The various local cultural groups in these areas, with their distinctive characteristics (pottery, forms of dwellings, lifestyle, worldview, etc.), represent the manifestations of this value system according to the data of material culture.

Within the Highland, three main historical and cultural subregions can be distinguished: 1. The western subregion, which includes the Upper Euphrates basin (historical regions of Tsopk and Armenia Minor), characterized by active connections with central Asia Minor and northern Syria; 2. The southern subregion, which includes the areas south of Van (the regions of Aghdznik and Korduk), known for its connections towards northern Syria and Mesopotamia; and 3. The central-northeastern subregion (Ayrarat, Upper Armenia, Vaspurakan, Mokq, Turuberan, Tayk, Utik, Gugark, Artsakh, Paytakaran, and Parskahayk), which was characterized by connections towards the Caucasus. The realities of Syunik can be considered within the boundaries of the last subregion. Moreover, according to the patterns of cultural development, the area under study is particularly connected to the territories of Utik and Paytakaran (primary), as well as Vaspurakan and Parskahayk (secondary)<sup>118</sup>. Syunik has served as the gateway of Armenia to the Caucasian cultural world, and its significance in the development of the Highland is hard to underestimate.

## 2.

### The concept of “sacred landscape” and its structure

In recent decades, significant attention has been given to the concepts of “sacred space/landscape” and similar notions in professional literature<sup>119</sup>. Interdisciplinary approaches to this issue are developing, and this is not by chance, as cultic geography falls within the realm of various scientific fields, including philosophy, religious studies, geography, cultural studies, and archaeology, and is related to issues concerning human behavioral patterns and the formation of identity<sup>120</sup>.

The elements of sacred space have existed within prehistoric society and in the worldview of ancient Near Eastern peoples<sup>121</sup>, but the first definitions in this field were made by ancient authors, who distinguished sacred public and private spaces, addressing their significance and the issues of their location<sup>122</sup>. The views formed in antiquity continued partially into the medieval period, but with the difference that the sacred space and its components gained more transcendental qualities<sup>123</sup>. Ideas about sacred spaces are also reflected in Armenian historical and ethnographic materials<sup>124</sup>.

**Levels of the sacred landscape.** The terminology related to sacred topography has been widely discussed in scholarly literature; however, the corresponding definitions vary from author to author<sup>125</sup>. In the context of existing discussions, we propose distinguishing three levels of sacred spaces:

1. Sacred Area = Landscape: In general, the concept of a sacred area/landscape encompasses all elements related to the religious and cultic sphere within a specific historical-geographical environment, including the natural surroundings<sup>126</sup>. In this regard, the term “Hierotopy” is currently in circulation (from the Greek *hieros* – sacred and *topos* – place), which reflects both the process of creating sacred spaces and their structural characteristics<sup>127</sup>. In this sense, the concept of a sacred landscape is often used in both broad and narrow meanings<sup>128</sup>. In a broad sense, any space associated with human activity can hold hierotopic significance<sup>129</sup>. In a narrow sense, a sacred site includes smaller areas characterized by similar geographical conditions (e.g., mountains, valleys, mountain peaks)<sup>130</sup>.
2. Sacred Place: This concept is interpreted as a subunit of the sacred landscape, characterized by a concentration of cultic monuments/sites<sup>131</sup>. The sacred place is the epicenter of communication between humans and higher powers<sup>132</sup>.
3. Sacred Object: It is an attribute of a sacred place and can be either “large-scale” (e.g., a temple, a tomb)<sup>133</sup> or “small-scale”. The latter can exist independently (e.g., a menhir, a khachkar)<sup>134</sup> or within the context of other sacred or profane objects (e.g., a khachkar embedded in a church wall or a cultic hearth inside a residential dwelling)<sup>135</sup>. To define sacred objects, Mircea Eliade uses the term “hierophany,” which means “simply something sacred, from the reflection of the sacred in a stone or tree”<sup>136</sup>. Such objects are not worshipped in themselves but because they manifest some sacred phenomenon<sup>137</sup>. Natural objects can also be sacred, forming the earliest layer of a sacred place – the foundation around which cultic objects are developed<sup>138</sup>.

As conditional examples of the aforementioned three levels, we can bring:

1. Armenia (sacred landscape in a broad sense) and the mountains of Syunik (sacred landscape in a narrow sense), 2. Zorats Karer (sacred place), 3. menhirs (sacred object).

***Factors forming the sacred landscape.*** What are the criteria through which a certain place is considered sanctified? Thus:

1. The sanctified area must occupy a significant place in the landscape. Such places can include, for example, natural heights, cliffs, caves.
2. The sanctified site must be somewhat separated from the common area<sup>139</sup>.
3. The sanctified site must be connected to the road network, that is, it should be accessible to visitors or serve as a guardian (in this context, sanctuaries in mountain passes or near them should also be considered<sup>140</sup>).
4. The presence of a large settlement is a powerful cult-forming factor. In this regard, the sanctuary may function as a city-forming element<sup>141</sup> and also serve as the guardian of the settlement.

5. The connection of a cultic object with hunting or animal husbandry can hold certain significance<sup>142</sup>.
6. The cultic object may also be related to agriculture, manifesting itself in a river (or its source), a lake regulating precipitation, a mountain, or a wheat granary<sup>143</sup>.
7. Factors forming worship also include the presence of natural resources and the area's role as a craft center<sup>144</sup>.

**Structure of the sacred place.** When analyzing the internal structure of a sacred place, it is not hard to notice that it follows the same logic as a common area: boundary, road, center. At the same time, it should be noted that even in a common area, these components are often sanctified<sup>145</sup>.

The most important factor is the demarcation of the sanctuary from other areas, which symbolizes the idea of the separation between the sanctified and the profane, the “inside and outside”. Furthermore, as with the case of a settlement, in the case of a sacred site, territorial separation can also symbolize the unity of the community (in this case, the spiritual community)<sup>146</sup>. This goal could be achieved using both the natural features of the land (e.g., separate plateaus or hills, which could be separated from the settlement = the common area by ravines or a river) as well as artificial means (such as building a fence<sup>147</sup> or erecting a stela). On the other hand, the cultic structure, site, or unit itself could serve as the boundary, thus separating the “own” from the “foreign”<sup>148</sup>.

One of the factors of sanctifying a space is the road. By crossing the boundary, the mortal must be purified in order to enter the central, most sanctified area. For this reason, altars and cultic platforms were often placed along the roads<sup>149</sup>. The purifying function of the road is especially evident in the case of burial complexes, where they serve as symbolic paths leading to the afterlife<sup>150</sup>.

The axis of the sanctuary is the center, which is abstracted as the “symbolic” axis of the world<sup>151</sup>. The sanctuary, altar, or temple was located in the central part of the sanctuary and was often enclosed, as the entry of an ordinary person into the sanctified area was considered prohibited<sup>152</sup>. In the case of a settlement, the central square performed the same function<sup>153</sup>, where the sanctuary was typically placed. It is worth noting that the central square was also somewhat separated from the general mass of the settlement<sup>154</sup>.

Thus, the concept of the sacred landscape is crucial for understanding the internal structure of any society. Moreover, the more archaic the society is in nature, the greater the role of the sacred landscape. There are societies whose formation has been directly linked to its transformations, where political structures emerged and grew around sacred centers. Developments took place in this way in both the Armenian Highland and the culturally related regions of the Caucasus and Asia Minor<sup>155</sup>. This is why greater attention should be paid to the study of sacred landscapes in our reality.

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- <sup>99</sup> A. Shahinyan, The Vishap-Stelae of Vayos Dzor, p. 286–289; O. S. Xnkikyan, op. cit., p. 114; H. L. Petrosyan, op. cit., p. 76–78.
- <sup>100</sup> H. Petrosyan, personal communication.
- <sup>101</sup> S. Harutyunyan, A. Kalantaryan, H. Petrosyan, G. Sargsyan, H. Melkonyan, S. Hobosyan, P. Avetisyan, B. Gasparyan, Wine in Armenian Traditional Culture, Yerevan, 2005, p. 20, 22, 31, 33–35, Fig. 1–2, Tab. 5–7.
- <sup>102</sup> H. A. Martirosyan, New Sites of Prehistoric Culture in Armenia, HPJ 3, 1969, p. 191–208.
- <sup>103</sup> L. M. Melikset-Bekov, Vishaps and Vishapoids of Georgia, BCIHMC 15, 1947, 27–37; A. S. Sanosyan, The Vishap Stelae of Javakheti, BYU 2, 1989, p. 97–102.
- <sup>104</sup> One is from the Bjnak/Kare Tun site, the other is from Khoshkashen (northern foothills of Vishapasar/Azhdahak/Ilandagh) (A. Ayvazyan, personal communication, 01.06.2013). Only the fish-shaped stela from Bjnak/Kare Tun, found in the Batabat pasture, has been published: moreover, although A. Ayvazyan mentions “five fish-shaped stelae” (A. Ayvazyan, Prehistoric Site in the North of the Nakhijevan ASSR, BYU 3, 1974, p. 238–241; A. Ayvazyan, The Monumental Stelae and Bas-Reliefs of Nakhijevan, Yerevan, 1987, p. 8), only one of them is a vishap stone (A. Ayvazyan, personal communication, 01.06.2013). After 1983 it was removed (A. Ayvazyan, Armenian Monuments of the Nakhijevan ASSR (Corpus), Yerevan, 1986, 159, Fig. 49). Towards this vishap cf. also O. Belli, V. Sevin, Archaeological Survey in Nakhijevan 1998, Istanbul, 1999, p. 64 (the latter mention the vishap on the kurgan). It is probably one of the mentioned vishaps (fish-shaped stela) placed in the courtyard of the Nakhijevan State Museum. (O. Belli, Kars – Çıldır Gölü yakınında bulunan anıtsal taş balık heykeli, Kars 2. Kent Kurultayı – Kafkasya’da Ortak Geleceğimiz, Kars Belediyesi Yayınları 21, İstanbul, 2007, s. 111–116, 113–115). For more information on the vishap in Nakhijevan cf. also E. V. Khanzadyan, Vishaps of the Armenian Highland, The Current State of Armenology and Its Development Prospects, International Armenological Conference, September 15–20, 2003, Abstracts of Reports, Yerevan, 2003, p. 35.
- <sup>105</sup> A. Bobokhyan, A. Gilibert, P. Hnila, Archaeology of Vishap Stones, Vishap Stelae, Yerevan, 2014.
- <sup>106</sup> Atrpet, The Chorokh Basin, Vienna, 1929, p. 55.
- <sup>107</sup> A. Kalantar, Committee for the Preservation of Antiquities of Armenia, Yerevan, 1931, p. 9, 13.
- <sup>108</sup> A. Bobokhyan, A. Gilibert, P. Hnila, Archaeology of Vishap Stones, Vishap Stelae; A. Gilibert, A. Bobokhyan, P. Hnila, Dragon Stones in Context: The Discovery of High-Altitude Burial Grounds with Sculpted Stelae in the Armenian Mountains, MDOG 144, 2012, p. 93–132.
- <sup>109</sup> Both the vishap-khachkars of Rind and Aghavnavzor were most likely moved to their current location from nearby areas relatively recently, as they were not mentioned by Y. Lalayan, who studied the Ulgyur area and described the chapel in 1904 (Y. Lalayan, Sharur Daralageaz, p. 184).
- <sup>110</sup> O. Xnkikyan, op. cit., p. 20, Tab. III.
- <sup>111</sup> Here and below, the inventory numbers of the materials preserved in the LLMY are indicated in the text.
- <sup>112</sup> O. Xnkikyan, op. cit., p. 23–24, Tab. III, IV; P. Avetisyan, op. cit., p. 19.
- <sup>113</sup> O. Xnkikyan, op. cit., p. 23–25.

- <sup>114</sup> O. Xnkikyan, *op. cit.*, Tab. LXII/30, LIX/18.
- <sup>115</sup> Published in: O. Xnkikyan *op. cit.*, Tab. LXIII/1.
- <sup>116</sup> H. Melkonyan, I. Karapetyan, N. Yengibaryan, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
- <sup>117</sup> O. Xnkikyan, *op. cit.*, Tab. XCIV-XCVI.
- <sup>118</sup> For more details, see A. Bobokhyan, *Kommunikation und Austausch im Hochland zwischen Kaukasus und Taurus, ca. 2500–1500 v. Chr.*, BAR 1858, Oxford.
- <sup>119</sup> The original meaning of the word *sanctus* signifies “enclosed” (V. N. Volovik, *Categories of Sacred Landscape*, *Geographical Bulletin* 4, 2013, p. 27).
- <sup>120</sup> V. V. Yemelyanov, *Ritual in Ancient Mesopotamia*, St. Petersburg, 2003, p. 27; P. A. Kutsenkov, *Dispersion and Convergence*, in: *The Earthly and Heavenly Temple*, Moscow, 2004, p. 43, 52–53.
- <sup>121</sup> L. Levy-Bruhl, *Primitive Thinking*, Moscow, 1930; H. Frankfort, H.A. Frankfort, J. Wilson, T. Jacobsen, *Before Philosophy*, Moscow, 1984.
- <sup>122</sup> Thus, for example, Hippodamus of Miletus believed that the territory of the state should be divided into three parts: sacred, public, and private (cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 2, V, 2, 35). Aristotle considered the care of worship to be one of the most important responsibilities of the state (*Politics* 7, VII, 4, 5). Moreover, according to him, religious structures in the city should be located near the residences of state officials, in a proper and fortified place, unless the law requires the ritual structure to be placed in isolation. Below this area should be the public square (*Politics* 7, XI, 1, 25–30). Vitruvius viewed temple construction as one of the most important aspects of architecture and wrote about the placement of sacred objects, noting that the temples of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva should be located at the highest point, Mercury’s temple in the forum, and those of Mars and Venus outside the city (Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, Moscow, 1972, 1, III, 1; 1, VII, 3).
- <sup>123</sup> A. Y. Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture*, Moscow, 1972.
- <sup>124</sup> Cf. S. Harutyunyan, A. Kalantaryan (ed.), *Armenian Saints and Sanctuaries*, Yerevan, 2001; V. Barkhudaryan (ed.), *Biblical Armenia*, Yerevan, 2005; R. Büttner, J. Peltz (ed.), *Mythical Landscapes Then and Now*, Yerevan, 2006; St. Melik-Bakhshyan, *Sacred Places of Armenia*, Yerevan, 2009.
- <sup>125</sup> Cf. the relevant discussions in: *Sacred Spaces in Mentality and Perception in Eastern and Western Christianity and in Non-Christian Traditions: Are the Differences Significant?* Materials from the roundtable held during the summer school in Raivola on June 7, 2008. [http://www.hist.msu.ru/Labs/UkrBel/hierotopy\\_round.ht](http://www.hist.msu.ru/Labs/UkrBel/hierotopy_round.ht).
- <sup>126</sup> V. N. Volovik, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
- <sup>127</sup> A. M. Lidov, *Hierotopy – the Creation of Sacred Spaces as a Form of Creativity and a Subject of Historical Research*, *Hierotopy: Creation of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium and Ancient Russia*, Moscow, 2006, p. 10; A. M. Lidov, *Hierotopy – the Creation of Sacred Spaces as a Form of Creativity and a Subject of Research*, Introductory article of the collection, *Hierotopy: Comparative Studies of Sacred Spaces*, Moscow, 2008, p. 5–11.  
For the cultic significance of the hearth, see A. Gnuni, *The Hearths and Their Complexes of the Shengavit Culture*, *HPJ* 1, 2004, p. 218–220; D. Vardumyan, *The Traditional Armenian Dwelling (Gikhhatun) as a Sanctuary, Armenian Saints and Sanctuaries*, Yerevan, 2002, p. 359.
- <sup>128</sup> V. N. Volovik, *op. cit.*, p. 30–31; S. P. Romanchuk, *Sacred Landscapes, Landscape as an Integrative Concept of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, *Collection of Scientific Papers*, Kiev, 1998, p. 144–146.
- <sup>129</sup> M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, Moscow, 1994, p. 12; A. M. Lidov, *Hierotopy – The Creation of Sacred Spaces as a Form of Creativity and an Object of Historical Research*, p. 18. In this logic, for the Jews, the Promised Land was a sacred space, while for the Greeks, it was Hellas (G. A. Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, Jerusalem, 1974, p. 80–88). In the same context, cf. Thales of Miletus’ thought that “all things are full of gods” (F. Schimpf, *Man-Nature-Religion: Thoughts Concerning Development, Form and Perception of*

- Sacred. Sacred Landscapes: Creation, Manipulation and Transformation, 2014 Abstracts of Conference, [http://viasacra.org.uk/abstrakts./](http://viasacra.org.uk/abstrakts/)).
- <sup>130</sup> K. Bannikov, Some Ideas on the Principles of Sacral Shape Areas on the Mohe: Towards the Reconstruction of Cosmography in Ethnological Methodology, *Senry Ethnological Studies* 72, 2009, p. 154.
- <sup>131</sup> V. N. Volovik, op. cit., p. 31–32. A sacred place can be formed by both natural and man-made elements of the landscape. In Roman reality, the word *templum* could refer not only to a temple but also to a city, a military camp, or even a crossroads (A. Nagovitsyn, *Mythology and Religion of the Etruscans*, Moscow, 2000, p. 67–68). Through this, both the idea of the city and its separate elements were fetishized (cf. also J. Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*, Princeton, 1988, p. 50–51; For the specific fetishization characteristic of socio-cultural phenomena, cf. P. Sorokin, *General Sociology*, in: P. Sorokin, *Man, Civilization, Society*, Moscow, 1992, p. 214–218). Naturally, the cemetery was also considered a sacred place (V. S. Olkhovskiy, *Burial and Funerary Rites in the System of Interrelated Concepts*, SA 1, 1986, p. 71, Tab. 1).
- <sup>132</sup> For the ritual significance of the hearth, cf. A. Gnuni, *The Hearths and Their Complexes of the Shengavit Culture*, HPJ 1, 2004, p. 218–220; D. Vardumyan, *The Traditional Armenian Dwelling (Gikhatur) as a Sanctuary*, *Armenian Saints and Sanctuaries*, Yerevan, 2002, p. 359.
- <sup>133</sup> A distinctive feature of the tomb structure is that it essentially contains all the elements associated with sacred space: the road-dromos, the center-chamber (E. A. Savostina, *Sacred Space and Burial Rite of the Bosporan Tombs*, <http://www.kladina.narod.ru/savostina2/savostina2.htm>; V. S. Olkhovskiy, *Burial and Funerary Rites in the System of Interrelated Concepts*, SA 1, 1986, p. 65–76; N. B. Leonova, Yu. A. Smirnov, *Burial as an Object of Formal Analysis*, BClA 148, 1976, p. 23).
- <sup>134</sup> A. Turalija, A. Vrsaliko, G. Juric', I. Kelava, M. Drenjancevic', A. Stanisavljevic', V. Lukic', *Small Sacral Objects as a Landscape Determination in Croatia*, *Bulletin of the University of Agriculture Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Culj-Napoka* 68/1, p. 437.
- <sup>135</sup> A. Gnuni, *The Hearths and Their Complexes of the Shengavit Culture*, HPJ 1, 2004, p. 218–220.
- <sup>136</sup> M. Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*, Moscow-Kiev, 1996, p. 141.
- <sup>137</sup> M. Eliade, op. cit., p. 141. P. Sorokin is more specific, noting that when examining objects associated with cult or ritual in the context of social phenomena, the stone or log used to build a temple serves as a reflection of religious experiences (P. Sorokin, op. cit., p. 45).
- <sup>138</sup> See, e.g., J. Baleriaux, *Were Rivers Dive? Meaning to Subterranean Rivers in Ancient Greek Thought*, *Sacred Landscapes*.
- <sup>139</sup> D. Soszynski, *The Role of Natural Factors in Shaping the Sacral Landscape of the Ropa and Wislok Rivers Interfluvium (Se Poland)*, *OLPAN* 8, 2011, p. 170; Alberty L., *Over the Rainbow: Places with and without Memory in the Funerary Landscape of Knossos during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC*, Abstracts of Conference, <http://viasacra.org.uk/abstrakts./>).
- <sup>140</sup> S. Tokarev, *Early Forms of Religion*, Moscow, 1990, p. 603 (Although S. Tokarev links several factors only to the cult of mountains, the same factors can also be attributed to other relief and geographical zones). For Armenian examples, cf. S. D. Lisitsyan, *Sanctuaries at the Passes*, SE 4–5, 1936, p. 200–212.
- <sup>141</sup> A. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, Moscow, 1990, p. 89.
- <sup>142</sup> S. Tokarev, op. cit., p. 604.
- <sup>143</sup> S. Tokarev, op. cit., p. 605; A. G. Sagona, *The Caucasus Region in the Early Bronze Age*, BAR 2014, Oxford, 1982, vol. 1, p. 82.
- <sup>144</sup> S. Tokarev, op. cit., p. 604; K. Kh. Kushnareva, *Ancient Monuments of Dvin*, Yerevan, 1977, p. 98–105.
- <sup>145</sup> H. Hakobyan, A. Gnuni, *Observations on the Unity of the Functional and Symbolic Roles of the Road and the Street*, *Etchmiadzin* 9, 2007, p. 89–97.

- <sup>146</sup> Cf. in the case of settlements: O. Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Moscow, 1999, p. 118; J. Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, Moscow, 2002, p. 101.
- <sup>147</sup> The idea of the gate/entrance being frequently sanctified is connected with the concept of the wall (cf. S. Hmayakyan, *The State Religion of the Kingdom of Van*, Yerevan, 1990, p. 67–68; J. McQueen, *The Hittites and Their Contemporaries in Asia Minor*, Moscow, 1983, p. 107). The gate is perceived as an entrance to a sanctified place (Nikityuk E. V. (ed.), *Pausanias, Description of Greece*, Moscow, 2002, 1, II (1, 4).
- <sup>148</sup> V. O. Klyuchevskiy, *Course of Russian History, Works*, vol. 1, Moscow, 1987, p. 134; M. Gabrielian, A. Galoyan, A. Gnuni, *The Wall and the Square: Unity of Functionality and Symbolism*, Collection of Scientific Articles, Yerevan, 2006, p. 50.
- <sup>149</sup> H. Hakobyan, A. Gnuni, *op. cit.*, p. 89–92; cf. Nikityuk E. V. (ed.), *Pausanias, Description of Greece*, 1, II, (2), XXXVI (3).
- <sup>150</sup> G. Narimanishvili, *New Discoveries in Trialeti and Some Questions on the Function, Origin, and Distribution of Ritual Roads*, AEFC, Holy Etchmiadzin, 2003, p. 65–67; cf. S. Kramer, *Mythology of Sumer and Akkad*, in: *Mythology of the Ancient World*, Moscow, 1977, p. 134–135.
- <sup>151</sup> I. O. Trifonova, *The City as a Sacred Space*, <http://medievalrus.narod.ru/trifonova.htm>.
- <sup>152</sup> I. L. Pavlov, *Altar-Stupa-Temple*, Moscow, 2001, p. 19–21.
- <sup>153</sup> J. Ortega y Gasset, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
- <sup>154</sup> According to F. de Polignac's assumption, the acropolis should not necessarily be considered in the context of a settlement (F. de Polignac, *Cult, Territory and Origins of the Greek City-State*, Chicago, 1996, p. 20–22).
- <sup>155</sup> For more details, see: A. G. Perikhanyan, *Temple Communities in Asia Minor and Armenia*, Moscow, 1959.

## Chapter II

# Classification of sacred places

According to available data, the religious sites of the Syunik region from the 3<sup>rd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> millennia BC can be conventionally divided into two main groups based on their structural characteristics: platforms and monumental stelae, each with corresponding subgroups (textual Tab. 3).

### 1.

#### Platforms

Functionally, platforms serving as altars are divided into two subgroups based on their location and morphological characteristics: platform-structures and platforms placed on rock outcrops or boulders<sup>1</sup>.

**Platform-structures.** Cultic platforms can be found in the context of both settlements and cemeteries. In settlements, they appear within the environment of “public structures”, while in cemeteries, they may be placed directly on the tomb, adjacent to it, or enclosed within the burial filling. The simplest platforms can be the covering slabs of tombs, whereas platform-structures are more complex in design. Additionally, there are platforms and structures that are not directly associated with a specific cultic object (e.g., a tomb or a settlement).

It is possible to distinguish corresponding cultic *settlement structures*. In this context, the “public building” of Ali Bayramli (Shahumyan region of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, Karvachar district) is noteworthy<sup>2</sup>. Its architectural composition is similar to the monumental structure of Bjni (conditionally referred to in publications as Tomb № 2), which is located in an area characterized by rock-cut complexes<sup>3</sup>. Similar designs appear in the rock carvings of Gobustan<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, M. Faradjeva interprets these images as a labyrinth<sup>5</sup>. Similar images are also known in the rock carvings of the Geghama Mountains, which H. Martirosyan interprets as solar symbols, recognizing some signs as early Bronze Age ornaments, although he considers the entire composition within the context of late Bronze Age decorative art<sup>6</sup>. Among non-Armenian parallels, it is worth mentioning the megalithic structure of Rukhim el-Khirka, located on the Holan Heights. Although it significantly surpasses the mentioned structures in size and the number of concentric circles, it is built according to the same principles<sup>7</sup>. A similar composition is also found in the concentric-circle structure of Khachaghbyur<sup>8</sup>.

Class	Type	Subtype	Location	Sites		
I. Platforms	1. Platform-structures	a. Platform-complexes within the settled area	Settlement	Ali Bayramali (Karvachar), Sonasar (?) (Kashatagh)		
			Cemetery			
			Isolated			
		b. On/adjacent to the tomb, under the filling; stone, clay-plastered, and earthen structures, slabs	Unknown			
			Settlement			
			Cemetery	Stone structure – Kapan-Shahumyan (section IV – tomb № 5, section V – tomb № 3) (Zangezur), Sarmaghbyur (?), Berdik (complex), Vardut, Zirik (Kashatagh) Clay-plastered, earthen structure - Lchashen (tomb № 120) (Gegharkunik), Keren (tombs № 1, 106) (Kashatagh) Slab – Kapan-Shahumyan (section V – tomb № 1) (Zangezur), Nerkin Getashen (Gegharkunik), Keren (tomb № 1, 105) (Kashatagh)		
		2. Platforms placed on rocky outcrops, rock fragments, and stone boulders.			Isolated	
					Unknown	
					Settlement	
					Cemetery	
					Isolated	Khachaghbyur (?) (Gegharkunik), Sotk 15
					Unknown	
					Settlement	
Cemetery						
Isolated						
Unknown	Noravan-Portakar (Zangezur)					
II. Stelae	1. Sculptures and carved stones		Settlement	Ishak Meydan (Zangezur), Sotk 2		
			Cemetery	Tsitsemavank (Kashatagh)		
			Isolated	Khatsakh/Vanki Dzor (Zangezur)		
			Unknown	Tanahat, Shrvakan, Ughedzor, "Hazaraprakich" (Vayots Dzor), Selim (Gegharkunik)		
			Settlement			
			Cemetery			
			Isolated	Geghama, Yardenis, Syunik Mountains (Zangezur)		
			Unknown			
			Settlement			
			Cemetery	Bazarikhana (Zangezur), Kalajik 2 (Kashatagh)		
			Isolated	rock carvings (Geghama Mountains – Gegharkunik, Ukhtasar – Zangezur, Allich – Karvachar)		
			Unknown	Harzhis (LLMG), Harzhis (accidental find (HEME photo), Shaghat, Kornidzor (Zangezur), Tsovaghyugh (Gegharkunik)		

2. Vishaps	b. Zoomorphic	Settlement Cemetery	Arvakan(?) (Kashatagh)
		Isolated	Rock carvings (Geghama Mountains – Gegharkunik, Ukhtasar – Zangezur, Allich – Karvachar)
		Unknown	Khnutsakh/Khachkari Khut (Zangezur)
		Settlement Cemetery	Lchashen (HMA), Patashar, Tsovinar (Y. Lalayan's excavations) (Gegharkunik)
		Isolated	Karчевan (rock-carved sculptures according to Y. Lalayan) (Zangezur)
	c. Phallus-shaped	Unknown	Shinuhayr (Khachkar) (?) (Zangezur)
		Settlement Cemetery	Garni 1 (Kotayk)
		Isolated	Lchashen 1 (Gegharkunik) Azhdaha Yurt 3, 6, Arshaluys 1, Gyoli Yurt 2, 3, Goght 1, Diktash 1, Imirzek 1, 3, Tokhmakhan Gyol 2, 3 (Geghama Mountains – Gegharkunik), Attash 1, Selim 1 (Vardenis Mountains – Gegharkunik)
		Unknown	Lchashen 2 (Gegharkunik), Ulgyur 1, 2 (Vayots Dzor)
		Settlement Cemetery	
	b. Fish-shaped	Isolated	Azhdaha Yurt 1, 4, Arshaluys 4, Gyoli Yurt 1, Diktash 2, 3, Tokhmakhan Gyol 5, Imirzek 2, 4, 5 (Geghama Mountains – Gegharkunik)
		Unknown	
		Settlement Cemetery	
		Isolated	
		Unknown	
3. Menhirs	c. Hybrid	Settlement Cemetery	
		Isolated	Azhdaha Yurt 2, 5, Tokhmakhan Gyol 3 (Geghama Mountains – Gegharkunik)
		Unknown	
		Settlement Cemetery	Molar Kuze (Kashatagh)
		Isolated	Zorats Karer, Harzhis № 6–8, 10, Tandzaver (Zangezur), Vorotan, Gyaur Damer, Berdik, Kalajik (Kashatagh)
	a. With minimal intervention	Isolated	Allich (Karvachar)
		Unknown	Khnutsakh/Bhaver (Zangezur)
		Settlement Cemetery	
		Isolated	Harzhis № 1–5, 9, 11, 12, 14 (Zangezur)
		Unknown	Selim № 2, Attash № 2, 3 (Gegharkunik)
	b. With a moderate level of intervention	Unknown	Zirik (Kashatagh)
		Settlement Cemetery	
		Isolated	Gyaur Damer (Kashatagh)
		Unknown	Harzhis № 15 (Zangezur), Areni (Vayots Dzor)
		Unknown	
c. With maximum intervention	Settlement Cemetery		
	Isolated		
	Unknown		
	Settlement Cemetery		
	Unknown		

Table 3. Classification of sacred objects of Bronze and Iron Age Syunik by form

It is noteworthy that such a composition also appears in the area proper. As early as N. Adonts, based on A. Kalantar's research and H. Berberyan's report on them, mentioned the existence of a complex encircled by concentric rings of walls. It is noted that the number of such complexes reaches twelve, with the best-preserved one located between the villages of Aghavnatun (Etchmiadzin region, Armavir province, RA) and Kosh (Ashtarak region, Aragatsotn province, RA)<sup>9</sup>. S. Sardaryan presents the same data but additionally provides information about the radiating walls extending from the summit. Based on the data provided by A. Kalantar, T. Toramanyan, and Kh. Samuelyan, as well as his own observations, S. Sardaryan includes in this type of complexes the Ardar Davit hill of Oshakan<sup>10</sup>, Tsitsernakaberd<sup>11</sup>, Lernakert (Shirak province, RA), Dashtadem (Aragatsotn Province, RA), as well as several complexes in the Kars region<sup>12</sup>.

The Akunk (Talin region, Aragatsotn province) cultic structure is situated at the top of a hill within the settlement boundaries<sup>13</sup>. In the central part of the settlement lies the sanctuary of Tetri Tsgharo – a platform made of spirally arranged stones – where, according to T. Chubinashvili, rituals related to the worship of the Sun and Moon were performed. The Akunk (Talin region, Aragatsotn province) cultic structure is situated at the top of a hill within the settlement boundaries. In the central part of the settlement lies the sacred site of Tetri Tsgharo – a platform made of spirally arranged stones – where, according to T. Chubinashvili, rituals related to the worship of the Sun and Moon were performed<sup>14</sup>. Perhaps, in this context, the model of a ritual platform discovered in Gavar should also be considered. The platform has a circular layout with low walls. On one side of the circle, there is a vertical entrance with a pointed pediment and outward-facing portal walls<sup>15</sup>. This model has parallels in the materials from Kaytson Berd and Movses<sup>16</sup>. In this regard, the Talin platform should also be mentioned. Structurally, it resembled a burial mound with a diameter of 23 m and a height of 1.5 m. Under the stone-earth filling, two nearly identical platforms were discovered (measuring 4.8×10 m and 5.9×9.5 m). The walls of the relatively well-preserved first platform are built of medium-sized tuff stones, forming a straight wall with a distinctive “cornice-like” structure. Beneath the northwest and southwest walls of the platform, a two-step stylobate was uncovered on each side. The retaining walls were most likely constructed during the process of covering the structure. In front of the southwest wall of the platform, a fixed wall was identified, forming a corridor with the stylobate. The second platform was situated 1 m higher, indicating that it was built at a later stage<sup>17</sup>.

Similarly, corresponding *burial sites* can be considered in this context. These structures may be located directly on the tomb filling, in its immediate vicinity, or enclosed beneath the burial mound. In the first subgroup, it is important to mention Tomb № 3 from Area V of the Shahumyan cemetery in Kapan. The complex consists of a cist oriented east-west, with a roughly 1-meter-diameter circular stone-built structure constructed in its northeastern section. The circle was not fully enclosed, as one of the stones in the southern wall was missing. Between the

stone arrangement of the circle and the tomb slabs, there was a 30–40 cm thick soil layer. The interior of the platform was filled with stones and fragments of broken pottery, among which a small jug, broken on-site, was particularly notable. In this regard, it is also important to mention the 2.5-meter-diameter tower constructed between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD at the same location in the Shaghat I site, following the destruction of the settlement from the 7<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. At the base of this tower, two dog skeletons were placed. M. Zardaryan associates this stela with the worship of the Aralez spirits<sup>18</sup>.

In this context, the structure adjacent to Tomb № 5 in Area IV of the Shahunyan cemetery in Kapan should also be considered (Fig. 1). It was located in the southwestern part of the Area, about 1 m east of Tomb № 5 and approximately

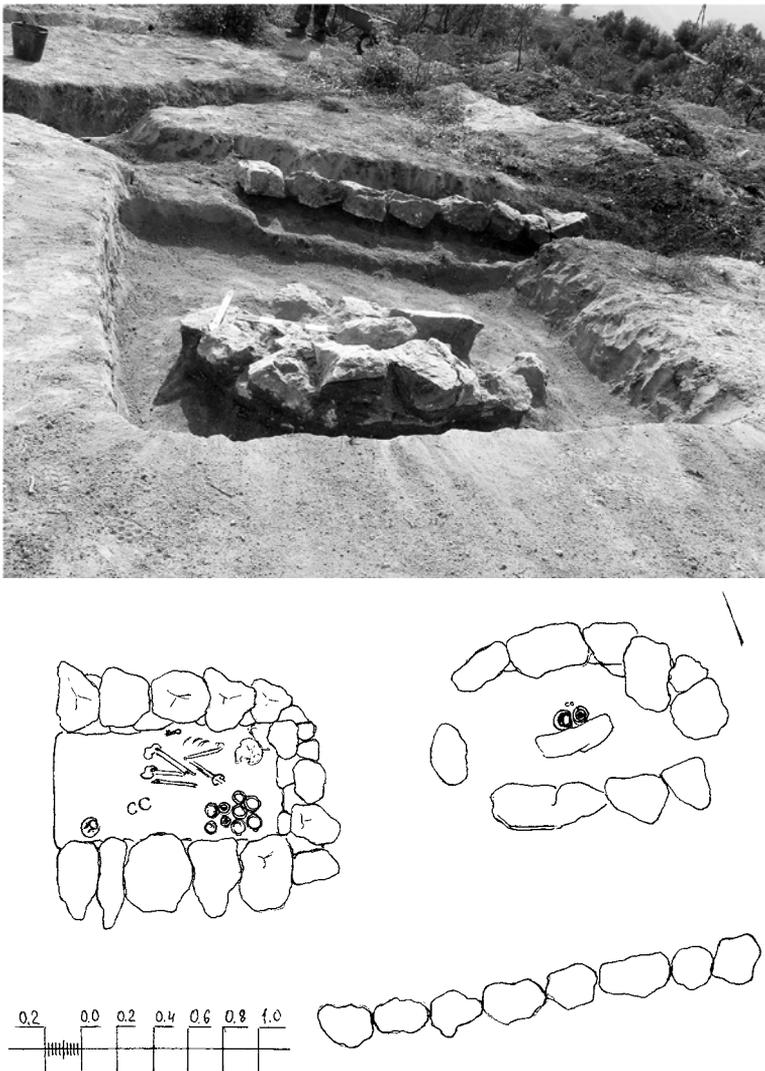


Fig. 1. Kapan, Tomb № 4.05, tomb and adjacent platform-structure

20 cm higher than its level, consisting of a stone filling beneath which lay an east-west oriented oval structure with a large stone placed at its center. The southern section was formed later during the filling process, while the northern section was built with two rows of stones and curved arch-like toward the east. Most likely, this represents the original appearance of the platform, as its destruction in the modern period is unlikely. The material (two vessels) was discovered right beneath the northern wall. Slightly further south, metal objects were also unearthed, including a bronze wire bracelet and three buttons of varying sizes.

In this regard, it is important to mention Tomb № 4 in Sisian, which was enclosed by three false burials, each containing only a single vessel<sup>19</sup>.

A structure/altar is also erected on the burial mound in Tomb № 34 of the First cemetery of Verin Naver and Tomb № 2 of Nerkin Naver. It is a rectangular structure oriented along an east-west axis, where excavations revealed pottery characteristic of the 19<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, along with zoological and anthropological materials<sup>20</sup>. The same pattern is observed in one of the burial mounds of Avazahank of Shamiram, where a stone structure was discovered<sup>21</sup>. A stepped mound built over the burial chamber has been identified at burial mound № 6 in Zurtaketi<sup>22</sup>. A complex discovered in the Ghalajik 2 cemetery is also located in close proximity to the tomb. It is attached to the cromlech of the burial mound and consists of an anthropomorphic idol enclosed within a Cyclopean rectangular structure<sup>23</sup>. A similar phenomenon is likely observed in Tomb № 5 of Aruch, where a rectangular structure made of standing stones was constructed atop the burial mound. To access the burial mound, one had to pass through this rectangular structure<sup>24</sup>. A stone-paved platform adjacent to a cromlech was also discovered in Tomb № 1 of Nerkin Getashen<sup>25</sup>. On the outside, a cist is built adjacent to the cromlech in the № 3 tomb of Kanagegh<sup>26</sup>.

The next subgroup presents altar structures enclosed under burial mounds. In this sense, an interesting structure was discovered in the village of Vardut, Kashatagh region, Republic of Artsakh. The burial structure was a mound with stone-soil filling, measuring 13.5 m in diameter. The cover stones were arranged in three layers with a total thickness of 0.4 m. Notably, the central part of the filling consisted of smaller stones. It is not excluded that this section of the mound was filled later, after the chamber had already been built and the burial-related rituals had been performed. The chamber was located in the central part of the mound with a slight deviation toward the southeast. It was oriented along the north-south axis, deviating 30 degrees eastward. The structure was covered with large flat pebbles, under which the teeth of a predatory animal were discovered. At a distance of 0.8 m east of the chamber, a circular structure made of two rows of stones was uncovered, with a diameter of 1.5 m. The structure was paved with pebbles. In the center, there was another pebble accumulation, on top of which a basalt stone with a parallelepiped shape and rounded corners was placed (15x7.5x7.5x6 cm). On its longitudinal side, two holes were drilled – one with a diameter of 2 cm and another

of 1.3 cm, both with a depth of 1 cm. The side surfaces of the stones bear traces of processing (LLMK inventory № 74/3)<sup>27</sup>.

Sub-burial structures were widespread in the Late Bronze and Iron Age complexes of Armenia. In particular, platforms inside the cromlechs are known from Burial Mound № 5 of the Shamiram II cemetery<sup>28</sup>. At Lori Berd, in the tomb located on the Tapa height, the stones in the sub-burial area were arranged in the shape of bull and deer heads, while in tomb № 79, a pyramid-shaped stone structure was built beneath the cover<sup>29</sup>. At Tomb № 19 of Verin Naver, an altar was constructed adjacent to its eastern wall<sup>30</sup>. In the Aygeshat cemetery, platforms were attached to the cromlech from the eastern side<sup>31</sup>.

In the context of cultic structures, it is necessary to mention *dolmen structures*. In Armenia, dolmen structures are relatively less known and have their own specific characteristics<sup>32</sup>, with the earliest of them dating back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC (Harich)<sup>33</sup>. In Syunik, dolmen-like structures have been recorded in Akhlatyan, in the Jaghachi Khach and Dolai areas, in Angeghakot<sup>34</sup>, in the Sevan basin, in the Monti Dzor area<sup>35</sup>, in Zorats Karer<sup>36</sup>, and in Gyaur Damer. Above-ground dolmen-type structures also include the tombs of the Joj dar. These have square, round, or wedge-shaped plans and are covered with massive stones<sup>37</sup>. It should be noted that both in Zorats Karer and Gyaur Damer (Tab. 3), dolmens with surrounding walls are known<sup>38</sup>. Y. Lalayan mentions a dolmen in the Garahogh area, which local residents believed to be the house of a giant (dragon)<sup>39</sup>. According to H. Martirosyan, dolmen-like structures have also been found in Tavush, in Ghrghi and Choratan<sup>40</sup>.

The next type is represented by “false-vaulted” structures, which can be either above-ground or underground. Among the above-ground tomb structures is the large cemetery located near the Ghalajik fortress. The tombs are represented by stone-soil burial mounds, which enclosed massive burial chambers, up to 10 square meters in size, covered with a false vault. Most of the tombs are destroyed and looted. The pottery material collected from the looted chambers identifies these tombs as belonging to the 8<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC<sup>41</sup>. It is likely that the large tomb of Sarnaghbyur from the late Bronze Age was also an above-ground structure<sup>42</sup>. The false vault is also present in the Lchashen № 2 burial mound<sup>43</sup>. At the same time, it should be noted that although the use of the false vault technique greatly facilitated the construction of large above-ground burial chambers, it was also applied in relatively small underground structures. For example, false vaults were found in many of the burials in the Shahumyan cemetery in Kapan and in Keran. In Tomb № 8 of the Shahumyan cemetery in Kapan, after removing the vault slabs, slabs supported by wall stones were revealed. Thus, the tomb had a false vault, as evidenced by the inward slanting of the longitudinal walls. Evidence of a false vault (referring to the inward-leaning walls) is also observed in other tombs of Kapan. The concept of a false vault was also applied in the Keren cemetery. For example, tomb № 105 had a false vault. Here, after the removal of the soil covering, the upper part of the false vault was revealed. The stone filling had an overall

length of 354 cm and a width of 150 cm. After removing the first layer of stones, the second layer of stones was exposed. Notably, two slabs placed in the northern section were tilted inward, which may have resulted from the removal of the side-covering stones of the false vault.

The mentioned tombs of Kapan and Keren date back to the 11<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, while the recessed burial of Tomb № 2 dates to the 7<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. In Keren, structures with false vaults continued to exist in later periods as well. Tomb № 95 did not differ in structure from the previous ones. It was a rectangular structure with longitudinal walls made of stone and transverse walls within the soil. The walls were inclined inward, indicating the presence of a false vault. The latter was covered with large red and black slabs. A similar pattern is observed in Tomb № 97, which is a cist with a rectangular layout, oriented north-south with a 20-degree deviation along an east-west axis. It was constructed using relatively small stones. The walls of the cist had a slight inward inclination, suggesting the presence of a false vault. The covering remained relatively intact in the central part of the tomb, whereas it was missing in the northern and southeastern sections. The southern wall of the tomb was reinforced with a row of relatively small stones, likely intended to support the covering. At the same time, during the 7<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, tombs with flat coverings also existed in Keren (e.g., Tomb № 64). Pit grave chambers, such as those in Lchashen, may have featured arched coverings<sup>44</sup>. Burial structures also include tombs with gabled roofs<sup>45</sup>.

A particular section of a burial structure could also serve as a simple altar - for example, *the tomb's covering slab* - an assumption that can only be made based on traces of actions performed on the slab. Similar phenomena can be observed in several tombs in Syunik, particularly in Tomb № 105 of Keren. The tomb was covered with rather large slabs, some of which were visible during an external survey of the site. The covering stones were made of basalt. After the removal of the soil covering, the upper part of the false vault was revealed. Notably, a vertically positioned stone was placed in the northern section of the covering. The stone filling had an overall length of 354 cm and a width of 150 cm. After the first layer of stones was removed, the second layer was exposed. It is noteworthy that two slabs in the northern section were inclined inward, likely due to the removal of the side-covering stones of the false vault. In the central part of the tomb, 120 cm north of the vertically placed southern stone, a vertically standing red diorite was uncovered. This stone was wedged on both sides with smaller tuff-breccia fragments. Under the covering stones, fragments of black polished pottery were found, as well as a large tooth of a ruminant cattle. The performance of ritualistic actions on the covering slab is even more pronounced in the Shahumyan cemetery of Kapan. For example, Tomb № 1 in Area V consists of a cist aligned east-west, constructed of medium-sized stones. The western wall was within the soil. As in previous cases, the tomb was covered with slabs placed on the longitudinal walls, with smaller stones wedged between them. The smaller stones were especially abundant in the

central and eastern parts of the tomb. Notably, in the southeastern section, the slab placed there was flat. When this slab was removed, a large number of broken ceramic vessel fragments were discovered beneath the soil layer, as well as a spear-shaped bronze pendant. A similar scene is observed in Tomb № 1 of Area IV. This group also includes the tomb № 79 of Damoghlu, located in the Khachenaget valley. Here, between the slabs covering the tomb, small pebbles are placed, which contain fragments of pottery<sup>46</sup>. Similar platforms could have been placed either on the covering slabs or buried beneath the burial mound. For example, in the burial mound of Keren's Tomb № 1, after the removal of the stone filling, a soil layer was revealed. The thickness of this layer varied between 20–50 cm in different parts of the excavation area and was saturated with ash and burned clay pellets (Fig. 2). Notably, the central, eastern, and southern parts of the tomb contained a higher concentration of ash, while in the northern section, where the cremation ash urn was placed, it was almost absent. This suggests that the cremation took place later, in the area buried beneath the burial mound<sup>47</sup>. A similar pattern can be observed

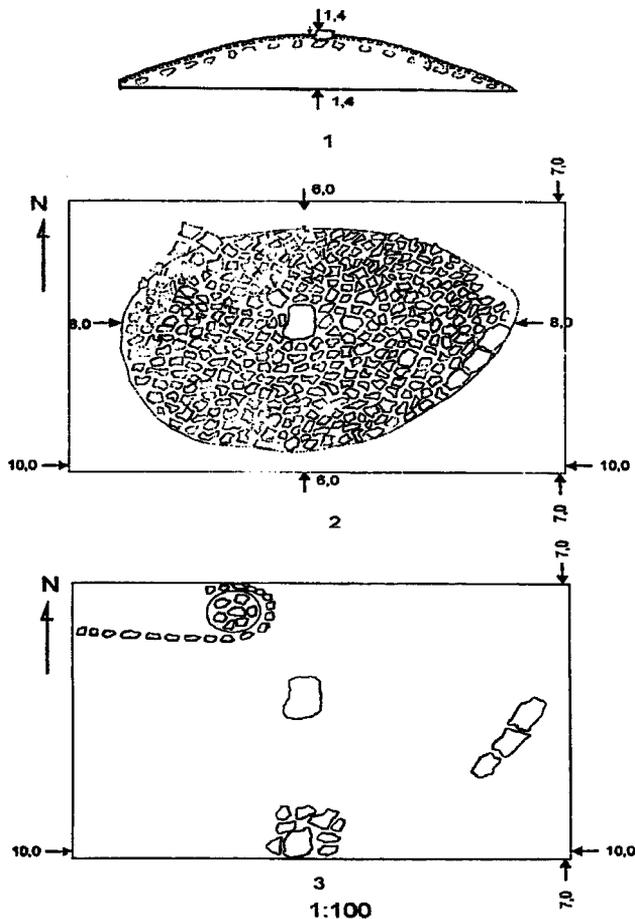


Fig. 2. Keren, Tomb 1, platform-structure 39

in the central part of the cemetery, in Tomb № 106 located at the top of the ridge<sup>48</sup>. Therefore, the soil surface acted as a kind of altar. A nearly identical situation is found in the burial mound of Khojalu's Tomb № 18, where the burial took place in the southern section, while the cremation pyre was in the northern section<sup>49</sup>. In the southern part of Keren's Tomb № 1, there was a stone platform measuring 130x110 cm, on which a severely burned pebble was placed. The soil layer covering and surrounding the platform was saturated with ash and well-tamped. The pottery found was exclusively fragmented and burned<sup>50</sup>. Platforms have also been identified beneath the burial mound of Nerkin Getashen<sup>51</sup>.

Based on the above, this group of platforms should also include those tombs where the burial took place directly on the platform itself. Tombs of this type include Tomb № 120 of Lchashen and Tomb № 119 of Stepanakert<sup>52</sup>. In the same context, Tombs № 14 and 16 of Khojalu can also be considered, where the burial was conducted within a layer of sand<sup>53</sup>.

The next subgroup includes platforms and structures that are not directly associated with a specific cultic object (e.g., a tomb)<sup>54</sup>. This group most likely includes Complex № 4 of Area IV in the Shahumyan cemetery of Kapan. The upper layer of the structure was completely destroyed, but the lower layer remained intact. It is difficult to determine whether the structure was originally built of stone, as only a few stones have been preserved on the northern and southern sides. Fragments of pottery, dozens of bronze buttons, and carnelian beads were found within the platform's area. The lower layer remained undisturbed. Notably, no anthropological material was discovered here, whereas such remains are typically concentrated in the lower layers of tombs. This raises doubts about the function of the structure as a tomb. The lower layer had the following features: in the northeastern part of the platform, a cluster of ceramic vessels was uncovered. Another cluster was uncovered to the west of these, aligned precisely along the north-south axis. The primary material within the platform was metal, which was placed southeast of the ceramic vessels. The metal finds included a fragment of a bronze belt, with an armor button positioned to its south. South of this button № 1, massive bracelets and rings were discovered. A large number of bronze buttons, beads, and spiral-shaped ornaments were also found. Southeast of the first belt, a second belt was arranged in a circular manner, with a second armor button attached to its western side.

Similar platforms may also include those supplemented with monumental stelae such as vishaps and menhirs, which do not serve as tombs (see below).

Altars of this type are also mentioned in ethnographic sources. For example, near the village of Tandzik in Vayots Dzor, in the Oster Plain, there is a pilgrimage site marked by a fire-blackened stone, which, according to Y. Lalayan, was venerated by both Armenians and Muslims<sup>55</sup>. In the Shaghat village of the Sisian region, a prism-shaped rock with a circular hole is mentioned at the summit of Kechaberd Mountain. It was perceived as a sanctuary, with numerous pottery fragments discovered around it<sup>56</sup>.

***Platforms placed on rock outcrops, boulders, and stone fragments.***

Rock-cut structures are among the most enduring cultural elements of the Armenian Highland and are characteristic of both the Bronze and Iron Age and the Urartian period, as well as the later periods in Syunik (cf. Tab. 4, 5). They also appear as platforms, whose main decorative elements include phallus-shaped protrusions and bowl-shaped depressions.

A classic example of such altars is the structure located in the cemetery near the village of Noravan in the Sisian region. It is a natural rock formation modified with a phallus-shaped protrusion (Tab. 1). In ethnographic literature, this and similar structures are commonly referred to as *portakar*<sup>57</sup>. However, it should be noted that this designation is quite conventional, as similar protrusions also appear in other types of open-air sanctuaries (e.g., in Gyulibulagh<sup>58</sup>).

In this subgroup, it is important to mention the altar located in the cemetery of Bazarkhana (Khoznavar village in the Goris region). It occupies an intermediate position between altars placed on rock outcrops and man-made altars. The altar in Bazarkhana is situated in a cemetery, although the lack of excavation in the site cluster prevents determining whether the structure is specifically related to a particular tomb or not. The altar itself is a platform with a circular plan, 5 m in diameter, part of which is made of a semi-circular slab, while the other part is made of stacked stones<sup>59</sup>. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the well-crafted circular stone discovered in Harzhis. Unfortunately, the displacement of this site prevents us from determining its function.

Another similar altar is located in the central part of the Ishak Meydan settlement, not far from the town of Goris (Tab. 2). The structure consists of a flat, irregular rock outcrop with rounded lateral sides. The cup mark depressions, up to 10 cm in diameter, have small channels leading outward. Another altar with cup mark depressions was discovered in Tsitsernavank (Fig. 3). It is carved on a natural rock fragment along the road leading to the cemetery, outside the western wall of the fortress. The altar of the site of Melikin Duz is located on a rock fragment; the homonymous fortress is located in the Melikin Duz area of Dashushen village (opposite the building of the Ministry of Urban Planning of Stepanakert, on the right bank of the Karkar River). On the south-facing slope of the hill, a large protruding rock fragment has been carved as an altar, or possibly a Zoroastrian fire altar. Two large holes with channels have been carved on the table-like platform, and the rock fragment is shaped into a two-tiered pedestal (the surface material of the fortress is Achaemenid, antique, and early medieval<sup>60</sup>). The altar located in the central part of the natural amphitheater in the Vanki Dzor area of Khnatsakh is set on a rock fragment. It is a triangular-shaped rock, 2 m high, with a cup mark depression in the central part of its top<sup>61</sup>.

Altars of this type have their ethnographic parallels. In particular, Kh. Samuelyan mentions the slab stone called “Hazaraprkich”, located near the village of

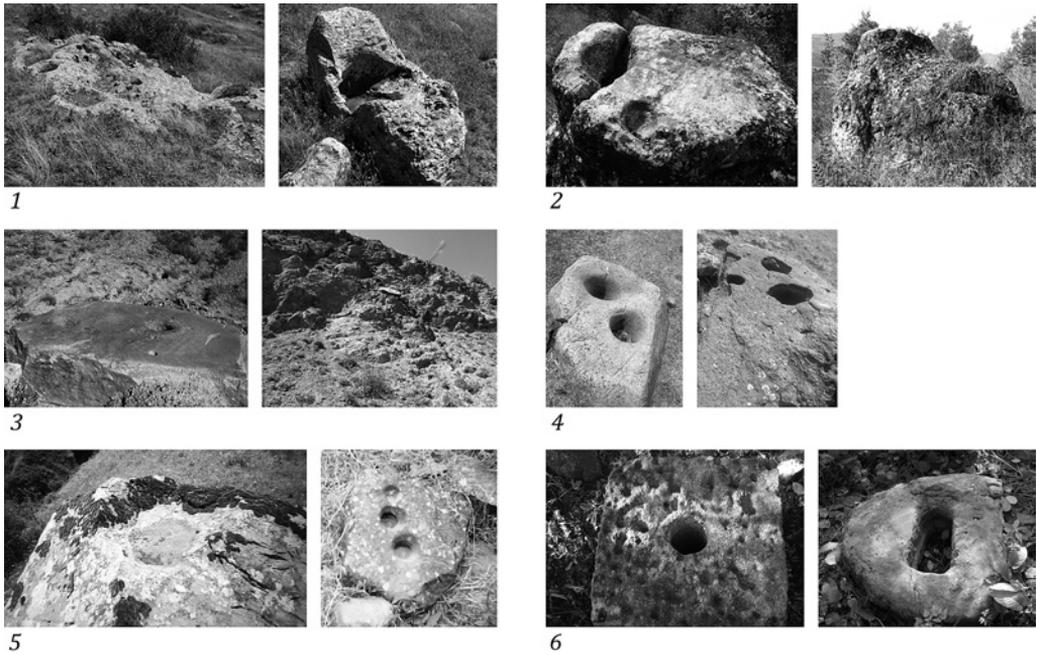


Fig. 3. Cup mark depressions on the altars:

1. Tsitsernavank, 2. Melikin Duz, 3. Zanger, 4. Selim, 5. Vanki Dzor, 6. Chankatagh of Khnatsakh

Khachik in the Vayots Dzor region, where sacrifices were still performed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>62</sup>.

One of the key elements of the ritualistic decoration of these platforms is the presence of *stones with cup mark depressions*. These have been specifically addressed in archaeological and ethnographic literature<sup>63</sup>. The study of numerous structures of this type, both in Armenia and abroad (they are found near rock carvings, on vishaps, menhirs, dolmens, tomb walls, or surrounding rocks – primarily in Western Europe and the Mediterranean, but also in Eastern Europe<sup>64</sup>, the Urals<sup>65</sup>, and the Caucasus<sup>66</sup>). Known as *cup marks* or *cup and ring marks*, they are generally dated to the Neolithic to Early Iron Age periods, though examples from both earlier<sup>67</sup> and later<sup>68</sup> times also exist), allows for certain generalizations regarding the typology of the depressions as well as their cultic significance.

In general, such depressions can be classified into three types: like bowls (relatively large in diameter with narrowing walls), like cups (cylindrical in form), and those with small-diameter (resembling blind holes). Similar bowl-like depressions, along with rock formations featuring basins and channels, are found within cultic complexes, cemeteries, or as isolated structures. Examples of standalone instances include the rock fragments at Tsitsernavank, Melikin Duz, Zanger, Selim, the Vanki Dzor area of Khnatsakh, Chankatagh (Fig. 3), the area around St. Gayane Church in Etchmiadzin, and Bjni<sup>69</sup>. Y. Lalayan mentions a similar stone on one of the tombstones in the cemetery near Karmir Vank (Tanahat) in Sisian. Another simi-

lar stone has been discovered in the village of Shrvakan in the Kashatagh region of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic<sup>70</sup>. Due to their displaced nature, it is difficult to determine whether these rock fragments were originally positioned horizontally or vertically<sup>71</sup>. The depressions found in the Basharajur (Fig. 4), Shamiram, Agarak, Gyulibulagh, Kakavadzor, Nerkin Bazmaberd, and Shirakavan complexes<sup>72</sup> cover vast areas and follow a similar principle of flat surface modification<sup>73</sup>. The Berdik cultic structure and cemetery, as well as stones with depressions in the dolmen-like cemetery of Gyaur Damer are associated with burial structures.



Fig. 4. Basharajur, rock platform

The functional interpretations of the mentioned stones vary greatly, as the shapes of the depressions are highly diverse. They are mainly associated with women and water<sup>74</sup>, the starry sky (the Sun and celestial bodies)<sup>75</sup>, and ritualistic libations (in the context of ancestor worship)<sup>76</sup>. A similar view is the hypothesis that stones adorned with holes reflect the spirit of the stone<sup>77</sup>. Near one such stone with similar depressions in Upper Austria, remains of an altar, a human skeleton, and a sacrificed bull were discovered<sup>78</sup>. It is evident that the cup mark stones found on the shore of Lake Sukhodolskoye, north of St. Petersburg, served cultic purposes, as they were encircled by stone barriers and accompanied by orthostat-placed stones<sup>79</sup>. N. Shanshashvili, analyzing the small holes on the hearths of the Shengavit culture, suggests that they may have been used to secure a model of the Tree of Life<sup>80</sup>. Finally, these depressions could have also been used for collecting water<sup>81</sup>, a notion supported by various ethnographic sources. For instance, in the Russian North and Belarus, rainwater accumulating in such depressions was considered “sacred”<sup>82</sup>. Interpreting the cup mark depression carved into a stone near the Tanahat Monastery, Y. Lalayan suggests that it was made to allow birds to drink water<sup>83</sup>. M. Faradjeva, analyzing stone № 20 in the Keshiktash Firuz II site in Gobustan, as well as the cup mark depressions found in the Buyukdash and Jingirdash sites, suggests that they could have been perceived as a symbol of womanhood, used for sacrifices, water collection, or even for preparing ritualistic paints<sup>84</sup>. In Europe, until recent decades, such stones were considered “sacrificial stones”, and grain was poured into the depressions, thus associating them with fertility worship<sup>85</sup>.



Fig. 5, 6, 7, 8. Paytasar, rock carvings, HEME, R. Torosyan's Archive



Fig. 9. Paytasar, Harutyun Martirosyan during the study of the rock carvings, HEME - R. Torosyan's Archive

R. Torosyan compares the cup mark stones discovered in the area of St. Gayane Monastery in Etchmiadzin to mortars intended for the preparation of the sacred drink Haoma<sup>86</sup>.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that a universal interpretation of the cup mark stones is not possible. Their meaning depends on the location of the respective sites, the archaeological context, the shape of the depression holes, and their combination with other elements<sup>87</sup>.

In this context, the rock carvings and their immediate surroundings can also be considered, which are an important component of the sacred landscape and can be defined as *pictorial platforms*. Primarily, these sites, which are drawn on high volcanic rock outcrops and are adorned with both everyday and mythical images, are often arranged in groups around certain platforms. These platforms are frequently characterized by cup mark depressions and surrounded by megalithic monuments (such as cromlechs and menhirs), thereby completing the list of the aforementioned sanctuaries. Additionally, the rock carvings could have been engraved on cromlechs and the slabs of tombs<sup>88</sup>. Historical Syunik (and especially the Geghama, Syunik, and Vardenis Mountains) is the epicenter of rock art in the Armenian Highland (Fig. 5–9, Tab. 6–12)<sup>89</sup>.

## 2. Monumental stelae

The monumental stelae of Syunik can conventionally be divided into three subgroups, which have morphological and iconographic differences. These include sculptures and decorated stones (table-shaped, rectangular, cylindrical, domed, cross-shaped stelae characterized by anthropomorphic and phallic features, and less commonly, zoomorphic ones), vishaps (square-shaped stelae, carved with the image of a bull's head and downward-facing legs on the front, or in the shape of a fish, or stelae that combine the features of the previous two, appearing in a unique environment) and menhirs (upright stones carved with minimal modification of natural rock formations, created at different levels). From a technical and crafting perspective, they have undergone various forms of refinement and bear certain depressions (textual Tab. 4).

	Type of technical intervention	Sites
Treatment	1. Carving	Rock carvings (Ukhtasar – Zangezur, Geghama Mountains – Gegharkunik, Allich – Karvachar), Karchevan (rock with a phallic engraving) (Zangezur), Selim № 2 (cup mark at the top of the stele), Lchashen (phallus – HMA)
	2. High relief and bas-relief	Shaghat (sculpture), Bazarkhana (idol, bas-relief in the central part), Khnatsakh (Khachkari Khut, serpent-ornamented (?) stone), Harzhis (accidental find, anthropomorphic sculpture, HEME photo), Harzhis № 14 (concentric circles on the menhir)
	3. Volumetrical sculpture	Arvakan (idols from tomb № 1, with carved, bas-relief and high relief elements), Kalajik 2 (idol), Kornidzor (sculpture), Bazarkhana (sculpture), Harzhis (sculpture) (HMA), Harzhis (sculpture) (LLMG), (Zangezur), Tsovagyugh (sculpture), Lchashen (phallus), Patashar (phallus), Tsovinar (phallus) (Gegharkunik)
Depressions	1. Cup mark depressions	Tanahat (carved stone turned into a gravestone), Khnatsakh/Vanki Dzor (carved stone near the rock fragment) (Zangezur), Selim (stone near the rock outcrop, photo by Yerevan State university Archaeology Laboratory) (Gegharkunik – Vayots Dzor), Shrvakan (stone with a depression), Kalajik 2 (idol) (Kashatagh)
	2. Hollow	Berdik (cultic complex-cemetery), Vardut (artifact found on the platform), Gyaur Damer (slabs of dolmens) (Kashatagh)
	3. Hole	Zorats Karer (menhirs) (Zangezur), Ughedzor (stone fragment), Soyran (menhir turned into a khachkar), Rind 2 (Vayots Dzor), Vorotan (menhirs) (Kashatagh)

Table 4. Classification of Bronze and Iron Age sacred objects of Syunik by types of technical intervention

***Sculptures and decorated stones.*** This subtype of monumental stelae is divided into three types.

***Anthropomorphic.*** Anthropomorphic sculptures can be divided into several groups: The first group includes head sculptures. Numerous discoveries of head sculptures in Armenian sites have allowed H. Martirosyan to distinguish

two groups: table-shaped heads and other types of heads with a discernible neck<sup>90</sup>. Expanding on H. Martirosyan's typology, B. Arakelyan identifies five groups: conical heads, with a flat upper and lower section, flat heads with flat upper and lower sections, heads with a discernible neck, small-scale heads, and heads without the upper and lower parts of the face. According to B. Arakelyan, the first four groups are characteristic of the Iron Age, while the fifth is typical of the ancient period<sup>91</sup>.

Anthropomorphic stelae have also been preserved in the complexes of Syunik. Although the examples found are not numerous, the characteristics of the sculpting allow for the distinction of several groups. According to the typology proposed by B. Arakelyan and H. Martirosyan, the first group of stelae can include the stela from Harzhis (HMA), as well as the head sculpture preserved in Kapan Local Lore Museum. The eyes are indicated by depressions, while the nose is depicted in relief<sup>92</sup>. This group is closely related to the head sculpture discovered at Karmir Blur, with the exception that here, the forehead is also marked in relief<sup>93</sup>. It is not difficult to notice that both the examples from Harzhis (HMA) and the ones preserved in Kapan are somewhat similar to phallic stelae (due to the transition from the head to the torso). It may be suggested that these sculptures are one of the development directions of phallic worship, linked to the anthropomorphization of the phallus, which, with its further development, leads to the preservation of phallic elements in anthropomorphic sculptures and symbolizes the emergence of an anthropomorphic deity that integrates elements of phallic worship. This was connected with the elevation of the leader's role, who, being deified, was perceived as the father of the people and the main guarantor of the prosperity of the land<sup>94</sup>. It is necessary to agree with M. Steblin-Kamenskiy's viewpoint that deification implies the sexual power of the being<sup>95</sup>.

One more idol from Harzhis preserved in HMA (225x37x35 cm) differs in its design. The human face is depicted on a cylindrical protrusion, which is carved at the upper part of a conical narrowing stela (Fig. 10). This idol, with its facial



Fig. 10. Harzhis, currently at the HMA, anthropomorphic statue

features (a flat face, partly cylindrical in shape), resembles the idols discovered at Aygeshat (Tomb № 17)<sup>96</sup>.

Among the head sculptures are also several other stelae. An anthropomorphic idol has been discovered from the Harzhis-Darabas region<sup>97</sup>. It is a highly stylized rectangular stone fragment, decorated with relief ribbons. The statue discovered at Shaghat has a completely different appearance. Here, the image is carved in a highly naturalistic style, with the almond-shaped eyes and a nose that widens directly downward clearly depicted<sup>98</sup>. The upper part of the head and the lower jaw are absent. The back side of the statue is concave, indicating that the idol was embedded. The Shaghat idol shares certain parallels with the head sculpture from Karmir Blur, differing only in the depiction of the forehead and eyes, which suggests its dating to the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC<sup>99</sup>.

Among the series of head sculptuers, a special place is occupied by one of the anthropomorphic idols of Harzhis, which is five-faced. The upper part of the head is flat, while the supraorbital ridge and nose are sculpted with a convex line. The eyes are made with engraved holes, and the mouth is depicted as a groove. Unlike the aforementioned stelae, this statue belongs to the Late Bronze Age. Among the morphological differences, the following features should be noted: the faces of the idols are essentially represented as cylinders, and the depiction of the face combines engraving and bas-relief techniques, emphasizing the supraorbital ridge and forehead. Judging by the height of the idol, it can be assumed that it was placed at the center of a certain structure. The five-faced statue of Harzhis has parallels in Navur<sup>100</sup>.

The next group of anthropomorphic sculptures consists of statues depicted in full-body volumetric form. In this group, the idol discovered in the Ghalajik 2 cemetery of the Kashatagh region of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (Fig. 11) should be mentioned first. Its head is indicated by a slightly inclined relief circle, the eyes and mouth are engraved, while the nose is in relief. The torso descends not straight but at a certain angle, which likely symbolizes a seated position. At the lower part of the statue, there is a small hole, which is meant to indicate female gender identity. The statue, with certain features such as its seated position and the tilt of its face, resembles the statuette discovered in Metsamor<sup>101</sup>. In terms of facial characteristics, this statue has parallels in Late Bronze Age sculpture in Armenia (Navur)<sup>102</sup>. Considering its facial features and sculptural characteristics, the statue can be classified within the first group of stelae in B. Arakelyan's typology, which follows the traditional-conventional style<sup>103</sup>. Around the idol, traces of a cyclopean-style construction have been recorded, possibly the remains of a cultic structure.

The next stela is located in the village of Kornidzor, in the Toplari Khut area of the Goris region. It has a cylindrical torso, with arms extending outward from the upper part. The neck is not specifically defined but can be discerned where the outlines of the arms and head intersect. The head is roughly hewn, pentagonal



Fig. 11. *Ghalajik, anthropomorphic statue*

in shape, with the face indicated by a cylinder. This stela has no direct parallels; however, the position of the arms, the cylindrical torso, and the flat face make it comparable to examples known from Kapan and Tomb № 64 in Keren (Tab. 13)<sup>104</sup>. The statue features ornaments on its hand, forehead, and neck, created using a dotting technique. The forehead is depicted in relief, the face is flat, and the eyes and mouth are made with deep holes and a slit. It has a necklace on the chest, a sash on the shoulder, and a belt around the waist. A slight indentation marks the phallus, with an evergreen-shaped ornament just above it. In the right hand of the statuette, there is a cup. In terms of its stylistic features, the described statuette is classified among “traditional-conventional” works defined by B. Arakelyan<sup>105</sup>. The closest example was found near the city of Kapan, at the Teghut site, and is kept at the Kapan Local Lore Museum (inventory № 94, 1017). A similar statuette is also housed in the Erzurum Museum, but unlike the Keren example, it is depicted clothed rather than nude.

The second idol is a roughly hewn rectangular stone block with cross-shaped rudimentary projections that indicate the idol’s arms. The head is essentially absent and is only marked by a slight widening<sup>106</sup>.



Fig. 12. Arvakan, statuettes characterized by anthropomorphism (?)

*Zoomorphic:* Zoomorphic idols are relatively few in number, not only in Syunik but also in Armenia as a whole. On the other hand, zoomorphism is well reflected in small plastic works (both clay and bronze), particularly in two groups: a) Metal sculptures, including volumetric sculptures – primarily standards and the heads of staffs (Lchashen, Tolors, Ltsen, Angeghakot, Sznak)<sup>107</sup>; zoomorphic pendants and jewelry (Lchashen, Khnatsakh, Kapan-Shahumyan № 2 tomb's secondary burial)<sup>108</sup>; zoomorphic elements in weapons and armament (Shikahogh, Lchashen, Gavar)<sup>109</sup>; b) Clay objects, including zoomorphic vessels (Areni – LLMY collection, Tab. 14; Khnatsakh, Shikahogh<sup>110</sup>, Keren tomb № 64<sup>111</sup>); zoomorphic elements in vessels (Keren); Shikahogh, Sisian, Moz<sup>112</sup>.

As for the stone volumetric sculptures, their quantity is very limited, and the interpretations we propose are worthy of further discussion.

In this regard, it is important to mention the stela located in the Khachkari Khut area of Khnatsakh village, which occupies a special place in the general context of monumental stelae (Tab. 34). On the back side of the khachkar, there is a relief image that narrows towards the top of the stone<sup>113</sup>. Y. Lalayan, while describing this khachkar, analyzes the relief from an ethnographic perspective<sup>114</sup>. The absence of parallels in medieval sculpture suggests that the khachkar is the result of the secondary use of an earlier stela<sup>115</sup>.

The idols of Arvakan (Fig. 12) hold a distinctive place due to their structure. These idols were used as building stones and were placed in the wall of a tomb dating back to the 11<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. The first stone idol is made of gray basalt. Its body has an irregular prismatic shape with rounded corners. The back of the statue is left unworked. In the central part of the torso, there is a segment-shaped ornament, while the lower part features three vertical relief lines. A deep groove separates the torso from the head. The head is hexagonal, with one of its edges being more flattened than the others. Certain sculptural features (such as the groove separating the head from the torso and the structure of the head) suggest similarities with phallic sculptures. This idol shares some characteristics with an idol found in Tomb № 11 of Kuchak IV. Like the described example, that idol was worked

only on one side, with the decorated side adorned with horizontal relief lines. One of the common features of the two statues is the groove that separates the torso from the head. However, in the Aparan statue, the head is dome-shaped. Like the Kashatagh example, the Aparan idol was also used as a building stone in an Early Iron Age tomb<sup>116</sup>. Some characteristics do not rule out the possibility that the statue represents a fledgling bird of prey. Specifically, wild bird chicks rest on their talons, have short necks, and their beak angles are more flattened<sup>117</sup>. The structure of the protrusions on the head and the one-sided processing suggest that the idol was embedded in a wall. The next idol is made of pink conglomerate. It has an irregular three-sided prism shape. The sculpture is roughly crafted, with the torso and head separated by a shallow groove. The shape of the head section of the mentioned statue, as well as the almost complete absence of a neck, resembles a bear cub<sup>118</sup>.

*Phallic*: Phallic stelae are quite common in Bronze and Iron Age sites. They can be divided into three main components: the head, the torso, and the base. According to the structure of the head, phallic stelae are either semi-circular or dome-shaped. However, in dome-headed phalli, a different slant towards the head part can be observed<sup>119</sup>. In this regard, the phallus from Lchashen holds a special place, as its head is truncated<sup>120</sup>. The next type of head is represented by phalli with hemispherical heads. A phallus of this type was confirmed by Y. Lalayan in the Mrtbi Dzor<sup>121</sup>. It has parallels in Aghdam (Tab. 15), in the Haykajur area of the Martakert region of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, and along the Tigranakert-Martakert road<sup>122</sup>, as well as in the statue embedded as a building stone in the wall of tomb № 8 of the Shahumyan cemetery in Kapan, in Gyunesh Tepe, in the Ishkhanaget and Varanda mesopotamia<sup>123</sup>, as well as in Dvin, Oshakan and Artik<sup>124</sup>. The head might be separated from the torso due to the finishing of the latter (Haykajur). Moreover, while the transition between the torso and head in the Lchashen stela is actually abrupt, in the Mrtbi Dzor, it is smooth<sup>125</sup>. In Kapan and Gyunesh Tepe, the head is separated from the torso by a deep groove<sup>126</sup>.

The torso can be cylindrical (Lchashen, Haykajur), widening both upwards and downwards (Mrtbi Dzor), prism-shaped (Keti), widening downwards (Kapan, Oshakan, Karmir Blur), or unprocessed (Gyumri)<sup>127</sup>. The phallus of Gyunesh Tepe is particularly interesting, as it widens downwards and then suddenly narrows.

The next component of phallic stelae is the base. The bases of Lchashen, Patashar, and Tsovinar have the shape of rectangular prisms, while the one in Mrtbi Dzor's incense burner is cylindrical. Most likely, the statue of Gyunesh Tepe was mounted on the base<sup>128</sup>.

The ornamentation of phallic stelae is highly diverse. A significant portion features sun motifs, such as a rotating spiral (Lchashen) and triangles (Lchashen, Mrtbi Dzor). Interestingly, the head of the Lchashen phallus has deep grooves along its sides, likely symbolizing the sun's radiating rays<sup>129</sup>. The central part of the Lchashen phallus's torso is decorated with a cross-shaped pattern enclosed within a carved circular frame. Similarly, the central sections of the Karmir Blur

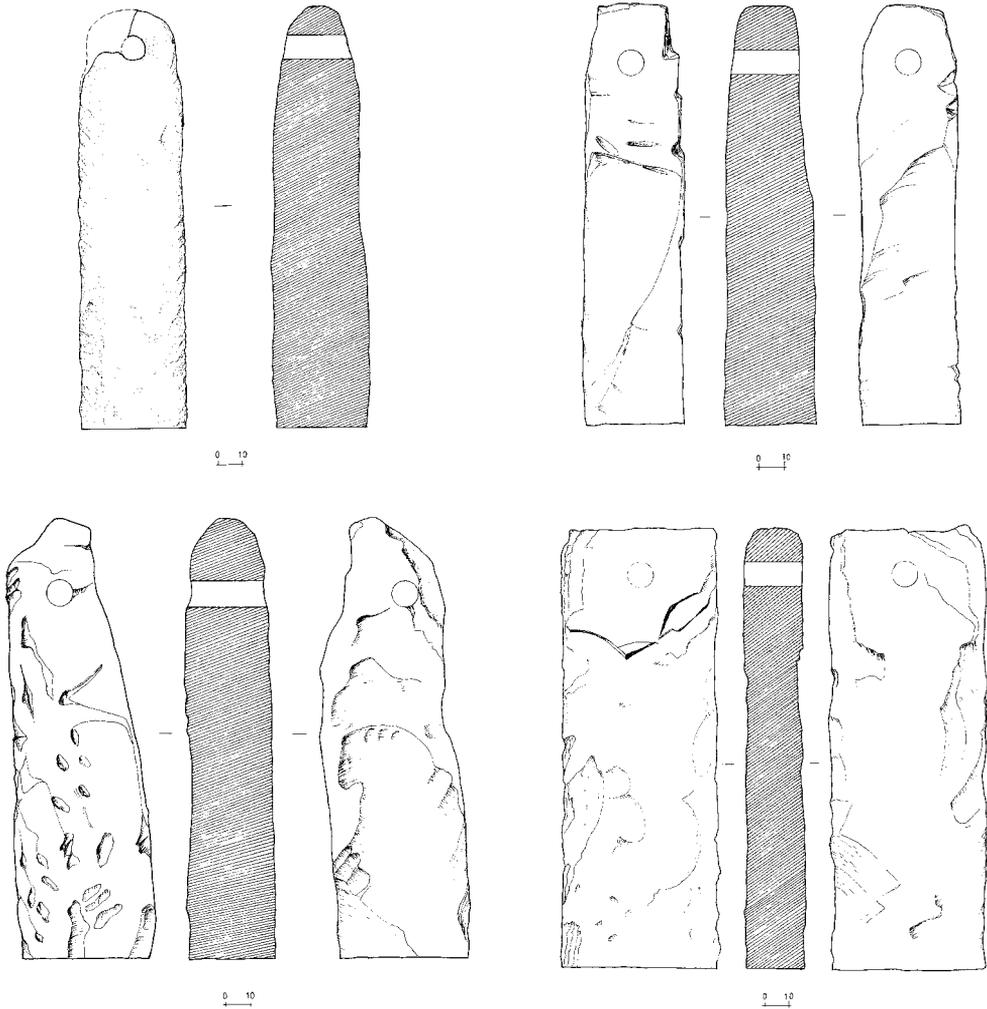


Fig. 13. Harzhis, menhirs

Fig. 14. Harzhis, menhirs

and Arevshat phalluses are adorned with a relief frieze<sup>130</sup>. Considering that both in Lchashen and Karmir Blur, these circular frames contain “sun motifs”, it can be assumed that they are associated with sun worship, though they may also have had a protective function<sup>131</sup>.

A certain level of interest is presented by the cup mark depression in the lower part of the Gyunesh Tepe example<sup>132</sup>. It is certainly comparable to the phallic-shaped statue of Metsamor, the lower part of which contains a hole that, according to S. Yesayan, represents a depiction of a kteis<sup>133</sup>. In this regard, it is important to mention the clay miniature with a phallic hole found in the historical Khram city<sup>134</sup>.

In burial complexes, phalli can be placed in different locations. In Armenian sites, they are recorded on burial mounds (Oshakan), within cromlechs (Oshakan), on cover slabs (Tsovinar), or in burial chambers (Karmir Blur, Oshakan, Artik). In

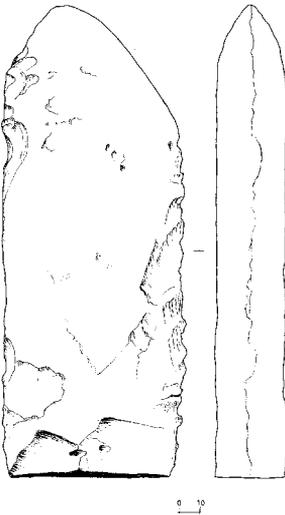
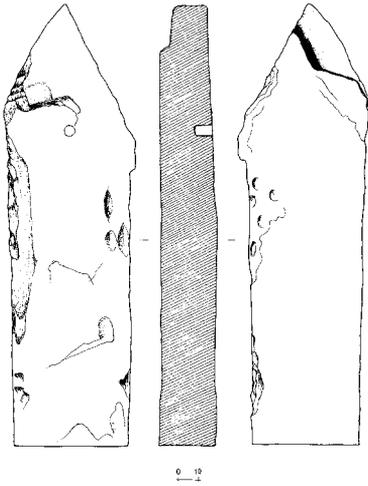


Fig. 15. Harzhis, menhirs

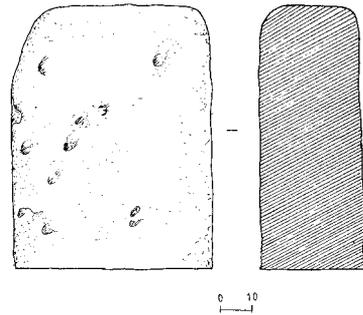
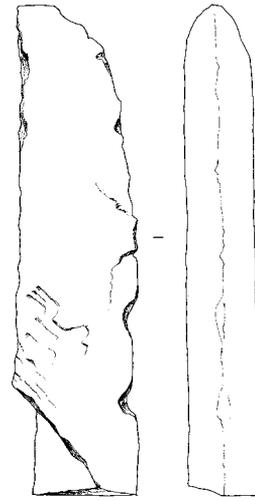


Fig. 16. Harzhis, menhirs

the tombs of Shamiram, the phallus stood on the floor of the burial chamber, with its head protruding from the chamber through a specially made hole at the junction of the cover slabs<sup>135</sup>.

Alongside separate standing phallic images, there are also depictions of phalli on stelae in Syunik. One of these is the “bride and groom” stone group in Karchevan, where a phallus is depicted on one of the stones. According to Y. Lalyan, this representation of the phallus has parallels in Akhalkalak and Van<sup>136</sup>.

It is not excluded that the XIII-century khachkar from Shinuhayr could have originally been a phallic stele. It is a stele with a domed head and a cylindrical torso narrowing towards the top. Later, during the process of turning it into khachkar, one of the faces of the stele was smoothed to create the khachkar sculptures, and the head was transformed into a crown<sup>137</sup>. Referring to the cultic significance of

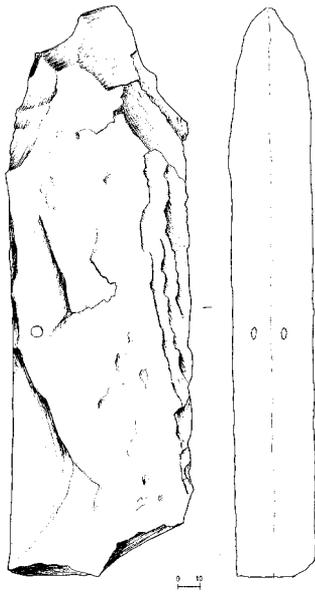


Fig. 17. Harzhis, menhirs

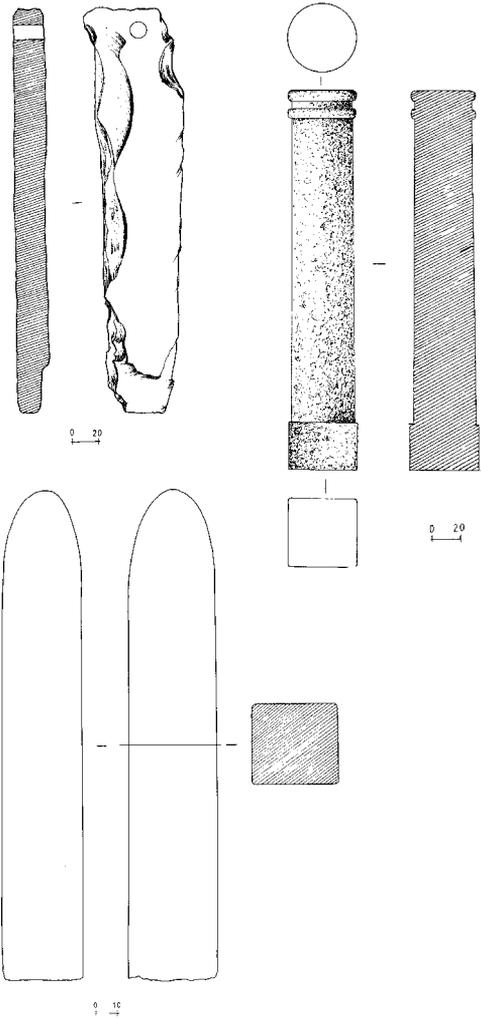
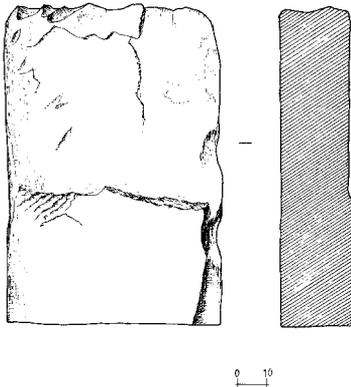


Fig. 18. Harzhis, menhirs

phallic stelae, it should be noted that the phallus could be associated with fertility<sup>138</sup>, the sun<sup>139</sup>, the worship of the underworld and ancestors<sup>140</sup>, the act of sacrifice<sup>141</sup>, as well as serving a protective function<sup>142</sup>.

**Menhirs.** Syunik is quite rich in menhirs. As in other regions characterized by menhirs, in Syunik, they appear on isolated tombs and platforms (e.g., Selim, Harzhis), as alignment (e.g., Berdik, Gyaur Damer, Zorats Karer, Khnatsakh/Bhaver, Kuri Kharaba), and in an enclosed arrangement (e.g., Kuri Kharaba).

The most famous menhir site in Syunik is Zorats Karer, where the menhirs are placed within the cemetery, in some areas forming its borders (Tab. 49)<sup>143</sup>. Menhirs are also known from Khnatsakh (not far from Bhaver Monastery) (Tab. 50) and especially in the surroundings of Harzhis village (Fig. 13–18, Tab. 36–48)<sup>144</sup>. It is not excluded that some of them (e.g., stelae № 1–6, 12) were used as road markers

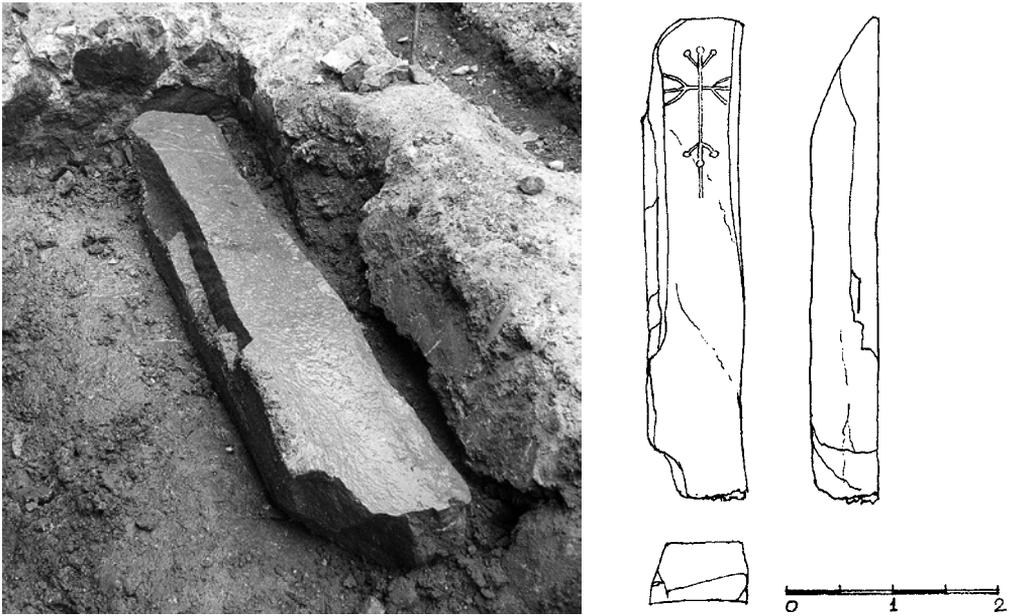


Fig. 19. Dadivank, menhir turned into a khachkar

in the Middle Ages or even earlier<sup>145</sup>. At the same time, these menhirs share certain similarities with the stelae of Zorats Karer, suggesting the possibility of their reuse. Additionally, stele № 1, as well as those located along the Harzhis-Darabas section (№ 6–11), are placed directly on tombs. Among the menhirs of Harzhis, special mention should be made of the displaced stelae (now in the courtyard of the Harzhis village cultural center) and those showing signs of secondary use (№ 13–15). Y. Lalayan also noted the presence of menhirs at the Sultan Keghesi site<sup>146</sup>. Moreover, a menhir has been identified in the Kari Dar Urartian multi-chamber tomb<sup>147</sup>. It is likely that a stone or wooden stele was once placed at the top of the Kanagegh burial mound, as only the base of the monolith has been discovered<sup>148</sup>. A stele pedestal has also been found in one of the Lchashen tombs (excavations by V. Avetyan)<sup>149</sup>. In this context, the standing stones positioned in the central part of the burial mounds should also be examined. A similar phenomenon is observed in Arkhachi Glukh cemetery of Tandzaver, specifically in Tomb № 5<sup>150</sup>. Comparable stones have been recorded in the Ghalajik, Molar Kuze, Berdik, and other cemeteries. Particularly interesting in this regard is Tomb № 105 in Keren, where a vertically placed stone was found in the northern section of the tomb's cover. After removing the first layer of cover stones, a second layer was revealed. Notably, 120 cm north of a vertically placed southern stone in the central section of the tomb, an upright red diorite was revealed, wedged on both sides by smaller tuff-breccia stones.

Most likely, with their original functions, the khachkars of Khnatsakh's Tsits Kar (Tab. 35), Harzhis № 14, Zirik (Kashatagh region, Nagorno-Karabakh Republic), Soylian (Vayk 1) (Tab. 31), and Dadivank (Fig. 19)<sup>151</sup> were perceived as menhirs<sup>152</sup>.



*Fig. 20. Allich, menhir*

Although the available material is quite insufficient, it is still possible to attempt to examine several types within the general context of menhirs, based on the design of the upper part, overall processing, and the shape of the body. The design of the upper part can conditionally be used to distinguish two main groups. In the first group, menhirs with an angular or near-angular upper part are united. These can be examined in several subtypes based on the degree of processing: a) Stelae with minimal human intervention: This group includes the stelae of Zorats Karer, Khnatsakh (Bhaver area), Harzhis № 6, 8, 10 (Harzhis-Darabas cluster), and Allich (Fig. 20)<sup>153</sup>; b) Stelae with a somewhat shaped body: This subtype includes Harzhis № 1 (cluster of menhirs by caravanserai), and № 14 (from the group of menhirs placed near the cultural center) stelae. Notably, the body of № 1 is more rounded in section, while № 14 approaches a rectangular shape in section. A similar menhir was the example from Talin later turned into a khachkar (in the 8<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>154</sup>; c) polished stelae: This type includes Harzhis № 15 stele, which belongs to the group of menhirs placed near the cultural center. It has a nearly square cross-section and a polished body that tapers in the middle, forming a roughly hewn conical upper part. At the lower section of the body, engraved circles are depicted using a bas-relief technique.

The second group of menhirs has a flat, straight, or inclined upper part. In terms of processing, the three aforementioned subgroups can also be observed

here: a) The use of stone fragments with minimal modification is recorded in the dolmen cemetery of Gyaur Damer (Tab. 50) and on Stele № 7 of Harzhis (Harzhis-Darabas cluster). b) The upper parts of Stelae № 2, 3, and 12 in Harzhis (cluster of menhirs by caravanserai), as well as Stele № 2 in Selim (Tab. 24), tend to be straight. Meanwhile, the upper parts of Stelae № 4, 5, 9, and 11, as well as those of Attash № 2 and 3 and Dadivank examples, can already be considered full-fledged stelae, similar to the later examples placed near the Areni church<sup>155</sup>.

It is particularly important to mention the cube-shaped stone with a hole from Gyaur Damer. The torso of statues of this type is mostly rectangular in cross-section. The front part of stele № 9 in Harzhis has a smooth surface. In stelae № 5 in Harzhis and № 2 in Selim, the head part is distinct from the torso. In Harzhis, it has a greater width, while in Selim, it is separated by a shallow groove.

A characteristic feature of the menhirs in Syunik is the frequently occurring holes, mainly located in the upper part of the stele, rarely in the middle section (cf. № 10 in Harzhis-Darabas section, № 5 in Harzhis cluster by caravanserai), or at the top (e.g., the menhir of Soylan turned into a khachkar). There is an opinion that these holes were made to facilitate dragging the stones<sup>156</sup>. However, it is not excluded that they were created after the stones were already in place and served other purposes<sup>157</sup>, as there are numerous stelae (vishaps and menhirs) that lack these holes (e.g., in the Khnatsakh-Bhaver section). Additionally, in Zorats Karer, there are menhirs with multiple holes<sup>158</sup>. A polished stone with two holes is also found near the Zanger mountain pass in Syunik. A stone with a hole is also present in one of the tombs at the Tapa site of Lori Berd<sup>159</sup>. Addressing this issue, Y. Lalayan also examines natural monuments with holes, such as the Saribek pilgrimage site in Shushi, the St. Sargis Monastery in the village of Murot near Gandzak, and Shulaver<sup>160</sup>. Based on ethnographic material and interpreting the worship of natural rock holes (“pierced stones”), Lalayan associates them with magical rituals related to the worship of women, water, fertility, and the enhancement of physical strength<sup>161</sup>. S. Yesayan interprets the hole in the lower part of the Metsamor statue as a symbol of sexual identity, linking it to the worship of women<sup>162</sup>. H. Simonyan also mentions a stone with a hole at the top of burial mound № 40 in Verin Naver, suggesting that it may have been intended for tying sacrificial animals<sup>163</sup>. In principle, this perspective could also be valid for the polished stone near the “Bells of Syunik”, which has lateral through-holes, as well as for the cube-shaped stele at Gyaur Damer.

The worship of standing stones and menhirs is reflected in the mythological systems of many peoples<sup>164</sup>.

**Vishaps.** Historical Syunik is one of the most important centers for the distribution of vishaps, where they appear in the greatest number and variety compared to other regions of the Armenian Highland<sup>165</sup>. Taking this into account, we present below the issues related to the definition and nature of vishaps within the broader context<sup>166</sup>.

Vishaps are monolithic stones sculpted with zoomorphic imagery, ranging in height from approximately 150 to 550 cm. They are made from local materials, primarily basalt, which can typically be sourced from quarries in the immediate vicinity of their findspots. Most vishaps remain in their original location, lying horizontally. However, they are generally processed and sculpted on all sides except for the “tail”, which clearly indicates that they were originally intended to stand upright. The orientation of the imagery also supports this assumption<sup>167</sup>. Nevertheless, some fish-shaped vishaps were likely meant to lie flat<sup>168</sup> – particularly those with distinctly flattened undersides and curved forms, for which maintaining balance in an upright position would have been problematic.

*Typology issue:* We conventionally divide the vishaps into three types: 1. Bull-shaped (four-sided or thick slab-like, tapering from top to bottom, with a depiction of a bull’s head and limbs falling downward on the front, found everywhere) (Tab. 16, 19–23, 25); 2. Fish-shaped (round in cross-section, sculpted in the form of a fish, with anatomical details of the fish, found almost everywhere) (Tab. 17); 3. Fish-bull-shaped (combines characteristics of the previous two – fish-like in shape, but with bull-like features in the iconography, currently only found in the Geghama Mountains) (Tab. 18).

In the literature, there is also the opinion that some vishaps could have been ram-shaped<sup>169</sup>, which, in our opinion, is possible and should be considered in the final typology<sup>170</sup>.

In addition to various bull and fish depictions, two birds appear five times on bull-shaped vishaps (Imirzek 1, Azhdaha Yurt 5, Tokhmakhan Gjol 1, Gandza 1, Murjakheti 1); in one case, a possible “trident” motif is observed (Prospekt 1), and in another, what is likely a “tree of life” (Azhdaha Yurt 2 and possibly Azhdaha Yurt 5)<sup>171</sup>.

According to our preliminary estimate, there are approximately 48 bull-shaped, 25 fish-shaped, and 6 fish-bull-shaped vishaps within the territory of the Republic of Armenia. The remaining ones are unknown (5 of them are only mentioned in the literature, while the rest provide no information due to being incomplete or because the iconography has been later erased, although the form suggests that they should have been bull-shaped).

In addition to the aforementioned characteristics defining the proper/classical vishaps, there is a group of monolithic stones (17 in number) that only partially exhibit vishap elements. This group is conventionally referred to as “vishapoid”.

The “vishapoid” category was first introduced by I. Meshchaninov, who characterized them as survivors, which, however, share general features with proper vishaps. Among them, he mentions examples found outside the Armenian Highland<sup>172</sup>. Later, “vishapoids” were also mentioned by L. Melikset-Bek based on the Parvana material in 1927<sup>173</sup>. In the context of 23 examples by N. Marr and V. Smirnov, “vishapoids” are discussed by V. Mikhankova<sup>174</sup>. In subsequent studies, the number of vishapoids will certainly increase (the example from Bjnak 1 in Nakhijevan is also defined as such).

According to the material we have studied, the vishapoids are either imitations of vishaps (Ghurt Tapa 1–2, Geghashen 1, Yeghnajur 1, Lichk 1, Vishapasar 1, Vayk 1 (Tab. 32), or “pre-vishaps” (Kyurakand 1, Darik 1, Harzhis 1, Vayk 1 (Tab. 36), cf. the processed four-sided stele near Ahmadi Oba 1, which we conventionally refer to as Ahmadi Oba 2), or, in some cases, Christianized stelae, where the iconographic and morphological details have been altered, are difficult to interpret, or are illegible (Avanik 1, Garni 2, Karmrashen 1, Rind 1 (Tab. 29), Vayk 1 (Tab. 31), Angeghakot 1 (Tab. 33), Avan 1). In this context, it is highly likely that the stele discovered in the ruined tomb of the Vardut cemetery, which has fish-shaped features, should also be considered<sup>175</sup>.

The vishapoids differ from the classical examples in several ways: size (cf. the smaller sizes of Avan 1, Ghurt Tapa 1–2, Geghashen 1), shape (cf. the pattern of the recessed upper/lower parts in Kyurakand 1, Darik 1, and Ghurt Tapa 2, which has parallels with some classical vishaps (cf. Prospekt 1 and Prospekt 3), the fish-like shape in the cross-section of Ghurt Tapa 1 (cf. Arshaluys 3), or the indeterminate shape of Lichk 1), or iconography (e.g., the unique bull-head on Geghashen 1, cf. an example from Geghardalich<sup>176</sup>). One of the iconographic differences is that some vishapoids (cf. Harzhis 1 or Yeghnajur 1) are devoid of iconography, which likely indicates that these are closer to menhirs and probably date to the earliest period<sup>177</sup>. In this sense, the boundary between menhir and vishap is often defined not by shape but by iconography<sup>178</sup>. An example of this is the Tikkar 1 vishap with a bull image, which, according to A. Sanosyan, resembles the menhirs of Shamiram. L. Melikset-Bek calls it a menhir because he did not notice the bull image, which was observed by A. Sanosyan, who defines it as a vishap<sup>179</sup>. The same applies to Sarnaghbyur 1, which is listed as a menhir in the State Register of Monuments because the bull image was not noticed, and once this image is revealed, it becomes a vishap. In any case, both the vishap and the menhir can coexist in the same environment and be associated with cromlechs<sup>180</sup>.

Sometimes, vishapoids may have later features, such as the fish eye on Avan 1, depicted with a rosette. Although the rosette is known from the Bronze Age, this decorative motif is especially common in the medieval period<sup>181</sup>. It is likely that the rosette on this stele was added in the medieval era<sup>182</sup>.

The discussion of vishapoids in the context of classical vishaps is particularly justified by the fact that both often appear in similar historical-geographical environments (cf. especially Kyurakand 1 and Darik 1, which are found in concave meadows, with the latter located not far from Lake Arpi).

*Context and location.* During the survey works, it was discovered that high-altitude vishaps are almost always associated with medium-sized cromlechs (4–10 m in diameter) and their immediate environment, which may consist of other cromlechs, rock carvings, structures resembling “Oghuz/Giant’s House/Kyalafa” (tower-like structures/tombs) found within so-called “chingils” (lava accumulations), artificial stone accumulations, and water channels. Most of the vishaps re-

main fallen in their original location – typically at the center of a cromlech, possibly a tomb or a stone-paved pedestal – such as in the cases of Azhdaha-Yurt 1, 3, 4, and 6, Karmir Sar 1 and 7, and Maghalner 1<sup>183</sup>. However, in three cases – Diktash 1 in the Geghama Mountains, Ahmadi Oba 1, and possibly Sarnaghbyur 1 in the Aragats Massif – the vishap still stands in its original position<sup>184</sup>. As the study of the localization of these in situ vishaps shows, they were originally located not at the center of a cromlech or pedestal, but primarily at its immediate boundary – along the cromlech’s perimeter. In some cases, it is not excluded that they may have been positioned partially outside the cromlech as well<sup>185</sup>.

The type of cromlech/tomb visible in the environment of the vishaps is known from the Bronze and Iron Ages of the Armenian Highland. Their distribution at altitudes of 2,000–3,000 m above sea level was likely typical of periods when high mountainous regions acquired specific symbolic and functional significance. In the cromlechs associated with vishaps, we documented eight cases of non-scientific excavations conducted either recently or in earlier times. Five of these were carried out using machinery, completely disrupting the archaeological context<sup>186</sup>. However, the cromlechs of Azhdaha Yurt 3 and Diktash 1 in the Geghama Mountains, as well as Kyurakand 1 on Aragats, were opened using digging tools. This is evident, as Diktash 1 is one of the rare vishaps that remains standing in its original position. Here, as in the case of Lchashen 1, the “burial chamber” was oriented north-south, and the vishap stood at the northern edge of the cromlech, facing north.

In this context, the study of the distribution characteristics of vishaps and their associated cromlechs is particularly important. The territory of Armenia is rich in Bronze and Iron Age cromlechs/tombs, which often form well-defined environments. However, cromlechs/tombs situated at significantly higher altitudes tend to be more spread along mountain slopes, overlapping in clustered formations, making it difficult to determine where one ends and another begins. The preliminary study of the distribution characteristics of cromlechs associated with vishaps indicates that they differ significantly from others. Located at altitudes of 2,000–3,000 m, they exhibit two patterns of distribution. Most of them appear in groups, situated within well-defined concave meadows. These meadows are typically ancient volcanic satellite craters, rich in water and sometimes marshy. Vishaps are generally located in the flattest areas of these depressions – so flat that temporary residents often use them as playing fields and refer to them as “football fields” (cf. e.g., Karmir Sar and Kyurakand on Aragats, Gyoli Yurt in the Geghama Mountains)<sup>187</sup>. They emerge within cromlechs, surrounded by other cromlechs. Notably, solitary cromlechs/tombs are also consistently found at the highest points of the hills bordering these depressions (cf. e.g., Karmir Sar, Kyurakand, Tokhmakhan Gyol, and Maghalner).

The presence of vishaps in plateaus significantly reduces their visibility<sup>188</sup>. So far, we have identified four “vishap plateaus”, each consisting of cromlechs

made of at least five, and at most nine, vishaps. These are: Tokhmakhan Gyol<sup>189</sup> and Azhdaha Yurt in the Geghama Mountains, as well as Prospect and Karmir Sar in the Aragats mountain range. In the summer pastures known as Gyoli Yurt and Arshaluys in the Geghama Mountains, we have identified cromlechs made of fewer vishaps, three in total, which were located in similarly well-defined, flat, and water-rich, but not concave, meadows.

Unlike these grouped vishaps in clearly defined environments, the expedition documented a small number (12 in total) of vishaps also in the context of isolated cromlechs. These “lonely” vishaps may be placed in relatively concave meadows<sup>190</sup>, as well as in more visible locations<sup>191</sup>. Their most important feature and difference from the aforementioned grouped ones is that they are placed in such a way that no other vishap is visible from the corresponding point. In the case of the Imirzek group located in the Geghama Mountains, the cromlechs<sup>192</sup> follow the upper parts of the mountain range and avoid being visible. Particularly unique is the cultural environment of the depression called Maghalner (with rock carvings, cromlechs/tombs connected by spiral-shaped stone arrangements, and a structure reminiscent of a “oghuz/giant’s house”), where the only existing vishap plays a unique role in various ritualistic spheres. Similar environments are found in Kyurakand 1 of Aragats and especially in Mosunin Gyol 1 of Trialeti.

Thus, most cromlechs concerning the vishaps tend to cluster in isolated depressions, while some of the “solitary” ones leave a lasting impression on visitors as unique landmarks. In both cases, the creators of the vishaps avoided forming a “visibility network” across the mountain landscape. Whether grouped or standing alone, these vishaps are largely self-sufficient. It gives the impression that vishaps are meant to remain unseen by their surroundings, yet they themselves have an unobstructed view of “everything”. This is especially evident in vishap depressions such as Azhdaha Yurt, Karmir Sar, and Diktash 1, from which vast panoramic views extend in various directions across the Armenian Highland.

Our initial observations suggest that the placement of vishaps reflects a certain system, demonstrating regularities in their arrangement and altitude. For instance, the promontories of Aragats seem to serve as epicenters for vishaps, where they are positioned on similar planes. For example, Karmir Sar and Kyurakand are parallel to each other, located in similar depressions and at nearly the same altitude. While these environments are generally visible to one another, the vishaps themselves are not.

*The issue of function and significance:* For more than a century, vishaps were perceived solely as stelae placed at the focal points of prehistoric irrigation systems. However, new research focusing on the vishaps from an archaeological perspective reveals that they represent a much more complex phenomenon. It turns out that vishaps are primarily located in mountain plateaus, within or around cromlech structures (either tombs or platform sanctuaries). This characteristic suggests that vishaps are primarily stelae associated with the organization of collective memory

and are situated in high-altitude sacred areas. They may be syncretic in nature and carry a multifunctional significance. In this sense, it is appropriate to refer to vishaps as “memorial stelae”. The monument is, first and foremost, intended to preserve communal memory related to ancestors and key events connected to them. Moreover, ancestors are represented not only through the stele itself but also through the surrounding geographical landscape – mountains, rocks, rivers, and lakes. In this sense, such natural environments function as memorial complexes in their own right<sup>193</sup>. For this reason, to fully understand a vishap, it is essential to first perceive its environment.

The theory of vishaps being related to cultic structures, particularly cromlech-tombs, burial rites, and connections to ancestors, does not contradict the “channels” theory, but rather complements it<sup>194</sup>. By the way, early scholars, who proposed the channels theory, had already expressed similar ideas in the past.

Thus, although N. Marr remains silent about the cromlech-tombs of the Geghama Mountains<sup>195</sup>, when speaking about the hereditary connection between khachkars, early Christian and Urartian stelae, and vishaps, he characterizes them as “monuments of the ancestors”<sup>196</sup>. Y. Smirnov, on one occasion, writes that the bull-shaped vishaps could have served as tombs, temples, or boundary stelae, whereas the function of the fish-shaped ones remains unclear<sup>197</sup>. A. Kalantar writes the following about menhirs in general: “They apparently stand over graves, although no traces of burial have yet been found. Some scholars believe that menhirs were erected on sacred sites. This explanation essentially aligns with the first one, as burial places naturally became sacred due to the worship of the souls of the deceased. In any case, there is reason to believe that menhirs were originally created as tombstones”<sup>198</sup>. Similarly, St. Lisitsyan and Y. Bayburtyan write that menhirs “were erected in honor of a certain notable deceased person, or his slain enemy, or as a monument of a binding agreement, or even as a marker of a place of sacrifice... Usually, all three types of megalithic stelae (menhir, cromlech, dolmen – *authors*) are found together and arranged not far from each other”<sup>199</sup>.

Connection between menhirs, vishaps to cromlech-tombs has been discussed in other historical-archaeological<sup>200</sup> and mythological<sup>201</sup> contexts. It is important to note that this viewpoint is confirmed not only by the new vishaps discovered by our expedition but also in the context of previously known vishaps from sites such as Lchashen 1<sup>202</sup>, Attash 1<sup>203</sup>, Sarnaghbyur 1<sup>204</sup>, Vosketas 1, Darik 1<sup>205</sup>, Bjak 1<sup>206</sup>, Tepejik 1<sup>207</sup>, Tikmatash 1<sup>208</sup>, Mosunin Gyol 1<sup>209</sup>, and Chikiani 1<sup>210</sup>, which were found on or near tombs. Notably, a vishap-shaped menhir was also found on the burial mound of Trialeti V, where the famous silver-engraved bowl was discovered<sup>211</sup>.

Moreover, this viewpoint aligns with the popular perception among the people regarding the function of the vishaps. For instance, “the locals refer to these monuments as “graves of the oghuzes (giants)”, considering them as the upper slabs of tombs in the form of large cists”<sup>212</sup>. It is noteworthy that in the context

of the cromlechs of Aragats and Ghazakh – “spiral-shaped stone circles” (with tall stones often placed at their centers) – it is mentioned that as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the local population would go to these sites to pray, perceiving them as “graves of saints”<sup>213</sup>. This function of the vishaps, associated with ancestors, finds partial parallels both in prehistoric megalithic cultures<sup>214</sup> and in ancient<sup>215</sup> or medieval<sup>216</sup> contexts.

When speaking about pre-Christian sacred sites of Armenia, T. Toramanyan considered it possible that our ancestors, as nature-worshippers, performed their main religious rituals outdoors, on sites regarded as sacred – primarily mountain peaks<sup>217</sup>. In this sense, vishap environments could have served as similar sacred spaces. Within the mysterious atmosphere surrounding the vishaps – characterized by abundant water, pure air, thunderous fire, and closeness to the sun – cultic ceremonies likely took place, accompanied by sacrifices. These ceremonies were primarily directed toward the earth and the preservation of ancestral memory, which lies at the heart of the continuity of every society, as well as the well-being of the community and its members. That memory was sustained through recurring festivals, for which the vishap environments served as unique stages.

Thus, being a fundamentally syncretic phenomenon and expressing the unity of opposites – life and death – the vishap embodied all that humans aspired to attain through reverence for their ancestors: resurrection, fertility, water, and well-being<sup>218</sup>. The available data suggests that vishap environments most likely reflect a springtime feast<sup>219</sup>. It must have resembled an archaic syncretic ritual that simultaneously incorporated elements of consecration, exchange, orgiastic and burial rites<sup>220</sup>.

The aforementioned syncretic environments are aptly described by N. Adonts: “In the totemic period, fertility likely manifests in animal form, resembling one or another animal, beast, reptile, or bird. Later, it is represented by the figures of a man and a woman – stout-bodied and multi-breasted woman, and young, handsome man. The first represents the mother-earth, while the second symbolizes the thunderstruck sky. Their meeting and union occur at the summits of high mountains, buried in the clouds, where it seems that the sky truly descends, approaching the earth, fertilizing it with moisture, heavy rains, and bringing life to the lush nature, resurrecting it from the death of winter”<sup>221</sup>.

In the context of what has been said, the vishap is not a reflection of an independent parallel world or some phenomenon with a specific function, but rather the condensation of the spiritual potential of the internal system of that society – usually located far from the main settlements, but within their direct line of sight. This is why different scholars have observed various symbolic characteristics in the vishap, associating it with water, fertility, death and resurrection, and more. However, it is important not to separate the different manifestations of the same phenomenon; one must be able to define the multiple levels of the vishap transformation.

For the ancient inhabitants of Armenia, however, the high mountains could have had not only symbolic significance but could also serve as summer pastures and vital water sources<sup>222</sup>. Consequently, by suggesting a reevaluation of the “canals hypothesis”, we find it entirely possible to consider the specific and abstract connection of the vishaps with water. Particularly, the same social groups that created the vishaps could have been involved in water accumulation work, linking the placement of the vishaps to areas where melting snow gathered. After all, the majority of vishaps are located in water-rich environments, and one of their main types embodies a fish. In this sense, yes, the vishaps were also “guardians of the waters”<sup>223</sup>.

Here, in the duality of the sacred (primary) and the practical/utilitarian (secondary), the syncretism of the vishap is once again revealed – being the most characteristic feature of prehistoric man’s worldview, which, however, contains primary and secondary levels that may have both semantic and chronological sub-layers. From this perspective, the vishap could have had a primary role, but also other functions (just as the khachkar had in the Middle Ages).

It is still too early to speak about the absolute dating of the vishaps. In this sense, it is hard to disagree with H. Martirosyan, who emphasized the consistent nature of the domestication of high-altitude alpine meadows, the early spread of archaeological sites in these areas, and their development over millennia. “All these circumstances compel us to reconsider the hypothesis in our archaeology that the settlement of mountainous regions and the development of a semi-nomadic form of pastoralism in Transcaucasia and Armenia occurred in very late historical periods – during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages<sup>224</sup>. In this context, the prehistory or early history of the vishaps may date back to the pre-Bronze or Early Bronze Age. However, the key period for their existence still seems to be the Middle Bronze Age (around 2300/2200–1600/1500 BC), when high-altitude pastures began to be actively used by mobile groups (this viewpoint is supported by iconographic parallels with contemporaneous pottery ornaments, as well as certain features of burial rituals in the context of bull sacrifices). This period is characterized by a particular vibrancy of megalithic thinking (not only in the Armenian Highland), another evidence of which is the complex of Zorats Karer, characterized by symmetrical standing stones. In the context of chronology, returning to the “canals hypothesis,” it should be noted that it may seem particularly relevant starting from the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. Why? Archaeological research in the Armenian Highland shows that while the bearers of Middle Bronze Age cultures were mainly (semi-)nomadic societies whose cultural heritage is primarily represented by tombs, by the end of the Middle Bronze Age or during the transitional phase between the Middle and Late Bronze Ages – and especially in the Late Bronze Age – “cyclopean” fortification systems begin to emerge<sup>225</sup>. How did these fortresses and the settlements associated with them suddenly immerse? Among other factors, this shift in lifestyle may have stemmed from the need to establish and control water supply systems – a

need likely driven by a society that had already grown complex and had become a bearer of statehood. It is no coincidence that the subregions whose high points are marked by vishaps – particularly around Mount Aragats and the Geghama Mountains – are characterized by a dense network of cyclopean fortresses. These are thought to have been founded in the 17<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> centuries BC and to have reached their peak development by the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC.

The phenomenon of vishaps should be viewed within the broader framework of cultural developments – specifically, in the context of the dynamic interaction between sedentary, agrarian, lowland communities and semi-nomadic, pastoral, highland communities. In this regard, the classification of the altitudes within the vishap biosphere holds primary importance<sup>226</sup>. Taking into account the altitudes of the vishaps that are in their original locations, likely in their original locations (partially displaced), and those whose original position has been restored, two distinct levels of their appearance can be clearly identified:

1. High mountainous – approximately 2400–3200 m, where there are no permanent settlements, but summer residences, cromlechs/tombs, and sanctuaries are present. The following vishaps or groups of vishaps belong to this area: Dikhtash 1–3 (3174–2936), Maghalner 1 (3013), Gyoli Yurt 1–3 (2968–2963), Karmir Sar 1–9 (2852–2846), Kyurakand 1 (2818), Prospect 1–5 (2770), Ahmadi Oba 1 (2765), Arshaluys 1–3 (2714–2639), Tokhmakhan Gjol 1–5 (2700), Azhdaha Yurt 1–6 (2510–2472).

2. Foothills – approximately 1700–2300 m, where both permanent/temporary settlements and summer residences, cromlechs/tombs, and sanctuaries are present. The following vishaps or groups of vishaps belong to this area: Selim 1 (2340), Imirzek 1–5 (2338–2100), Davtashen 1 (2313), Hayseri Oba 1 (2299), Attash 1 (2285), Darik 1 (2147), Yegnajur 1 (2110), Vosketas 1 (2072), Lichk 1 (2025), Sarukhan 1 (2012), Sotk 1 (2009), Sarnaghbyur 1 (1867), Lchashen 1–2 (2057–1975), Ghurt Tapa 1–2 (1954), Buzhakan 1 (1820), Garni 1–2 (1390–1387)<sup>227</sup>.

The vishaps of the first level are classic, and we have already considered the principles of their spatial distribution. However, the fact that the vishaps of the second level consistently appear at nearly the same altitude (on average around 2000 m)<sup>228</sup> suggests that they were likely not moved from higher mountains but rather remain in their original locations or not far from them<sup>229</sup>. From this perspective, it is clear that these vishaps are associated not with (summer) highland pastures, but rather with (winter) lowland settlements and fairly culturalized environments. Classic examples of this are the regions of Imirzek, Lchashen, and Sarnaghbyur-Vosketas.

It is important that these two groups of vishaps exhibit environmental-level similarities. As is well known, the majority of highland vishaps are located near small lakes; similarly, the foothill vishaps are found in the environments of (larger) lakes (Sevan, Van, Sarnaghbyur, Tsovakn Hyusiso, Parvana, Arpi<sup>230</sup>). Most of

the foothill vishaps (Lchashen 1–2, Vosketas 1, Sarnaghbyur 1, Attash 1, Selim 1, Sarukhan 1, Darik 1, Lichq 1; cf. also Teghut 1 in Hark, at an altitude of around 2000 m) appear in concave open areas that are characteristic of highland vishaps as well. These concavities seem to reflect one of the most significant geographical features of the Armenian Highland – the plateau<sup>231</sup>. Both are found in the context of cromlechs/tombs, but unlike the highland vishaps, the foothill ones also function within the context of fortress-settlements. The latter are mostly isolated and do not appear in groups (at best, in pairs), though in several cases they are located relatively close to each other. For instance, in the foothill zone of the Geghama Mountains, the case of the Lchashen vishaps is noteworthy: Lchashen 1 and Lchashen 2 are separated by a large hill and serve as the “anchors” of two broad concave meadows. Both locations offer views of the Lchashen fortress and Lake Sevan, though the vishaps themselves are not visible to each other (in a similar manner, Teghut 1 faces Lake Van). Likewise, Sarukhan 1 appears in the environment of fortresses, cemeteries, and Lake Sevan. Interestingly, in terms of characteristics – especially iconography – it closely resembles Lchashen 2. Positioned at the edge of a concavity, Lichq 1 also faces Lake Sevan (it was likely relocated from the central part of the same concave area). Also noteworthy is the context of Attash 1 and Selim 1, which are situated close to one another. They lie within the same geographical environment, at nearly the same altitude, yet are not visible to each other. However, while Attash 1 appears within a somewhat culturalized zone – including not only cemeteries but also nearby fortresses<sup>232</sup> – Selim 1 is located near the highest point of the Selim Pass, which is likely not accidental. In the Aragats foothill zone, a similar relationship can be observed between Vosketas 1 and Sarnaghbyur 1. Both are positioned in the center of typical open spaces and seem to be situated within unique culturalized areas, with the vishaps appearing to serve as the axes of these worlds. From both points, one can see the fortresses around the hill Tsaghkasar, even though the vishaps themselves are not visible to each other<sup>233</sup>.

The geographical similarity between the two levels creates the impression that the foothill vishap environments reflect those of the highlands. This suggests that the society that created the vishaps may have conceived of a “miniature model of the world”, directly expressed through the organization of space and landscape<sup>234</sup>. The above mentioned indicates the simultaneous presence of vishaps at two levels of the same cultural system. This is further supported by the fact that the typology of vishaps based on their altitude does not yet allow for the identification of distinct chronological groups, since the elements from both levels significantly overlap in their characteristics.

Thus, the vishaps from both of these spheres can be understood as symbolic “anchors” within a system of interaction between different socio-cultural groups. Consequently, our classical scholars (A. Kalantar, T. Toramanyan, G. Ghapantsyan) were right in suggesting that the Aragats foothill clusters – such as Shamiram, Aruch, Kosh, Aghavnatun, Oshakan – with their diverse range of sites

(settlements, tombs, sanctuaries, standing stones, “oghuz/giants’ houses”<sup>235</sup>, towers, rock carvings), and, more broadly, their material and spiritual culture, should be directly connected to the creators of the vishaps<sup>236</sup>. In this regard, we agree with G. Ghapantsyan’s view: “This reflects the mythological worldview of agricultural communities and, to some extent, herders who would drive their livestock into the mountains during the summer”<sup>237</sup>.

Among foreign scholars, it was V. Gurko-Kryazhin who first identified this pattern. He referred to a “period of vishaps and cyclopean cities”, which chronologically preceded the culture of the Khaldians. In this sense, as early as the 1920s, he argued that vishaps should be considered within the context of the Transcaucasian “megalithic complex” (dolmens, menhirs, cromlechs, cyclopean fortresses), with which they were, in general, contemporary<sup>238</sup>.

In this context, it is worth adding that the foothills of Mounts Aragats, Geghama, and Nemrut, as well as the Trialeti-Javakheti and Tsovakn Hyusiso regions – that is, the areas which serve as centers for the distribution of vishaps – are also characterized by the presence of similar or related megalithic complexes (particularly cyclopean fortresses). This further emphasizes the existence of a distinct cultural sphere within the Armenian Highland<sup>239</sup>. However, a major question remains: does the spatial extent of the megalithic complex truly coincide with that of the vishaps, or do vishaps appear in more specific and rare zones? At present, we believe the latter hypothesis remains more viable.

Thus, the preliminary mapping of vishaps shows that they are found exclusively within the Armenian Highland<sup>240</sup>, with a total number (including vishapoids) of approximately 150, of which about 100 are located within the present-day Republic of Armenia. When placed in historical context, this data reveals that vishaps appear within four provinces and twelve corresponding districts of the central and northern regions of ancient Armenia. These are: Ayrarat (32 examples): Aragatsotn – 28, Vanand – 2, Shirak – 1, Basen – 1; Syunik (70 examples): Gegharkunik – 45, Vayots Dzor – 10, Sotk – 6, Nakhchavan – 2, Tsghuk – 3; Gugark (19 examples): Trialeti – 13, Javakheti – 4, Ashotsk – 2; Tayk (approx. 35 examples): Azordats Por – 25–30, Khaghtik – 2+, Aghtik – 1; Turuberan (1 example): Hark<sup>241</sup>.

These regions correspond to the third of the three historical-cultural zones of the Armenian Highland that we have identified – the Central-Northeastern zone (Ayrarat, Syunik, Gugark, Tayk, Bardzr Hayk, Turuberan, Vaspurakan, Mokq, Utik, Artsakh, Parskahayk). This zone is characterized by common trends in historical-archaeological development, particularly during the Bronze and Iron Ages<sup>242</sup>.

Although the significance and chronological relationships of the distribution centers of vishaps are not yet fully understood, the fact that, according to mapping data, the simple/unadorned forms of vishaps are found predominantly on the Aragats mountain massif – while the more complex/decorated types appear in the Geghama Mountains and elsewhere – may suggest that Aragats was likely the cradle of vishap formation, while the Geghama Mountains became the epicenter of

their flourishing phase. It is no coincidence that while bull-like forms are found nearly everywhere, fish-like ones are present in most regions, but high-quality hybrids – crafted with great mastery – appear only in the Geghama range. Thus, the Ayrarat region (particularly Aragatsotn) likely represents the cradle of the vishap phenomenon<sup>243</sup>, Syunik (especially Gegharkunik) marks the center of their flourishing, and Gugark as well as Tayk can be viewed as secondary zones of distribution. The appearance of a vishap in Turuberan is also of significant importance, suggesting that further examples may still emerge from that area. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the highest vishaps are located on Aragats and the Geghama Mountains, from where they may have “descended” into lower zones over time.

At the same time, it is possible that the various epicenters of vishap distribution form distinct groups, each characterized by specific features. Clear examples of such groupings may include the vishaps of Mount Aragats, the Geghama Mountains, and the Trialeti-Javakheti region. However, a definitive answer to this question is not yet possible, as the extent of chronological differences among the vishaps found in these regions remains unclear. Nevertheless, in all probability, any such differences are relatively minor, given the limited number of distinguishing features among the examples.

Thus, an attempt was made to undertake a preliminary typology of the cultic objects in the Syunik region (platforms and monumental stelae with their respective subtypes) and to examine them within the context of a complex cultic landscape. The available data indicate that these monuments are marked by significant diversity, while the cultic landscape – characterized by a set of unifying features – was shaped through the complex social processes of the Bronze and Iron Ages and incorporates both natural and anthropogenic elements. At the same time, this study, as a preliminary attempt, primarily brings to light a number of issues that may become subjects of future investigation.

The scarcity of data does not allow for a comprehensive functional typology or a definitive interpretation of the original purpose of the cultic sites. Nevertheless, the examples cited above generally reveal their association with ancestor worship (altars, statues, menhirs, vishaps) or fertility cults (phallic idols, “navel stones”), although by their very nature, these monuments should be viewed as syncretic in character. At the same time, a non-ritualistic function may also be possible for certain examples – for instance, menhirs could have served as boundary stones or may have been repurposed for such use.

The clarification of the archaeological context is also of great importance. While the context of the cromlech (= tomb or platform) is gradually becoming clearer in relation to the menhirs and vishaps, rock carvings have been documented near platforms placed on rocky outcrops and boulders, alongside traces of both settlement and burial structures.

The issue of dating these monuments and their surrounding contexts is particularly complex, as they appear as culturally persistent elements over extend-

ed periods and often bear traces of secondary use. In this regard, it is often only possible to speak in terms of chronological ranges. For instance, in the absence of a clear context, cultic platforms can generally be regarded as a phenomenon of the Bronze and Iron Ages (particularly the Iron Age), although their use may have remained consistent into later periods (cf., e.g., “navel stones”). Regarding the statues and sculpted stones, starting from the Late Bronze Age and especially during the Early/Middle Iron Age, a process of anthropomorphization becomes evident, as well as the combination of different images on a single stele<sup>244</sup>. The menhirs and vishaps are, in all probability, contemporaneous (this is also suggested by the fact that they sometimes appear as components of the same environment – c.f., for example, Selim 1–2 (Tab. 23, 24), possibly also Attash 1–4 (Tab. 25–28). They should be viewed within the context of the megalithic complex of Armenia and the surrounding regions, which is visible in the pre-Urartian period, more specifically around the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC.

From a technical perspective, the creation of the stelae involved various sculptural techniques, including full-volume sculpturing (Harzhis, Arvakan, Tsovaghyugh), high relief (Khnutsakh), bas-relief (Harzhis – accidental find, Shaghat), and engraving (statues of Arvakan, rock carvings) (Tab. 4). The majority of the discovered stelae (menhirs, vishaps, the anthropomorphic idol of Harzhis) were intended to be perceived in their entirety, as they were placed in open areas, on burial mounds, or in the central parts of structures. At the same time, certain features of some stelae suggest that they were meant to be viewed frontally. For example, the back of the Arvakan stele was left unworked, and the lateral protrusions of the head – presumably representing beaks - were depicted with slanted lines, suggesting that the statue was embedded. The Tsovaghyugh idol was worked only on the left side, indicating that it, too, was probably embedded or leaned against a wall. The flat backs of the stelae from Shaghat and Harzhis (accidental find) also suggest that they were embedded.

## References

- 1 Archaeologically, the presence of relevant material in the studied area can be considered a defining characteristic of an altar (cf. below: tombs № 1 in section IV and № 1 and 3 in section V of Kapan, tomb № 105 of Keren) or the presence of traces of specific ritual activities (see below: tomb № 1 of Keren). In this regard, it should be noted that H. Martirosyan, examining the archaeological material found near rock carvings, rightly points out that this indicates the site's function as a place of sacrifice (Martirosyan, Israyelyan, op. cit., p. 47). From an architectural perspective, structural elements related to libations – such as cup-shaped depressions, basins, and rock-carved channels – can be considered characteristic features of an altar (see below: Khnatsakh, Ishak Meydan, cf. Bjni, Karmir Berd).
- 2 N. S. Ibrahimov, *On the Domestication of the Highland Zones of Azerbaijan* (Based on the Data from the Kelbajar Highlands), AEIA 1985, Baku, 1986, p. 25–27. It should be noted that the fact of the contemporaneity of the rock carvings and the “public structure” is unclear.
- 3 I. Gharibyan, H. Hakobyan, A. Gnuni, G. Khachatryan, T. Vartanesova, *The Sites of Bjni* (Excavation Results), *Hushardzan* 6, 2010, p. 71.
- 4 D. Akhundov, *Architecture*, p. 80; M. Farajeva, *Rock Art of Azerbaijan*, Baku, 2009, p. 341, Fig. 67b; H. Martirosyan, H. Israelyan, op. cit., p. 39, 49, Fig. 290.
- 5 M. Farajeva, op. cit., p. 228.
- 6 H. Martirosyan, H. Israelyan, op. cit., p. 39, 49, Fig. 290.
- 7 M. Freikman, *A Near Eastern Megalithic Monument in Context*, eTepoi, *Journal for Ancient Studies* 3, 2012, p. 143–144.
- 8 R. Biscione, S. Hmayakyan, N. Parmegiani, op. cit., p. 97.
- 9 N. Adonts, *History of Armenia*, p. 11–12.
- 10 The hill Ardar Davit is frequently mentioned in folk traditions, associated with cannibalism during famine years (A. Ghanalanyan, *Traditional Folk Tales*, Yerevan, 1969, p. 34). Incidentally, it should be noted that Artemi Araratski, quoting this myth, describes Just David's cave as if describing a cist: “A cave made of stones, spacious enough for one person, with a pit dug in its side, filled with a large quantity of human bones” (*Life of Artemi Araratski*, p. 49).
- 11 During the archaeological research of Tsitsernakaberd, numerous altar-rock outcrops directed towards the Hrazdan River have been discovered (H. Hakobyan, personal communication, 11.10.2014).
- 12 S. Sardaryan, *Armenia: The Cradle of Civilization*, Yerevan, 2004, p. 443–446.
- 13 Y. Asatryan, *Sites of the Talin Region*, Yerevan, 2004, p. 54.
- 14 T. N. Chubinashvili, *On the Ancient History of the South Caucasus*, Tbilisi, 1971, p. 50.
- 15 S. A. Yesayan, *Sculpture of Ancient Armenia*, 1980, p. 59, Tab. 58/3. It should be noted that the pointed-gable entrance has parallels in the dolmens of the Gyaur Damer cemeteries.
- 16 S. A. Yesayan, *Sculpture*, p. 58, Tab. 58/1–2.
- 17 G. Sargsyan, *Excavations of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium BC Site of Talin*, RFAW, 1987–1988, p. 9–10; Avetisyan P., Muradyan F., Sargsyan G., *Early Bronze Age Burial Mounds at Talin*, *Von Maikop bis Trialeti: Gewinnung und Verbreitung von Metallen und Obsidian in Kaukasien im 4.–2. Jt. v. Chr.*, Bonn, 2010, p. 161–165.
- 18 M. Zardaryan, *Contemporary Archaeological Researches*; cf. S. Harutyunyan, *Ancient Armenian Beliefs, Religion, Cult, and Pantheon*, Yerevan, 2001, p. 15–16; N. Taghavaryan, *The Ancient Religions of the Armenians*, Constantinople, 1909, p. 34–35; Gh. Alishan, *Ancient Beliefs or Pagan Religions of the Armenians*, Venice, 1910, p. 444–445.
- 19 O. Xnkikyan, *Excavations of 2<sup>nd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> Millennia BC Tombs in Sisian*, AWNCA I, 1993, p. 37.
- 20 H. Simonyan, *Verin Naver*, Yerevan, 2006, p. 36.
- 21 G. Areshyan, Y. Asatryan, *Results of the Archaeological Field Work of the Center for Armenian Studies in 1979–1983*, *BYU* 3, 1985, p. 203–204.

- 22 G. Narimanishvili, Trialeti in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC, Tbilisi, 2006, p. 74.
- 23 G. Sargsyan, A. Gnuni, A. Hakobyan, Formation of the Eastern Border Defense System of Syunik, p. 153.
- 24 G. Areshyan, G. Tumanyan, Tomb № 5 of the Aruch Cemetery, RFAW 1989–1990, Yerevan, 1991, p. 24–25.
- 25 O. Xnkikyan, op. cit., p. 43.
- 26 G. Areshyan, Y. Asatryan, op. cit., p. 205; G. Areshyan, Rescue Excavations in the Kanagegh Cemetery, p. 3; L. Kirakosyan, Architecture of the Tombs of Kanagegh, p. 97–98.
- 27 A. Gnuni, G. Khachatryan, Field Research in the Shalva River Basin and on the Left Bank of the Hochants, HA 1–12, Venice-Yerevan, 2003, p. 253–254.
- 28 G. Tumanyan, The Structure of Late Bronze Age Tombs in Armenia, HPJ 1, 2003, p. 175.
- 29 S. Devejyan, Lori Berd 2, Yerevan, 2006, p. 62.
- 30 A. Simonyan, Excavations of the Verin Naver Cemetery, AD 1980, Moscow, 1981, p. 426.
- 31 H. Avetisyan, Excavations at the Aygeshat Cemetery, BYU 2, 1996, p. 157.
- 32 G. Tumanyan, op. cit., p. 179.
- 33 T. S. Khachatryan, Ancient Culture of Shirak, Yerevan, 1974, p. 35.
- 34 M. Hasratyan, Historical and Archaeological Studies, p. 168–170; S. Yesayan, The Early Archaeological Sites of Zangezur, HSS 4, 1972, p. 65; O. Xnkikyan, op. cit., p. 67.
- 35 G. Tumanyan, op. cit., p. 179; S. Barkhudaryan, Monuments of Material Culture in Soviet Armenia, p. 32–33.
- 36 O. Xnkikyan, op. cit., p. 26, 50.
- 37 O. Xnkikyan, op. cit., p. 26.
- 38 S. Barkhudaryan, op. cit., p. 33.
- 39 Y. Lalayan, Zangezur, p. 16.
- 40 H. Martirosyan, Late Bronze Age Settlements and Cemeteries, ASA 2/III, p. 23.
- 41 G. Sargsyan, A. Gnuni, A. Hakobyan, op. cit., p. 164–165.
- 42 The Sarnaghbyur Cemetery was studied in 2014 by the expedition of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic Government Tourism Department (G. Sargsyan, A. Gnuni, L. Hovhannisyan, Z. Yrkoyan).
- 43 G. Tumanyan, op. cit., p. 169.
- 44 L. Petrosyan, Excavations of the Lchashen Cemetery (2005–2006), p. 129.
- 45 G. Areshyan, K. Ghafadaryan, K. Hovhannisyan (ed.), History of Armenian Architecture, Yerevan, 1996, p. 70.
- 46 A. Ivanovskiy, Through Transcaucasia, p. 145.
- 47 A. Gnuni, G. Khachatryan, G. Mikaelyan, Excavations of the Northern Hill of the Keren Cemetery, CAA XIV, p. 182.
- 48 The № 106 tomb of Keren was investigated by the expedition of the Cultural Heritage public organization (A. Gnuni, A. Tadevosyan, H. Ohanyan).
- 49 K. Kh. Kushnareva, The Khojali Cemetery, HPJ 3, 1970, p. 111.
- 50 A. Gnuni, G. Khachatryan, G. Mikaelyan, op. cit., p. 182–183.
- 51 O. Xnkikyan, op. cit., p. 43.
- 52 H. Mnatsakanyan, The Main Stages of the Development of the Material Culture of Lchashen, HPJ 2, 1965, p. 96; K. Kh. Kushnareva, T. N. Chubinashvili, Ancient Cultures of the South Caucasus, Leningrad, 1971, p. 63.
- 53 K. Kh. Kushnareva, The Khojali Cemetery, p. 110.
- 54 In this context, it is necessary to mention the traces of rectangular structures with a central standing stone located near the tombs in the Spitakajur 1 cemetery. The pottery collected from the destroyed examples of the tombs and structures proves their contemporaneity

- (third quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC). On the one hand, these structures may have had a ritual-cultic function, as indicated by the minimal cultural layer in the destroyed examples and the uniform layout of the structures. However, it cannot be ruled out that they served as temporary dwellings for the local population engaged in a pastora economy.
- 55 Y. Lalayan, *Province of Sharur Daralageaz*, p. 261.
- 56 Y. Lalayan, *Zangezur*, p. 186.
- 57 S. Lisitsyan, *The Armenians of Zangezur*, p. 200, 285, Tab. CXVIII.
- 58 The ritual functions of phallus-shaped structures will be discussed in detail below, within the context of phallus-shaped monumental stelae.
- 59 I. Gharibyan, H. Simonyan, A. Gnuni, E. Kamalyan, E. Ayvazyan, G. Khachatryan, *New Discoveries in Syunik Hushardzan 7*, p. 130.
- 60 The site was studied in 2014 by the expedition of the Artsakh Tourism Agency (G. Sargsyan).
- 61 I. Gharibyan, H. Simonyan, A. Gnuni, E. Kamalyan, E. Ayvazyan, G. Khachatryan, *op. cit.*, p. 132. The stone № 93 of Gobustan, adorned with solar motifs, serves as a cultic platform, and there is also a hearth nearby. The surface material discovered at this site is characteristic of the Copper Age and Early Bronze Age (M. Farajeva, *op. cit.*, p. 223).
- 62 Kh. Samuelyan, *Culture of Ancient Armenia*, p. 314–315.
- 63 Thus, when discussing cultic sites, St. Lisitsyan and Y. Bayburtyan write: “There are also cup mark or sacrificial stones, on which sometimes irregular and unsystematic, and at other times geometrically arranged, holes are found. There are regular round holes with a diameter of five centimeters or less. In some villages, the inhabitants continue to venerate these cup mark stones, carving crosses on them” (St. Lisitsyan, Y. Bayburtyan, *Cataloging and Description of Antiquities*, Yerevan, 1928, p. 36–37; from an ethnographic perspective, cf. also Kh. Samuelyan, *op. cit.*, p. 290–298). T. Toramanyan writes that circular holes appear on rocks or separate stones (Metsamor, Marmashen, Aghts), “which were a sacred form for pre-Christian people according to their cult” (T. Toramanyan, *Armenian Architecture 1*, Yerevan, 1942, p. 38–39, 40). In this context, Toramanyan also mentions the circular holes on the vishap at Tikmatash (= Hayseri Oba 1) (T. Toramanyan, *Armenian Architecture 2*, Yerevan, 1948, p. 229). E. Khanzadyan also noticed the “cup mark depressions” on the vishaps, which he compared to the circular/oval holes characteristic of the decorative art of the Kura-Araxes culture pottery (E. Khanzadyan, *Garni IV*, AEA 12, Yerevan, 1969, p. 157; for the Kura-Araxes context, especially regarding hearths and vessel depressions, cf. also E. A. Bayburtyan, *Sequence of Development of the Ancient Cultures of Armenia Based on Archaeological Material*, Yerevan, 2011, p. 54; G. Ismailov, *Early Bronze Culture of Azerbaijan*, Candidate Dissertation Abstracts, Tbilisi, 1983, p. 15; A. Gnuni, *The Hearths and Their Complexes of the Shengavit Culture*, HPJ 1, 2004, p. 219). M. Hovhannisyan addressed the presence of cup mark depressions in rock-cut sanctuaries (especially on the southern slopes of Mount Aragats), and in this context, he also mentions the vishaps (M. P. Hovhannisyan, *The Sanctuary of Voskehat*, HSS 2, 2001, p. 147; for Agarak, see P. Avetisyan, *Recently Found Archaeological Sites of Armenia (Agarak)*, *Aramazd III/2*, 2008, p. 39–50). Cup marks should be considered part of the “megalithic culture”, and it is no coincidence that they also appear in the environments of slab constructions associated with cyclopean fortresses (Ordaklu, Zagal, Sarnaghbyur, Horom) (B. B. Piotrovskiy, L. T. Gyuzalyan, *Fortresses of Pre-Urartian and Urartian Armenia*, *Problems of the History of Material Culture* 5–6, 1933, p. 55–56).
- 64 N. Karamzin refers to similar stones in Russia, as well as depressions resembling hoof prints and footprints (N. M. Karamzin, *History of the Russian State*, vol. 1, book 1, Moscow, 1988, p. 38–39).
- 65 T. M. Potyomkina, *Megalithic Structures of the Urals: Structure of Sacred Space*, *Bulletin of Archaeology, Anthropology, and Ethnography* 2, 2011, p. 13.
- 66 I. Bgazhnikov, *The Sacred Meaning of Cup mark Signs*, *Bulletin of the Institute for Humanitarian Research of the Kabardino-Balkarian Center of the RAS* 1, Nalchik, 2013, p. 7; I. Markov, D. N. Markov, *The Megalithic Era in the Territory of Sochi National Park*, *Samarskaya Luka: Problems of Regional and Global Ecology* 22/4, Moscow, 2013, p. 167.

- 67 A. R. Demirkhanyan, B. A. Frolov, *Primitive Symbolism of the Vertical*, HPJ 3, 1985, p. 70.
- 68 B. B. Piotrovskiy, *Archaeology of Transcaucasia*, Leningrad, 1949, p. 27.
- 69 R. Torosyan, *The Archaeological Sites of Etchmiadzin*, Report Presented at the Seminar Dedicated to the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Zvartnots Excavations in 1980, p. 8 (The manuscript and the typewritten version of the report, from which the citation is made, are kept at HEME); I. Gharibyan, H. Hakobyan, A. Gnuni, G. Khachatryan, T. Vartanesova, Bjni (Excavation Results), p. 71–72; I. Gharibyan, H. Simonyan, A. Gnuni, E. Kamalyan, E. Ayvazyan, G. Khachatryan, *New Discoveries in Syunik*, Hushardzan 7, Yerevan, 2011, p. 132.
- 70 Due to the lack of an archaeological context in Shrvakan, it is difficult to draw a definitive conclusion about the significance of this stone.
- 71 The example of vishaps and European stelae suggests that they could have been placed vertically as well (e.g., the stelae decorated with cup mark depressions found in the Pyatikhatki area near Anapa, the Solokh aul in Abkhazia, and from burial mound № 2 in Yevpatoria) (A. Novichikhin, *Stones with Cup Mark Depressions from the Anapa Region*, *Historical and Archaeological Almanac of the Local Lore Museum of Armavir*, vol. 1, Moscow-Armavir, 1995, p. 26).
- 72 G. Areshyan, Y. Asatryan, *op. cit.*, p. 206; Y. Asatryan, *op. cit.*, p. 28, 31–32; R. Torosyan, O. Xnkikyan, L. Petrosyan, *Ancient Shirakavan*, Yerevan, 2002, p. 71–73.
- 73 P. Avetisyan, *Preliminary Results of the Excavations at the Agarak Site*, AEFC, Holy Etchmiadzin, 2003, p. 54–55; H. Hakobyan, A. Gnuni, *Observations*, p. 90.
- 74 A. Gnuni, *The Hearths of the Shengavit Culture*, p. 219.
- 75 G. Ismailov, *op. cit.*, p. 15; A. Novichikhin, *op. cit.*, p. 27–28; I. Bgazhnokov, *op. cit.*, p. 9; Y. Asatryan, *op. cit.*, p. 31–32. This view was first presented by the archaeologist P. Putyatina in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, analyzing the cup marked stone found in the Tver region (N. Krivtsov, N. Nepomniashtchi, *Prehistoric Europe*, Moscow, 2004, p. 231–232). Cf. also V. A. Gurko-Kryazhin, *Cyclopean Structures of Transcaucasia*, *Noviy Vostok* 15, 1926, p. 218, in the context of the vishaps.
- 76 E. V. Antonova, *The First Sanctuaries of the Armenian Highland*, *Interdisciplinary Studies of the Cultural Genesis and Ethnogenesis of the Armenian Highland and Adjacent Regions*, Yerevan, 1990, p. 55; A. Novichikhin, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
- 77 I. Bgazhnokov, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
- 78 N. Shirokova, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
- 79 N. Krivtsov, N. Nepomniashtchi, *op. cit.*, p. 234.
- 80 N. Shanshashvili, *The Origin and Functions of Hearth Supports in the Kura-Araxes Culture*, AEFC, Holy Etchmiadzin, 2003, p. 59.
- 81 I. Bgazhnokov, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
- 82 V. V. Sedov, *Eastern Slavs in the 7<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, *Archaeology of the USSR*, Moscow, 1982, p. 264; N. Krivtsov, N. Nepomniashtchi, *op. cit.*, p. 228.
- 83 Y. Lalayan, *Sisian*, p. 130.
- 84 M. Farajeva, *op. cit.*, p. 222–223; cf. C. Rüstamov, F. Muradova, *Qobustan*, Baki, 2008, s. 51, 217.
- 85 N. Shirokova, *op. cit.*, p. 104–105.
- 86 R. Torosyan, *Gayane (Iran, Palestine)*, *Diary Entries*, HEME, The Fund of R. Torosyan, cf. M. A. Dandamaev, *New Data on the Religion of Persia at the Turn of the 6<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> Centuries BC*, *JAH* 2, 1974, p. 20.
- 87 Thus, the corresponding complexes of Metsamor are associated with celestial imagery (the carvings on the Pokr Blur), water worship (Mets Blur), and fire altars (the second group of carvings on the Mets Blur) (E. Khanzadyan, K. Mkrtchyan, E. Parsamyan, *Metsamor*, Yerevan, 1973, p. 142–165). Stones with depressions were also used as fire altars in Pasargadae (M. Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, Moscow, 1988, p. 64).
- 88 In this regard, the signs carved on the cromlechs and slab of the tomb in the Aparan cemetery are particularly noteworthy (F. Muradyan, *Newly Discovered Hieroglyphs from the Aparan Region*, p. 103–105).

- <sup>89</sup> G. H. Karakhanyan, P. G. Safyan, *Rock Carvings of Syunik*; H. A. Martirosyan, H. R. Israelyan, *Rock Carvings of the Geghama Mountains*; H. A. Martirosyan, *Rock Carvings of the Geghama Mountains*. For new research cf. A. Khechoyan, *The Rock Art of the Mt. Aragats System, Rock Art in the Frame of the Cultural Heritage of Humankind, XXII Valcamonica Symposium, Capo di Ponte, 2007*, 247–252; F. Knoll, H. Meller, B. Figur, G. Knoche, T. Schunke, V. Dresely, P. Avetisyan, T. Koiki, J. Lipták, A. Poppe, *Die Felsbilder im Hochland von Syunik, Archäologie in Armenien II*, Halle, 2013, 209–234. For Western Armenia cf. M. Uyanik, *Petroglyphs of South-Eastern Anatolia*, Graz, 1974.
- R. Torosyan's photographs depict the rock carvings of Paytasar/Nal-Tapa in the Geghama Mountains (R. Torosyan's photo archive, HEME, R. Torosyan's collection) – one of the first groups of rock carvings discovered in Armenia. These were first studied by L. Lisitsyan in 1913, later examined by geologist S. Demyokhin in the 1940s, and copied by S. Sardaryan in 1964–1965. Mets Paytasar is perhaps the oldest site in Armenia, where R. Torosyan discovered dagger-like and other tools made from large and small obsidian blades. These tools have parallels in Neolithic and Chalcolithic complexes, were used as sacrificial instruments, and were left in place. At Mets and Pokr Paytasar, there are also rock carvings from the Early, Middle, and Late Bronze Age, as well as from the Iron Age. Numerous drillings have been made here, but no datable material has been found (only stone hammers, with which the images were carved, have been discovered) (H. A. Martirosyan, H. R. Israelyan, *op. cit.*, p. 7, 22–23; H. A. Martirosyan, *op. cit.*, p. 17–18, Tab. V). Near Pokr Paytasar, tombs are also mentioned (H. A. Martirosyan, *New Sites of Prehistoric Culture in Armenia*, HPJ 3, 1969, p. 193).
- <sup>90</sup> A. A. Martirosyan, *The City of Teishebaini, Yerevan*, 1961, p. 82–84.
- <sup>91</sup> B. Arakelyan, *Sculpture in Ancient Armenia*, HPJ 1, 1969, p. 43.
- <sup>92</sup> S. Yesayan, *Sculpture*, p. 30–31, Tab. 41/ 3, 6.
- <sup>93</sup> S. Yesayan, *Sculpture*, p. 30–31, Tab. 41/1.
- <sup>94</sup> A. Gnuni, *op. cit.*, p. 129–130.
- <sup>95</sup> M. I. Steblin-Kamenskiy, *Myth*, Moscow, 1977, p. 79–80. Such sexual power is characteristic of Zeus (M. I. Steblin-Kamenskiy, *op. cit.*), Odin (*The Elder Edda, The Song of Harbard*, 18, 20, 30), and Indra (E. N. Tyomkin, V. G. Erman, *Myths of Ancient India*, Moscow, 1989, p. 80).
- <sup>96</sup> R. Torosyan, *Diary № 1, The Cemetery of Aygeshat Village in the Etchmiadzin Region (1971)*; R. Torosyan, *Diary for the Years 1976–1983*, entry of April 28, 1983, HEME, R. Torosyan's collection, materials are kept at HEME.
- <sup>97</sup> The photograph has been submitted to HEME.
- <sup>98</sup> S. A. Yesayan, *op. cit.*, 55, Tab. 43/2.
- <sup>99</sup> B. Arakelyan, *Sculpture in Ancient Armenia*, p. 49.
- <sup>100</sup> S. Yesayan, *Sculpture*, Tab. 21/1, 2.
- <sup>101</sup> Cf. S. Yesayan, *Sculpture*, p. 51, 69, Tab. 23; E. Khanzadyan, K. Mkrtchyan, E. Parsamyan, *Metsamor, Yerevan*, 1979, p. 138–139, Fig. 142, 143.
- <sup>102</sup> S. A. Yesayan, *Sculpture*, Tab. 22/1, 42/1.
- <sup>103</sup> B. Arakelyan, *Sketches of the Art History of Ancient Armenia, Yerevan*, 1976, p. 14.
- <sup>104</sup> A. Gnuni, *The “Priestly” Tomb of Keren, BYU 3*, 2006, p. 215–216, Fig. 1.
- <sup>105</sup> B. Arakelyan, *Sketches*, p. 14–16.
- <sup>106</sup> The statue discovered east of Tsovagyugh, along the Shorja road, stands out for its distinctive construction features. The head, shin, and one arm were found. Here, unlike other examples, the frontal part is not flat but rather curved. The upper part of the head resembles a hat, decorated with a triangular pattern. The ear is marked in relief, and the chin is massive. Notably, only the left side of the statue is worked. The leg is preserved from the knee down to the foot, while the arm is an extension of the shoulder. The fact that the statue is only worked on one side suggests that it was embedded in a wall or leaned against it (B. Arakelyan, *Sculpture*, p. 49–52; S. Yesayan, *Sculpture*, p. 55, Tab. 43/5).

- <sup>107</sup> S. Yesayan, *Sculpture*, p. 51–54, Tab. 28–34; O. Xnkikyan, *Syunik*, Tab. 9.
- <sup>108</sup> S. Yesayan, *Sculpture*, p. 54, Tab. 34; O. Xnkikyan, *Syunik*, Tab. XC.
- <sup>109</sup> S. Yesayan, *Sculpture*, p. 54; O. Xnkikyan, *Syunik*, Tab. LXXIX/8.
- <sup>110</sup> O. Xnkikyan, *Syunik*, Tab. 14, Tab. LXXXIII, LXXXVI/38.
- <sup>111</sup> A. Gnuni, *The “Priestly” Tomb of Keren*, p. 215–216.
- <sup>112</sup> O. Xnkikyan, *Syunik*, Tab. 14, Tab. XLV/18, LXXV/19.
- <sup>113</sup> I. Gharibyan, H. Simonyan, A. Gnuni, E. Kamalyan, E. Ayvazyan, G. Khachatryan, *New Discoveries in Syunik*, p. 129–140. The object was researched in 2005 by a joint expedition of the Center for Historical and Cultural Heritage and Yerevan State University (led by I. Gharibyan, H. Simonyan). It was registered by E. Kamalyan, E. Ayvazyan, and G. Khachatryan.
- <sup>114</sup> Y. Lalayan, *Zangezur*, p. 37.
- <sup>115</sup> It is difficult to determine the original placement of this stela. On one hand, due to its secondary use, it has been transformed into a khachkar and is located within the territory of a medieval cemetery. However, the same area also contained a cemetery from the 7<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. Moreover, considering the symbolic functions of the snake associated with underworld worship and burial rites, its place seems to be logical. In ancient Greek mythology (Apolodorus, *Bibliotheca*, Moscow, 2004, I, III, 2, I, IX, 11; Aeschylus, *The Sacrifice at the Tomb*, Moscow, 1958, 520–540), Etruscan mythology (A. Nagovitsyn, *op. cit.*, p. 108–109), and Russian folk tales (A. N. Afanasyev, *Russian Folk Tales*, Moscow, 1984–1985, 128), the snake was associated with the underworld. In Germanic mythology, the snake is one of the symbols of the unity of death and rebirth (*Saga of the Völsungs*, XVIII).
- <sup>116</sup> F. Muradyan, *Excavations of the Kuchak IV Cluster*, *Hushardzan* 7, Yerevan, 2011, p. 97, Tab. 19 (13).
- <sup>117</sup> The descriptions by M. Adamyan, Ph.D., an employee of the Institute of Zoology of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia.
- <sup>118</sup> The descriptions by N. Manaseryan, an employee of the Institute of Zoology of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia.
- <sup>119</sup> A. Gnuni, *The Types and Ritual Functions of Phallic Stelae in the Armenian Highland*, *BYU* 2, 2004, 15, p. 123–124.
- <sup>120</sup> S. Yesayan, *Sculpture*, p. 59, Tab. 54/1.
- <sup>121</sup> Y. Lalayan, *Excavations of Tombs*, Fig. 93.
- <sup>122</sup> The site was studied in 2010 by G. Sargsyan.
- <sup>123</sup> G. S. Ismailov, *Ancient Settlements between Guruchay and Kenedelenchay Rivers*, Baku, 1981, Fig. 13.
- <sup>124</sup> S. Yesayan, *Sculpture*, Tab. 54; T. S. Khachatryan, *op. cit.*, Fig. 81; K. G. Ghafadaryan, *The City of Dvin and Its Excavations*, vol. 2, Yerevan, 1982, p. 115, Fig. 88.
- <sup>125</sup> S. Yesayan, *Sculpture*, p. 59, Tab. 54/1; Y. Lalayan, *Excavations of Tombs*, Fig. 93.
- <sup>126</sup> G. S. Ismailov, *op. cit.*, Fig. 13.
- <sup>127</sup> A. Gnuni, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
- <sup>128</sup> A. Gnuni, *op. cit.*; Y. Lalayan, *Nor Bayazet or Gegharkunik: Prehistoric Period*, *EJ* XIV, 1906, p. 11; Y. Lalayan, *Nor Bayazet or Gegharkunik: Prehistoric Period*, *EJ* XV, 1907, p. 175.
- <sup>129</sup> S. Yesayan, *Sculpture*, p. 59, Tab. 54/1; Y. Lalayan, *Excavations of Tombs*, Fig. 93; A. Gnuni, *op. cit.*
- <sup>130</sup> S. Yesayan, *Sculpture*, p. 59, Tab. 54/5,6.
- <sup>131</sup> A. Gnuni, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
- <sup>132</sup> G. S. Ismailov, *op. cit.*, Fig. 13.
- <sup>133</sup> S. Yesayan, *Sculpture*, p. 51.
- <sup>134</sup> Y. Lalayan, *Excavations of Tombs*, p. 201.
- <sup>135</sup> A. Gnuni, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

- <sup>136</sup> Y. Lalayan, *Excavations of Tombs*, p. 202.
- <sup>137</sup> The stele was studied in 2005 during the joint expedition of the Center for Historical and Cultural Heritage and Yerevan State University, conducted by E. Ayvazyan, E. Kamalyan, and G. Khachatryan. Personal communication from the expedition members, July 11, 2005.
- <sup>138</sup> For more details, see A. Martirosyan, *The City of Teishebaini*, p. 86. H. Martirosyan and S. Yesayan note that the fertility cult in burial sites could have been perceived in the context of rebirth and the continuity of the clan (A. A. Martirosyan, *op. cit.*, p. 85; S. A. Yesayan, *Sculpture*, p. 37).
- <sup>139</sup> A. Gnuni, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
- <sup>140</sup> For Indian mythology cf. E. N. Tyomkin, V. G. Erman, *op. cit.*, p. 80). According to Etruscan beliefs, the transition to the underworld was inseparably associated with the sacred sexual act (A. Nagovitsyn, *op. cit.*, p. 113–114). K. Ghafadaryan also associates the phallic stelae with the spirits of the ancestors (K. Ghafadaryan, *Pagan Period Tombs in Dvin*, HPJ 4, 1974, p. 41).
- <sup>141</sup> The very presence of a phallic-shaped censer already indicates the phallus-sacrifice connection. Notably, according to the Padma Purana, when Shiva was castrated as a result of the Brahmins' curse, sacrifices ceased on earth (E. N. Tyomkin, V. G. Erman, *op. cit.*, p. 49). In the Atharvaveda, the phallus is often identified with Soma (*Atharvaveda: Selected Hymns*, Moscow, 1974, IV, 4, 6).
- <sup>142</sup> Y. Lalayan, *op. cit.*, p. 202; T. N. Khachatryan, *op. cit.*, p. 150.
- <sup>143</sup> O. Xnkikyan, *op. cit.*, p. 27. S. Lisitsyan, K. Kushnareva, and O. Xnkikyan interpret this site as a cromlech surrounding a tomb, although K. Kushnareva does not rule out the possibility that the complex may have later served as a temple (S. D. Lisitsyan, *The Koshun-Dash Megalithic Settlement in Sisian (Zangezur)*, Collection in Memory of Academician N. Y. Marr, Moscow-Leningrad, 1938; K. Kh. Kushnareva, *Ancient Monuments of Dvin, Yerevan, 1977*, p. 48; Xnkikyan, *op. cit.*, p. 27).
- <sup>144</sup> I. Gharibyan, H. Simonyan, A. Gnuni, E. Ayvazyan, E. Kamalyan, G. Khachatryan, *New Discoveries in Syunik*, Hushardzan 8, 2011, 133.
- <sup>145</sup> Cf. Y. Lalayan, *Sisian*, p. 167; S. Barkhudaryan, *The Regions of Goris, Sisian and Kapan*, CAE II, Yerevan, 1960, p. 81.
- <sup>146</sup> Y. Lalayan, *Sharur Daralageaz*, p. 269.
- <sup>147</sup> R. Biscione, S. Hmayakyan, N. Parmegiani, *op. cit.*, p. 120.
- <sup>148</sup> G. Areshyan, Y. Asatryan, *Archaeological Field Work of the Center for Armenian Studies in 1979–1983*, p. 205; G. Areshyan, *Rescue Excavations in Kanagegh*, p. 3.
- <sup>149</sup> V. Avetyan, *Excavations of Lchashen in 1984–1985*, HSS 10, 1986, p. 90.
- <sup>150</sup> O. Xnkikyan, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
- <sup>151</sup> The stele was studied by G. Sargsyan in 2008.
- <sup>152</sup> Y. Lalayan, *Sharur Daralageaz*, p. 256.
- <sup>153</sup> The Al lakes cluster was studied in 2013 by the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic Ministry of Tourism (G. Sargsyan).
- <sup>154</sup> L. Azaryan, *Armenian Khachkars, Holy Etchmiadzin*, 1973, Fig. 8.
- <sup>155</sup> L. Azaryan, *op. cit.*, Fig. 7.
- <sup>156</sup> S. D. Lisitsyan, *The Koshun-Dash Megalithic Settlement in Sisian*, p. 709–721.
- <sup>157</sup> Cf. O. Xnkikyan, *op. cit.*, p. 26–27.
- <sup>158</sup> Y. Lalayan, *Sisian*, p. 174.
- <sup>159</sup> S. Devejyan, *Lori Berd II*, p. 62.
- <sup>160</sup> Y. Lalayan, *Excavations of Tombs*, p. 204–205.
- <sup>161</sup> Y. Lalayan, *Javakheti*, EJ I, 1896, p. 372; Y. Lalayan, *Varanda*, EJ II, 1897, p. 188–191; Y. Lalayan, *Province of Gandzak*, EJ VI, 1900, p. 330; Y. Lalayan, *Province of Borchalu*, EJ X, 1903, p. 181; Y. Lalayan, *Province of Nor Bayazet*, EJ XVII, 1908, p. 88.

- <sup>162</sup> S. A. Yesayan, *Sculpture*, p. 21, Tab. 26.
- <sup>163</sup> H. Simonyan, Verin Naver, p. 27. R. Fritschen, in his work “Burial Customs of Asian Peoples” (1887), mentions that the graves of Arabs, Greeks, and Romans had an opening at the top so that the prayers of the deceased’s relatives could reach them. Additionally, the four corners of an Arab tombstone had small holes dug to collect water from rain and dew, allowing birds to come, drink, and sing over the grave. In the Armenian translation of the aforementioned work, M. Ter-Movsisyan notes that a similar custom exists among the Turkish Muslims in our region. Armenians interpret the opening on the tombstone as a means for the relatives of the deceased to provide food to the soul of the dead, which has turned into a dog. Ter-Movsisyan attributes such beliefs precisely to ancient times (M. Ter-Movsisyan, *Collection of Articles: “Ararat” Heritage*, vol. 8, Holy Etchmiadzin, 2010, p. 611).
- <sup>164</sup> The stone idol could have been associated with the symbolism of death and the underworld. In Irish epic literature, the hero Cú Chulainn falls into a deep sleep while leaning against a stone (Irish Sagas, Moscow, 1961, p. 101). The stone may have been perceived as a kind of portal or passage between “this” world and the “other” world (The World Tree Yggdrasil, The Saga of the Volsungs XIV, Moscow, 2002). In Russian folklore, the stone was also connected with the underworld, serving as the dwelling place of Baba Yaga, who was considered a goddess of death (A. N. Afanasyev, *Russian Folk Tales*, p. 128, 141). At the same time, the pillar itself was identified with the hero. In Irish sagas, Cú Chulainn was compared to a pillar (Irish Sagas, p. 131). In Indian mythology, the fire god Agni was also compared to a pillar (Rigveda, Moscow, 1989, 1, 59, 1).
- <sup>165</sup> In the present-day Syunik region of the Republic of Armenia, vishaps are particularly widespread in the Vayots Dzor area and are characterized by a high degree of secondary use, primarily in the form of their transformation into khachkars (A. Shahinyan, *The Vishap-Stelae of Vayots Dzor*, p. 286–289; O. S. Xnkikyan, *Bull-Headed Stelae from the Vardenis Mountains and the Interpretation of Vishap Stones*, HSS 3, 1997, p. 148–159; O. Xnkikyan, *Syunik During the Bronze and Iron Ages*, Barrington, 2002).
- <sup>166</sup> For a detailed catalog of the vishaps and the terminology used in this section, see: A. Gilibert, A. Bobokhyan, P. Hnila, *Dragon Stones in Context*, p. 93–132; A. Bobokhyan, A. Gilibert, P. Hnila, *Archaeology of Vishap Stones*, in press.
- <sup>167</sup> I. Meshchaninov, *Stone Statues of Fish-Vishaps in the Caucasus and Northern Mongolia*, PCO 1, 1925, p. 402.
- <sup>168</sup> N. Y. Marr, Y. I. Smirnov, op. cit., p. 61.
- <sup>169</sup> Cf. N. Y. Marr, Y. I. Smirnov, op. cit., p. 63.
- <sup>170</sup> On the dual opposition of ram-bull, which could have been the totems of different groups, cf. S. A. Harutyunov, *On Rams and Bulls in Sacrifices*, HPI 1, 2010, p. 197–213.
- <sup>171</sup> For the iconography of birds and the Tree of Life, cf. A. Sh. Mnatsakanyan, *Armenian Decorative Art*, Yerevan, 1955, p. 65, 122, 215, 169; for fishes as catfish, see: L. Simonyan, *The Bird with Its Wing and the Snake with Its Navel*, Yerevan, 2011, p. 81–83.
- <sup>172</sup> I. Meshchaninov, op. cit., p. 405.
- <sup>173</sup> N. Y. Marr, Y. I. Smirnov, op. cit., p. 10.
- <sup>174</sup> V. A. Mikhankova, *Vishaps*, MJSAHMC 9/10, 1931, p. 48.
- <sup>175</sup> The stele was documented in 1997 by the expedition team of the Scientific Research Center of Historical and Cultural Heritage (H. Simonyan, A. Gnuni, G. Khachatryan, G. Vardanyan) and was published in: A. Gnuni, G. Khachatryan, *Archaeological Research*, p. 269–270, Fig. 5.
- <sup>176</sup> M. V. Grigoryan, *The Volute Capitals in Armenian Architecture*, HPI 2–3, 1959, p. 261–263, Fig. 10; the stylized “gills” in the case of Darik 1.
- <sup>177</sup> Cf. A. Kalantar, *Stone Age in Armenia*, Nork 5/6, 1925, p. 219; S. G. Barkhudaryan, *Monumental Stelae of Armenia*, HSS 7/8, 1960, p. 53–54.
- <sup>178</sup> S. Barkhudaryan emphasizes the fact that menhirs are “without any ornamentation”, distinguishing them from vishaps, which bear carvings (S. G. Barkhudaryan, *Medieval Armenian Architects and Stonework Masters*, Yerevan, 1963, p. 122).

- <sup>179</sup> A. S. Sanosyan, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
- <sup>180</sup> Cf. the similarity between Yeghnajur 1 and one of Shamiram's menhirs – both standing within a cromlech/platform or a tomb. For Shamiram, cf. A. Khachatryan, *Analytical History of the Cuneiform Period of Armenia*, Yerevan, 1933, p. 71, Fig. 11.
- <sup>181</sup> Z. R. Tarayan, *Symbols of Symmetry in Ornaments of Armenian Applied Art*, Yerevan, 1989, p. 30–31.
- <sup>182</sup> Cf. also Karmrashen 1, on which a rosette was added in the medieval period, according to A. Shahinyan, *The Vishap-Stelae of Vayots Dzor*, p. 289.
- <sup>183</sup> Vishaps were perhaps periodically felled down. In several cases, a whitish lichen is visible on the surface of the vishaps. However, on those vishaps that were turned over by Marr and Smirnov in 1909, there was no “new” lichen. On the other hand, lichen was visible on the late cross at Azhdaha Yurt 1 when the stone was still upright standing. The cross was carved along with an inscription dating to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which provides us with a terminus post quem for determining the period when this vishap “fell”.
- <sup>184</sup> The name Tik(ma)tash, used to describe vishaps, originates from the Turkish dikilitaş, meaning “standing stone”, which in the Armenian tradition corresponds to “tsits kar” (“standing stone”) (S. Harutyunyan, *Armenian Mythology*, Beirut, 2000, p. 252–253; tsits kar = menhir, A. Kalantar, *op. cit.*, p. 210), cf. Dik-karer, the Armenian name for Ghoshundash (M. Hasratyan, *op. cit.*, p. 167, 175). Hayseri Oba 1 and the two vishaps near Parvana (Tikmatash 1 and Tikkar 1) are also known by the similar name “Tikmatash”, which indicates that they were originally standing stones. Another possibility is that this name is linked to the Armenian dik- root, a connection noted by Atrpet, who mentions the Diknis region, rich in vishap stelae, near the Akjakala fortress and the Pokrik Diknis stream, as well as Dikma-Verin (Atrpet, *Cult of the Vishaps*, *Bazmavep* 7/8, 1931, p. 316–317). Cf. also the Tik Mountains in the same Vanand region (Gh. Alishan, *Ayrarat*, Venice, 1890, p. 78, 81).
- In 1929, on August 22, Russian authors N. Tikhonov and V. Balich traveled along the route Nor Bayazet (Gavar) – Deli Kardash (Sarukhan) – Geghama Mountains – Tazakend (Tazagyugh, near Goght, on the Garni-Chay/Azat River) – Geghard Monastery. In the Geghama Mountains, specifically at a location where Ak Dagh (Spitakasar) and Kyzyl Dagh (Azhdahak) peaks were visible, at an altitude of approximately 2,800 meters, near a small lake, they saw a “high vishap”. According to them, it was “either a road marker or an object of worship”, featuring a “giant fish-like or vishap-like torso” and “was standing”, “embedded within stones” (N. Tikhonov, *Days of Discoveries. A Book about Armenia*, Yerevan, 1970, p. 77–79).
- If we try to identify the mentioned vishap, several versions can be considered:
- Gyoli Yurt – The environment and the direction of the road correspond, but Tikhonov mentions that the vishap was long, which is not present in Gyoli Yurt.
- Diktash 1 – This is the only standing vishap in the Geghama Mountains today, and it is embedded among rocks, exactly as Tikhonov describes. However, the environment does not match the description (there is no pond), and it is also far from the mentioned road.
- Goght 1 – We do not know its original location, but it could have originally stood on the shore of some pond.
- Tokhmakhan Gyol – The description of both the location (road direction, mentioned altitude, presence on the shore of a pond) and the vishap (possibly Tokhmakhan Gyol 1) closely matches the environment of Tokhmakhan Gyol. The issue lies in whether the vishap was standing. During the time of Marr and Smirnov, Tokhmakhan Gyol 1 was not standing (it had been upright in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and served as a water measurement unit – N. Y. Marr, Y. I. Smirnov, *op. cit.*, p. 83). It is possible that this vishap was re-erected after the visit of Marr and Smirnov, before the pond filled with water again. Tokhmakhan Gyol was dry during their visit (*op. cit.*, p. 82). It is not excluded that in 1929, when Tikhonov visited, there was once again a pond there. At the very least, 1950s maps indicate a pond in that location. When the pond was expanded in the late 1960s, two of the vishaps (Tokhmakhan Gyol 1, 4) were relocated to a nearby mountain ridge and later re-erected at their current location.
- <sup>185</sup> It is noteworthy that in the Shamiram cemetery, menhirs/standing stones were also found

either along the perimeter of the cromlech or directly next to it, with some positioned at the center (T. Toramanyan, *op. cit.*, 1942, p. 9, 40). On tombs located near vishaps, cf. also H. A. Martirosyan, *New Sites of Prehistoric Culture in Armenia*, HPJ 3, 1969, p. 192–193. A similar arrangement is observed in the case of the Trialeti vishaps, particularly concerning Mosunin Gjol 1.

<sup>186</sup> Aragats Massif – Hayseri Oba 1, Karmir Sar 4, Prospect 1; Geghama Mountains – Azhdaha Yurt 5, Diktash 2.

<sup>187</sup> V. Gurko-Kryazhin previously noted that the Manglisi vishap of Trialeti was located on a “flat platform” (V. A. Gurko-Kryazhin, *op. cit.*, p. 218).

<sup>188</sup> Aside from the visibility factor, the practical significance of high-altitude depressions likely lay in the fact that, in such enclosed environments, people were protected from natural elements, particularly the mountain winds. Prehistoric humans “sought shelter from mountain winds near graves buried at the foot of mountain passes and miraculous places” (St. Lisitsyan, *The Armenians of Zangezur*, Yerevan, 1969, p. 282). Ethnographic data from Mountainous Armenia (see below) show that such high-altitude flat platforms were consistently used during communal rituals, especially sacrifices (St. Lisitsyan, *op. cit.*, p. 280).

In addition to St. Lisitsyan’s “pass theory” (S. D. Lisitsyan, *Sanctuaries by the Passes*, p. 200–212), cf. the vishaps Selim 1 and Tikkar 1 of Parvana (A. S. Sanosyan, *op. cit.*, p. 101–102), which are located near mountain passes. The placement of these vishaps in such locations was likely not coincidental.

<sup>189</sup> The cemetery at Tokhmakhan Gjol, located within the environment of the vishaps, is documented in the State Registry of Monuments (Kotayk, Geghard, Vank Lake, 6.24.9), in the archive of the Scientific Research Center of Historical and Cultural Heritage (Geghard 1 and 2 vishaps), and in a work by H. Martirosyan (H. A. Martirosyan, *op. cit.*, p. 193). It is noteworthy that the hill where the Tokhmakhan Gjol 1 and 4 vishaps were moved from their original position to the current location near the lake, is also part of a cemetery, containing both looted and intact cromlech-type tombs. Traces of some kind of dwellings are also visible.

<sup>190</sup> Like in the case of Hayseri Oba 1 in the Aragats Massif and Maghalner 1 in the Geghama Mountains.

<sup>191</sup> Aragats Massif – Hayseri Oba 1; Geghama Mountains – Azhdaha Yurt 6, Diktash 1–3, Imirzek 1–5.

<sup>192</sup> The tombs near the Imirzek vishaps have also been noted by H. Martirosyan (H. A. Martirosyan, *op. cit.*, p. 193).

<sup>193</sup> L. Abrahamian, *Armenian Identity in a Changing World*, Costa Mesa, 2006, p. 273.

<sup>194</sup> Recent research by Georgian archaeologists also associates the vishaps to ancestors (G. Narimanishvili, N. Shanshashvili, *Megaliths and Cult of Ancestors in the South Caucasus*, AEFC, Makhachkala, 2007, p. 164–165).

<sup>195</sup> However, cf. his observation regarding the tombs present on all slopes of Aragats (Archival materials, according to T. S. Khachatryan, *On the History of the Study of the Ancient Sites on the Slopes of Mount Aragats*, *Armenological Studies I*, Yerevan, 1974, p. 91).

<sup>196</sup> N. Y. Marr, *The Caucasus and the Monuments of Its Spiritual Culture*, *Proceedings of the Imperial Academy of Sciences*, 1912, p. 68.

<sup>197</sup> N. Y. Marr, Y. I. Smirnov, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>198</sup> A. Kalantar, *Archaeology 1: Prehistoric Archaeology*, Yerevan, 1923, p. 65.

<sup>199</sup> S. Lisitsyan, Y. Bayburtyan, *op. cit.*, p. 20–21.

<sup>200</sup> Thus, V. Teptsov already considered the Tetrtsgharo 1 vishap in the context of a tomb (V. Teptsov, *Agbulak Legends*, CMDLTC IX, 1890, p. 131). A. Kalantar and, following him, H. Berberyan mentioned that cromlechs existed in the vicinity of Tikmatash on Aragats (= Hayseri Oba 1) (A. Kalantar, *op. cit.*, p. 214, 224; H. Berberian, *Découvertes archéologiques en Arménie de 1924 à 1927*, *RÉA* 7, 1927, p. 287). Kalantar also mentions other menhirs

found near cromlechs (A. Kalantar, *op. cit.*, p. 213, 225). T. Toramanyan refers to menhirs/stelae in the environment of cromlechs/tombs at Shamiram, Kapili, Khznavuz, and Darband. Moreover, he views the Shamiram menhirs in the same context as the others, with the difference that the numerous examples in Shamiram are concentrated within a single setting (T. Toramanyan, *op. cit.*, 1942, p. 9, 26, 33, 40). G. Ghapantsyan also considers the village of Shamiram in the context of vishaps and the ancient irrigation system originating from Aragats, without mentioning the Shamiram menhirs (G. Ghapantsyan, *The Cult of Ara the Handsome*, Yerevan, 1945, p. 101, 105, 140, 170–171). Cf. also M. Abeghyan, *The Stelae Called "Vishaps" as Statues of the Goddess Astghik-Derketo*, Yerevan, 1941, p. 78).

B. Arakelyan discusses the placing of menhirs or giant "vishaps" on tombs in ancient Armenia, drawing numerous parallels from the Caucasus and beyond (B. Arakelyan, *Armenian Sculpture of the 4<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Yerevan, 1949, p. 35–36). S. Barkhudaryan writes: "It is believed that the menhirs belong to the late Stone Age and were placed on the graves of the leaders of prominent families" (S. G. Barkhudaryan, *The Regions of Goris, Sisian, and Kapan*, p. 53), "secured with small stones and earth" (S. G. Barkhudaryan, *op. cit.*, 1963, p. 122). O. Khalpachyan discusses menhirs (which include vishaps) in the context of tombs/cromlechs (O. Kh. Khalpachyan, *Ancient Structures on the Territory of Armenia, Architecture of the Ancient World*, Moscow, 1970, p. 253–255). S. Mnatsakanyan presents the vishaps, the "oghuz/giant's houses", the Zorats Karer megalithic complex, and the Shamiram menhirs within the context of tombs and burial rites (S. Mnatsakanyan, *Armenian Early Medieval Memorial Monuments*, Yerevan, 1982, p. 47–54, Fig. 1a, b, 2a). According to E. Khanzadyan, vishaps depicting ox sacrifices (which, according to the author, belong to the later stages of the development of these stelae) "served as tombstones" (E. V. Khanzadyan, *Vishaps of the Armenian Highland, The Current State of Armenian Studies and Development Perspectives, International Conference on Armenian Studies, September 15–20, 2003, Abstracts of Reports*, Yerevan, 2003, p. 36). The connection between vishaps, tombs, and burial rites has also been considered by H. Simonyan (H. Simonyan (ed.), *Archaeological Heritage of Armenia*, Yerevan, 2012, p. 30).

H. Koshay and H. Tanyu also mention the connection of vishaps with tombs/kurgans, citing the example of Tepejik 1 of Tsovakn Hyusiso (H. Tanyu, *Türklerde taşla ilgili inançlar*, Ankara, 1987, p. 197), as well as I. Avsharova, in reference to the example of the Bjnak 1 vishap in Nakhijevan (I. Avsharova, *Vishap-Like Stelae of Azerbaijan*, AEFC, Tbilisi, 2010, p. 328–329). The latter emphasizes the semantic connection of fish with the burial rite.

In the discussed context, the most detailed and well-founded observations belong to H. Martirosyan. During the 1967–1968 rock carving studies, he identified large and small burial groups, a significant portion of which are directly linked to the culture of the creators of the rock carvings. He mentions similar groups of Early Bronze Age–Early Iron Age sites within the Geghama mountain range, near the lake at the southern peak of Aragats, and on the eastern and western slopes of Aragats: "Above the subalpine zone, at an altitude of 2000–3000 meters above sea level, the scale, nature, and appearance of the sites undergo significant changes. In the alpine and subalpine zones of Aragats and the Geghama mountains, small settlements are rarely encountered, while cemeteries composed of cromlechs and burial mounds with 5–10 burials are more frequent. These are located near sacred peaks, rock carvings, or the colossal vishap-fish stone stelae. In the Geghama Mountains, similar burial sites were discovered at Pokr Paytasar (Naltapa), Three peaks (Uch Tapa), as well as near the vishaps of Tokhmakhan Gyol and Imirzek. A similar pattern of site distribution was observed in the area of the Aragats vishaps. This spatial arrangement of spiritual-cultural sites inevitably recalls Armenian and broader Eastern myths and folktales related to human sacrifices offered to vishaps or the devoted priests serving their worship, who were slain and buried near these stelae. Setting aside the tempting attempt to interpret myths, folktales, and archaeological evidence in parallel, we can still note the abundance of cultic sites in high mountain zones and their interrelation across different groups" (H. A. Martirosyan, *op. cit.*, p. 191–193).

<sup>201</sup> M. Abeghyan, considering the stelae under discussion as possibly related to azhdahas (giants) rather than vishaps, presents as evidence the fact that on Mount Aragats, these

- stelae were called “oghuz’s/giant’s/aznavour’s graves” (M. Abeghyan, op. cit., p. 70). In the same context, he also mentions a ritual associated with graves and sacrifice, in which a skull would be taken from a grave and thrown into the river to bring rain (M. Abeghyan, op. cit., p. 89). G. Ghapantsyan sees in the vishaps the embodiment of a deity of death and resurrection. He compares Mount Masis, as a symbol of vishaps, with the mythical underworld mountain Aralu, which was also associated with the waters of life (G. Ghapantsyan, op. cit., p. 16). The connection of the vishap with the thunder deity and the underworld, the serpent-vishap’s role as the ruler of the realm of death and departed souls, as well as the perception of the underworld as a pasture in Indo-European mythology has been emphasized by A. Petrosyan (A. Y. Petrosyan, *The Reflection of the Indo-European Root \*wel- in Armenian Mythology*, HSS 1, 1987, p. 57, 64). He also highlights that certain vishaps (particularly those in Imirzek) may have been placed on tombs outlined with cromlechs, referencing the film “Temple of the Sun” (Hayk Film Studio, 2009, screenplay by Vahan Ter-Ghazaryan, directed by Shavarsh Vardanyan). In this context, L. Abrahamian’s viewpoint seems highly plausible. According to him, the vertical monument is a variation of the World Tree or axis mundi: “These types of archaic monuments are based on the idea of death and rebirth (the vertical placement) and it is no coincidence that archaeologists find stone phalli in burial sites as a natural embodiment of this idea.” Such objects are always associated with the idea of sacrifice, either concrete or abstract (relics). “Thus, the monument is essentially a tomb. In any case, this is perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the monument”. Such is the khachkar, which is a vertically standing tombstone that can easily be transformed into a memorial to commemorate events of a different nature than death. As the embodiment of a group’s key events, the monument thus becomes the focal point around which these events are observed. Sometimes, it bears direct ritual signs, as in the case with vishaps (L. Abrahamian, op. cit., p. 273–276).
- <sup>202</sup> E. Khanzadyan, *The Vishap of Lchashen*, p. 86–91.
- <sup>203</sup> O. S. Xnkikyan, *Bull-Headed Stelae from the Vardenis Mountains and the Interpretation of Vishap Stones*, p. 148–159.
- <sup>204</sup> *Atrpet*, op. cit., p. 310. Sarnaghbyur 1 is also mentioned in the State List of Monuments as part of the cemetery area.
- <sup>205</sup> Vosketas 1 is mentioned both on the tomb and within the cemetery area in the archives of the Scientific Research Center of Historical and Cultural Heritage, while Darik 1 is listed in the State List of Monuments, which is entirely plausible based on our observations.
- <sup>206</sup> A. Ayvazyan, *Monumental Stelae and Bas-Reliefs of Nakhijevan*, Yerevan, 1987, p. 8.
- <sup>207</sup> It refers to the fish-shaped vishap found in the aforementioned Tepejik village (near Tsovakn Hyusiso), located in the center of a cromlech surrounded by eight standing stones (K. Kökten, 1952 Yılında yaptığım tarihöncesi araştırmaları hakkında, *Ankara Üniversitesi dil ve tarih-çöğrafya fakültesi dergisi* 11, 1953, s. 205–206):
- <sup>208</sup> Tikmatash 1 (= Tekelidash) is located within the Tsalka Reservoir area, between the villages of Sanomer and Shipyak. In 1936, B. Kuftin conducted excavations around this vishap with the aim of relocating it from the reservoir area. However, the excavations did not reveal any cultural layer. That same year, L. Melikset-Bek continued the excavations of the vishap and determined that it was a fish-shaped stela. Once again, no mention was made of a cultural layer. In 1999–2000, when the water level of the reservoir dropped, Tikmatash reappeared, revealing that it was located on the southern side of Tomb № 6, with other stone-filled tombs in the surrounding area (Kuftin, *Diary of 1936*, cited by G. Narimanishvili, *New Discoveries in the Trialeti Culture*, Tbilisi, 2009, p. 37–38 (in Georgian)). Unaware of this, G. Mansfeld compared the vishap in question to Western European menhirs and referred to it as a “boundary stone” (G. Mansfeld, *Der Tqisbolo-gora: Eine Siedlungsgrabung als georgisch-deutsches Gemeinschaftsprojekt in der Republik Georgien*, AW 27/5, 1996, S. 379).
- <sup>209</sup> This spiral-ornamented vishap is also located within the Tsalka Reservoir area, where Lake Mosunin Gyol was situated before the reservoir was constructed. It was positioned in the center of a cromlech, and the surrounding area included five kurgans, two cromlechs, cists, and numerous small circular stone fillings (G. Narimanishvili, op. cit., p. 39–40).

- <sup>210</sup> It is located at the center of the Chikiani obsidian quarry, around which there are about 10 kurgans with either stone or obsidian filling. B. Kuftin excavated several of them, dating them to the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC (G. Narimanishvili, personal communication).
- <sup>211</sup> According to B. Kuftin's 1936 diary (Kuftin 1936, Diary; G. Narimanishvili, op. cit., p. 37; G. Narimanishvili, personal communication, 11.10.2012, Erzurum).
- <sup>212</sup> B. B. Piotrovskiy, *Vishaps: Stone Stelae in the Mountains of Armenia*, Leningrad, 1939, p. 13.
- <sup>213</sup> V. A. Gurko-Kryazhin, op. cit., p. 220, also in the context of vishaps.
- <sup>214</sup> T. Toramanyan, op. cit., p. 1942, 10.
- <sup>215</sup> Cf. the cult of ancestors, the associated environments and statues, the roots of which go back to ancient times, according to: G. Tiratsyan, *Questions of Continuity of the Official Cult in Armenia of Classical Period*, HSS 10, 1985, p. 60.
- <sup>216</sup> Cf. the early medieval Armenian "memorial" monuments, which emerge on a reliquary/the tomb of a distinguished person, saint, or that of an unknown soldier, and ultimately, in this context, on a cenotaph. See A. Mnatsakanyan, op. cit., 1982, p. 58.
- <sup>217</sup> T. Toramanyan, op. cit., 1942, p. 86. The peaks/summits of high mountains are perceived in numerous traditions – including Armenian – as the center of the world, where sacrificial rituals are performed to maintain the balance of human existence (S. Harutyunyan, op. cit., p. 36, 200).
- <sup>218</sup> Cf. G. Ghapantsyan, op. cit., p. 137.
- <sup>219</sup> The syncretic environment of the vishaps is partially revealed in the ethnographic materials of Armenian highland communities (especially those of the Zangezur-Artsakh region), where, due to mountainous isolation, pre-Christian elements have been particularly well preserved in their pure form. In this zone, sacred places were divided into several groups, among which especially important were those located on mountain peaks and slopes – mainly situated in hard-to-reach places, often in hollows for protection from the wind, and offering vast, panoramic views. Among them were sacred places in the form of rock fragments, stone pillars, or dolmens. Similarly, Armenians of Javakhk worshiped long stones on mountaintops (see St. Lisitsyan, op. cit., p. 279). Another type of sacred place consisted of graves located on mountain peaks and slopes, which were believed to possess magical power (cf. St. Lisitsyan, op. cit., p. 216, 297). When a grave belonged to a special individual – a saint, martyr, hermit, someone who died tragically or was struck by lightning – it was believed to acquire salvific power. The names of those buried in such graves were usually unknown. These became pilgrimage places visited by people seeking to be freed from fear or infertility, or to bring rain ("to open the heavenly waters") or to stop it. At the grave, the sick person was given water to drink, water was sprinkled on him to wash away fear, or the grave itself was washed, and offerings were made. Notably, these high mountain graves were not always actual burial sites – they could also be symbolic stone mounds. What mattered was that the people identified them with graves and regarded them as sacred. (St. Lisitsyan, op. cit., p. 275). Another type of sacred place was high-altitude springs, located near graves and other sanctuaries. During festivals, the lowland or foothill population conducted solemn pilgrimages to the high-altitude sanctuaries. The most significant of these festivals was Vardavar: "One of the popular festivals, which preserved the customs of early thought in a particularly large form, was the Vardavar festival, dedicated to the worship of mountain peaks... On Vardavar day, the faithful, in large groups, made their way to the pastures found on the summits of sacred mountains. Miraculous graves were located there..." (St. Lisitsyan, op. cit., p. 275). The people first visited the unknown grave on the mountain peak, prayed, then descended from the mountain to a flat, open area near a lake, where they slaughtered the sacrificed animal (St. Lisitsyan, op. cit., p. 280). Many offerings were made during the festival accompanied by a banquet, singing, dancing, music, and contests (St. Lisitsyan, op. cit., p. 278–282; L. Vardanyan, H. Sargsyan, *An Attempt at Classification of Armenian Sanctuaries* (based on St. Lisitsyan's field ethnographic materials from Zangezur and Nagorno-Karabakh), *Armenian Saints and Sanctuaries*, Yerevan, 2001, p. 368–376). The worship of mountain peaks and mountain sanctuaries, along with the festivals associated with them, indeed had a syncretic nature. On one hand, they were connected to the worship

of the sun (according to Lisitsyan, *op. cit.*, p. 282), and on the other, to the worship of water and earth (graves, ancestors). In the context of these sacred environments, a reference by Ghevond Alishan is particularly noteworthy. Specifically, near Kaghzvan, in a place called Vardiher in a plateau, there was a site known as a sanctuary and hermitage, where caves, springs, and saints' graves were located. There was also a cairn called the "Bear's Grave". It is no coincidence that Vishapadzor, the "dwelling place of the vishaps" was located in this very area (Gh. Alishan, *op. cit.*, p. 49–51; cf. also Stepanos Taronetsi Asoghik, *Universal History* (trans. V. H. Vardanyan), Yerevan, 2000, vol. 2). The "Vishap Valley" of Vardiher is also mentioned by Atrpet in the context of the worship of Anahit (which is the same as the worship of vishaps) (Atrpet, *The Chorokh Basin: Geographical and Historical Research*, HA, 1926, p. 605).

Atrpet once again writes about the aforementioned festivals carried out at the high-altitude sacred sites of the Byurakn, Vanand, and Aragats (Ziarats) and considers the issue of the vishaps. Every year, especially during the Vardavar festival, various communities made pilgrimages to these sanctuaries, bringing thousands of people. The festivals lasted several days and were accompanied by sacrifices, singing and dancing, performances by storytellers, and "Anahit dedicated feasts" (Atrpet, *op. cit.*, 1931, p. 310–319).

Atrpet describes/restores this process in a truthful manner in his story "Mother Vishap", which has the following content: A drought has struck the Ararat Valley. The ruler of Dvin, with his retinue and the people, prepares for a pilgrimage to the Geghama Mountains to celebrate the Vardeher/Vardavar festival. Upon reaching the vicinity of the Geghard temple, the caravan makes sacrifices and then ascends the mountains through the Garni Gorge. The procession reaches the "Vishap plateaus", near the lakes, where fish-shaped standing statues dedicated to Mother Vishap are located, symbolizing a positive beginning (vs. Vishapakhagh). Tents are set up, the priests make sacrifices of bulls, lambs, and goats, and the celebration begins, lasting for seven days. The festivities are accompanied by music, dancing, and games in honor of Mother Vishap's daughter, Astghik (the symbol of Vardavar), and Anahit. At the priest's command, following the example of the ancestors, a decision is made to build canals to solve the drought issue, after which Mother Vishap sends rain (Atrpet, *Mother Vishap: Story*, Alexandropol, 1912).

The communal rituals that took place on mountain peaks and plateaus, accompanied by bull sacrifices and performed in the environment of protective/rain bringing cross stones, are also described by M. Abeghyan in the context of the vishaps, emphasizing the connection of these rituals to the Vardavar festival and water worship (M. Abeghyan, *op. cit.*, p. 75–78, 82, 87). It is noteworthy that Abeghyan considers the vishaps to be prototypes of those cross stones (in this context, he also explains the cross image of Azhdaha Yurt 1): "The stone was a symbol of lightning, and lightning was the weapon of the storm god" (M. Abeghyan, *op. cit.*, p. 88–89, 93).

The Vardavar festival is also considered in the context of the vishaps by G. Ghapantsyan. Presenting it within the context of the worship of a dying and resurrecting deity, the author also mentions the high-altitude grave sanctuaries associated with it. It is noteworthy that Mazhan, the son of King Artashes, who fought against the vishap, descended Medians at the foot of Ararat, was buried in Bagavan, where an altar was built over his grave. Later, King Vagharsh established a world-wide festival there, which was associated with Navasard or Vardavar (G. Ghapantsyan, *op. cit.*, p. 99, 120–126).

The Vardavar festivities, accompanied by competitions of bards, wrestling, dancing and singing, banquets, wrestlers, rope-walkers, and fairs, are considered by S. Harutyunyan in the context of the mythology of the dragon slayer (S. Harutyunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 158–167).

Cf. also A. Mnatsakanyan's conclusions regarding the celebrations held around the vishaps (A. Mnatsakanyan, *op. cit.*, p. 557).

Regarding the same types of celebrations held on mountain peaks and around standing stones, according to Georgian ethnographic materials, cf. also V. A. Gurko-Kryazhin, *op. cit.*, p. 215–216.

- 221 N. Adonts, *The Ancient Armenian Worldview, Works 1*, Yerevan, 2006, p. 15.
- 222 On one occasion, Atrpet, in the context of the vishaps, associates the use of high-altitude sanctuaries to even miners (Atrpet, *op. cit.*, 1931, p. 310, 314).
- 223 B. B. Piotrovskiy, *op. cit.*, 1949, p. 76.
- 224 H. A. Martirosyan, *op. cit.*, p. 194.
- 225 Towards the slopes of Ararat cf. A. Özfirat, *Archaeological Investigations in the Mt. Ağrı Region: Bronze and Iron Ages*, Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East May, 5<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> 2008, "Sapienza" – Università di Roma, v. 2, Roma, 2010, p. 529-530.
- 226 Earlier researchers, for somewhat understandable reasons, did not pay attention to the altitudes of the vishaps. B. Piotrovskiy mentions that Imirzek is located at an altitude of 1000 meters above sea level (Piotrovskiy, *op. cit.*, 1939, p. 9), which is incorrect. N. Tikhonov gives an altitude of 2800 meters (perhaps referring to Tokhmakhan Gyol) (Tikhonov, *op. cit.*, p. 77), which is plausible.
- 227 The 1700-2300 m zones make up about 35% of the Armenian Highland, while the higher mountainous regions account for 14% (cf. L. M. Vardanyan, G. G. Sarkisyan, A. E. Ter-Sarkisyan (ed.), *The Armenians, Peoples and Cultures*, Moscow, 2012, p. 97-99). It should be noted, however, that the 2300-2400 m boundary we have emphasized may fluctuate to some extent. Other researchers also report the presence of diverse cultural environments in the high mountain regions. For instance, Atrpet refers to the fortresses, kurgans, and dolmens on the mountain peaks of Tayk, partly in the context of considering vishaps (Atrpet, *op. cit.*, 1926, p. 86, 88, 185, 411-412). Tombs, cattle sheds, isolated architecture, canal-reservoir systems, and steles are mentioned along the northern slopes of Mount Aragats – at altitudes reaching up to about 2600 meters (A. T. Smith, R. S. Badalyan, P. Avetisyan, *The Archaeology and Geography of Ancient Transcaucasian Societies, 1: The Foundations of Research and Regional Survey in the Tsaghkahovit Plain, Armenia*, OIP 134, Chicago, 2009). At Ughtasar, in the 2900-3300 m range, within an environment of rock carvings, researchers report the presence primarily of cromlechs, other types of burials, as well as remains of dwellings, traces of cyclopean walls, and artificial stone accumulations (G. H. Karakhanyan, P. G. Safyan, *op. cit.*, p. 10, 38). Along the slopes of the Zangezur and Vayk mountain ranges, at altitudes of 2000-3000 meters, there are settlements, cemeteries, and rock carvings within the same context. Similarly, the fish-shaped stele of Bjnak in Nakhijevan, located at 2300 meters, appears within a system of both a cemetery and a settlement (A. Ayvazyan, *op. cit.*, p. 8, 28-29). High-altitude cemeteries are also found in the Armenian Taurus region, within the same environment as rock carvings (M. Uyanik, *op. cit.*, p. 24), as well as on the slopes of Mount Masis (A. Özfirat, personal communication, Venice, 10.01.2012). Likewise, in the vicinity of Tokhmakhan Gyol – that is, in the context of vishaps – rock carvings are also mentioned (Martirosyan, Israyelyan, *op. cit.*, p. 7). Regarding the dating of these sites, H. Martirosyan rightly notes that their emergence was linked to the domestication of mountainous pastures and the development of semi-nomadic animal husbandry, which began in the Neolithic period and fully took shape during the Chalcolithic-Early Bronze Age phases. However, these highland zones were not particularly suitable for permanent habitation. The large Neolithic-Bronze Age settlements and cemeteries at the foothills of Aragats and Geghama mountains are, as a rule, located in the subalpine zones, at altitudes not exceeding 2000 meters above sea level (H. A. Martirosyan, *op. cit.*, p. 193). In 1967-1968, an expedition researching rock carvings attempted to take concrete steps in terms of establishing chronology. On the shore of the same Tokhmakhan Gyol, near the vishaps and not far from clusters of rock carvings, the expedition also reported a settlement. This site had no cyclopean walls and consisted of several rectangular dwellings with walls built of small pebbles. To the west of these were several cromlech-covered tombs, with burials placed in cists located in the central part (excavated by R. Torosyan). In the three excavated tombs, pottery from the period of widespread use of iron was discovered, along with a glass engraved gem of Greco-Persian type dated to the 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC (Martirosyan, *op. cit.*, p. 193-194). The author does not directly mention the dating of the settlement itself, but from another passage it can be inferred that he has the same period in mind as the tombs: "Apparently, during the early

Armenian period, small seasonal settlements began to be established in the Armenian mountains, which differ from the aforementioned ancient settlements as much as modern villages differ from their summer pastures” (H. A. Martirosyan, *op. cit.*, p. 193).

- 228 In this second-level context, a number of relocated and Christianized examples should be considered, among them Ulgyur 1–2, Angeghakot 1, Karmrashen 1, Rind 1–2, and Vayk 1. Except for the latter (at 1205 m), all the others are currently located at altitudes of about 1800–2000 meters, and although they have clearly been relocated (the details of the relocation are recorded in the respective inscriptions of Karmrashen 1 and Ulgyur 2), it is most likely that they were not moved from very far away. The immediate environment of some of them (especially Karmrashen 1) is typical of proper vishap environments. It is possible that the examples from Ulgyur and Rind formed a common group with the vishaps of Attash and Selim, as they are not located far from each other. It is noteworthy that all the mentioned stelae are found in the Vayots Dzor-Syunik region, known for its highland settlements, the inhabitants of which did not live far from the original area of vishap distribution. Additionally, the well-known Dvin-Partav route (Selim, Ulgyur, etc.) passed through these regions (H. Yeghiazaryan, *The Cultural Monuments of the Azizbekov Region*, p. 75–78), which may have been another reason for the accessibility of these areas.

The vishaps located outside the Republic of Armenia – in the Trialeti–Javakheti–Tsovakn Hysiso zone, Nakhijevan, and Aghtik (Yolboyu) – should also be considered within the same second-level context. In this zone as well, tombs and “Cyclopean” fortresses are found in the same environment as vishaps and menhirs (K. Köroğlu, *Çıldır Kurganları, Arkeoloji ve Sanat* 96, 2000, s. 2–11). In the context of Trialeti, this issue was addressed in the past by V. Gurko-Kryazhin. Specifically, on the summit of Deghin Sar near Manglisi (close to Tetrtsgharo), on a “flat plateau”, stands the “Stone Bride” vishap, below which lies a “Cyclopean” fortress where a large prismatic menhir was also found. According to the author, the vishaps and the fortress should be viewed within the same context (V. A. Gurko-Kryazhin, *op. cit.*, p. 215–216).

- 229 While some specialists consider the foothill vishaps to have been brought down from higher altitudes (regarding Sarnaghybur, cf. A. Sanosyan, ...Also the White Genocide: A Collection of Articles, Yerevan 2001, p. 181; and regarding Sarukhan, cf. S. Hmayakyan, personal communication), others believe that these stones were in their original locations. The latter view is developed by B. Arakelyan in the case of Garni 1 (B. N. Arakelyan, N. V. Harutyunyan, “Urartian Cuneiform Inscription from Garni”, *HPJ* 2, 1966, p. 291), which is entirely plausible, especially given that Garni and its surroundings were well-inhabited during the Early, Middle, and Late Bronze Ages. Incidentally, the presence of the nearby Garni 2, turned into a khachkar, may also support this hypothesis. However, it should also be noted that the vishaps of Garni are the lowest-altitude vishaps known to us, located at approximately 1390 meters, and in this sense, they have no parallels – except, perhaps, for Tetrtsgharo 1 in Trialeti, which lies at an altitude of 1135 meters (E. Talakhadze, *Big Catalogue of Georgia Petroglyphs*, Tbilisi, 2000, p. 147–148). This fact serves as a basis for the hypothesis that they may have been brought from the Geghama Mountains. A question arises: could the relocation of vishaps have taken place during the Iron Age or the Urartian period, as it did in the medieval or more recent periods? If, on the other hand, the vishaps of Garni were indeed not relocated, then this area must have held exceptional ritual and cultic significance during the vishap era – it must have been a sacred place, just as it was during the classical period (on this, see N. Y. Marr; Y. I. Smirnov, *op. cit.*, p. 95–96).

- 230 Although the current lake/reservoir of Arpi was formed between 1946 and 1950 (G. Shirmazan, *Episodes from the History of Irrigation in Armenia*, Yerevan, 1962, p. 128–129), there is no doubt that the area must have once belonged to an older lake zone, very similar to the Javakhk environment.

- 231 It is also noteworthy that the names of vishap-related environments – such as Imirzek, Kalaychi, Arkhashan, Kaznefer/Kazanchi/Kazan Bashi – are repeated in both lower and upper regions, as well as across different zones (particularly in the Aragats, Geghama Mountains, and the Chorokh Basin). This phenomenon was first observed by Atrpet, who wrote that “perhaps all of them are villages from the period of vishaps” (Atrpet, *op. cit.*, 1926,

- p. 408, 604; 1929, p. 57–58; see also N. Y. Marr, Y. I. Smirnov, *op. cit.*, p. 84 for Arkhasha/en). Cf. also the repetitions such as Ughti akunk – Geghama Mountains, Ughtasar – Syunik, and Ughti province/Olti – Tayk.
- <sup>232</sup> Attash 1 is located near the Kare Dzi fortress, along the road leading from it to the Nagharakhan fortress. It is no coincidence that the Kare Dzi fortress is interpreted as a lookout point controlling the Argichi River valley and as an ancient summer station for transhumant herders. In its vicinity – aside from Nagharakhan – there were two other fortresses: Belyi Klyuch and Tatev (R. Biscione, S. Hmayakyan, N. Parmegiani, *op. cit.*, p. 377–378).
- <sup>233</sup> The area around the village of Sarnaghbyur represents a distinct micro-region, where several Bronze and Iron Age fortress-settlements are located, forming a single complex along with other sites. According to the description by G. Areshyan and K. Ghafadaryan, the Verin Berd (Ghalaichi) fortress is situated on the western side of the village, on a promontory of the plateau. A menhir is erected at the eastern edge of the promontory. Along the slopes of the promontory, parallel to the main wall, there are additional walls. Outside the main wall, the fortress featured residential construction. The fortress was founded in the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC and was inhabited during the Late Bronze Age. About half a kilometer to the north and west of Verin Berd lie two more fortresses – Top Kar and Anonymous one – which served as outposts for Verin Berd. In addition, the fortresses of Shishblur, Pokr Berd, and Mets Berd are also located near Sarnaghbyur (G. E. Areshyan, K. K. Ghafadaryan, K. Hovhannisyan, *op. cit.*, p. 73–78).
- <sup>234</sup> It is noteworthy that in mythology as well, there is an attempt to view the vishaps in the context of modeling. According to common mythological conceptions, the world is divided into three vertically arranged realms – Heaven, Earth, and the Underworld – connected by an axis symbolized as a column or tree, with the center of the world at its peak. This imagery (the Tree of Life, birds, or bull sacrifices) is believed to be reflected on vishaps, which are situated in the upper zone, in locations regarded as the “navel of the earth” (S. Harutyunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 18, 32–33).
- <sup>235</sup> The “Oghuz Houses” are primarily burial chambers, which do not date earlier than the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC (G. Areshyan, K. Ghafadaryan, K. Hovhannisyan, *op. cit.*, p. 70).
- <sup>236</sup> A. Kalantar, *op. cit.*; T. Toramanyan, *op. cit.*; G. Ghapantsyan, *op. cit.*, p. 154. This is also the view of H. Martirosyan. According to him, the Bronze and Iron Age fortress-settlements and tombs of the Shamiram, Kuchak, and Zithankhov types are associated with the populations who created rock carvings in the highland zones. The “tomb inscriptions” on the cromlechs of these cemeteries (depictions of animals, serpents, celestial symbols) are directly connected with the rock carvings. “It is beyond doubt that the settlements and cemeteries described above, located in the subalpine zones of Aragats, belonged to tribes of the Bronze Age engaged in semi-nomadic animal husbandry and hunting, who, within the bounds of the mountainous meadows under their control, created remarkable stelae of worship and agriculture... These were the agricultural pastoralists of those fortress-settlements who, following the juicy green growth emerging from beneath the melting snow and the movement of their herds, ascended toward the mountains – moving from place to place, sheltering in felt tents or other temporary structures, the traces of which naturally could not have been preserved” (H. A. Martirosyan, *op. cit.*, p. 192–193). More detailed information towards the chronological profile of the settlements located at altitudes of 1000–2100 meters on the southern slopes of Mount Aragats has emerged relatively recently. The earliest settlements date to the Early Bronze Age (Dzyanberd, Akhtamir, Bazmakn). Their number decreases during the Middle Bronze Age (Akhtamir, Bazmakn), followed by an unprecedented increase in the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age, marked by a dense network of fortress-settlements (Tegher, Sahakaberd, Motkan, Vank Kharaba, Nazaravan, Shamiram, Dzyanberd, Mughni, Ushi, Zuyg Aghbyur, Akhtamir, Bazmakn, Kosh, Avan, Orgov) (G. Areshyan, K. Ghafadaryan, H. Simonyan, G. Tiratsyan, A. Kalantaryan, *Archaeological Research in the Ashtarak and Nairi Regions of the Armenian SSR*, HSS 4, 1977, p. 77–93).
- <sup>237</sup> G. Ghapantsyan, *On the Stone Stelae in the Mountains of Armenia*, Yerevan, 1952, p. 51.
- <sup>238</sup> V. A. Gurko-Kryazhin, *op. cit.*, p. 217, 220; cf. V. N. Khudadov, *Megalithic Monuments of the*

- Caucasus, JAH 1, 1937, p. 206–207. In this sense, it is surprising that N. Marr and Y. Smirnov do not consider the vishaps within any archaeological context, even though Marr must have been well acquainted with the megalithic-type monuments of Armenia. Moreover, in one instance Smirnov writes that no other structures are visible around the vishaps (N. Y. Marr, Y. I. Smirnov, *op. cit.*, p. 65; this idea is repeated by B. B. Piotrovskiy, *op. cit.*, 1939, p. 31). In the same section, it is mentioned that near one of the fishes at Azhdaha Yurt, a Kurd found a copper cup with a bird motif in the Persian style, dated to the 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries, buried in the soil – perhaps evidence of later visits or possibly ritual practices. Nevertheless, in one instance Marr does consider the high-altitude vishaps in relation to lowland settlements, specifically in the context of water supply – although based on a later example (N. Y. Marr, Y. I. Smirnov, *op. cit.*, p. 80–81).
- <sup>239</sup> It is noteworthy that this picture, reconstructed through archaeological data, is also confirmed by Urartian written sources. In these texts, the regions of Etiuni (in the broader sense, the area around Mount Aragats), Velikukhi and Uduri Etiuni (broadly corresponding to the Geghama Mountains), and Igani (around the Tsovavn Hyusiso) appear as centers of a dense network of “Cyclopean” fortresses (I. I. Meshchaninov, *Cyclopean Structures of Transcaucasia*, PSAMCH XIII/4–7, 1932, p. 70, 97).
- <sup>240</sup> In the literature, there is mention of vishap-like stelae located outside the Armenian Highland – in the North Caucasus and adjacent regions, as well as in Mongolia (I. Meshchaninov, *op. cit.*, 1925; B. D. Mikhailov, *The Sculpted Head of a Vishap in the Grotto of the Stone Tomb, Antiquities of the Steppe Pontic Region and Crimea – Collection of Scholarly Works III*, Zaporozhye, 1992, p. 99–105). However, these examples share only rare features with the Armenian vishaps and cannot be discussed within the same context.
- <sup>241</sup> The proposed division generally reflects a plausible picture of the distribution of vishaps, but it also contains certain conditional elements, as there are overlapping zones in their placement. For example, under Gegharkunik we have included all the vishaps of the Geghama Mountains, although they could also have been accessible from Ayrarat (Kotayk). Gegharkunik was chosen not only due to geographical considerations but also in light of historical tradition, which associates the Geghama Mountains primarily with Gegham (from which the province takes its name). Ashotsk is usually considered one of the provinces of Gugark, though it is sometimes included in Ayrarat as well. However, given the foothill geography of the region, which more closely aligns it with the Trialeti-Javakhk (i.e., Gugark) world, we have placed Ashotsk within the domain of Gugark. Similarly, Artanish could belong to either Ayrarat (Varazhnunik) or Sotk, but given the geographical context (proximity to Lake Sevan), we have opted for Sotk – especially since there is another vishap located there. Likewise, we have considered the Hovtak of Atrpet within the borders of Tayk, even though it lies primarily in a border zone with Khaghtik.
- <sup>242</sup> Cf. A. Bobokhyan, *Vasputakan in the System of Bronze and Iron Age Cultural Developments of the Armenian Highland, The Capitals of Armenia, Book I – Van*, Yerevan, 2010, p. 34–36.
- <sup>243</sup> Contrary to what is said, N. Marr considered the vishaps discovered by A. Kalantar on Mount Aragats to be later examples, based on what he perceived as signs of anthropomorphism on them (N. Y. Marr, Y. I. Smirnov, *op. cit.*, p. 10). In reality, however, there are no signs of anthropomorphic features on the Aragats vishaps.
- <sup>244</sup> In terms of dating, the method of parallel comparison of ornamental motifs found in stone stelae and ceramics can also be applied, a technique used by H. Martirosyan when dating rock carvings (e.g., H. Martirosyan, H. Israelyan, *Rock Carvings of the Geghama Mountains*, p. 48–49). For example, on the lower part of the 15<sup>th</sup>-century statue found in the area of Harzhis village, concentric circles are depicted in relief, which bear numerous parallels to motifs found in Bronze Age pottery.

## Chapter III

# Topography of sacred places

This chapter discusses the landscape characteristics of Bronze and Iron Age sanctuaries in Syunik and proposes a preliminary typology of the topographical and functional features of these sacred places. The sanctuaries are defined as integral components of a distinct social system.

### 1.

#### Geographical location

As a rule, the sanctuaries of Syunik are located on natural heights, their slopes, plateaus, near roads and ravines, cliffs, and around water sources.

**Height.** One of the primary means of distinguishing a sanctuary from its general natural environment is the use of natural heights (hills, mountain spurs, watersheds)<sup>1</sup>. For example, the Ishak Meydan sanctuary in the Goris region is situated on a high part of the settlement. In this context, another structure should be mentioned, the functional significance of which is not entirely clear. This refers to the round-shaped building located at the summit of the Sonasar 1 fortress hill, which is an artificially leveled platform at the highest point of the landscape. A similar feature is also found in the mound placed on the central walled hill of the Hak 1 settlement and cattle shed complex<sup>2</sup>.

The use of natural heights is more prominently seen in sanctuaries and cemeteries situated in isolated locations. In such cases, both the natural features of the landscape (such as placement on a hilltop or promontory, proximity to rivers) and artificial elements (altars, enclosures, barriers), or a combination of both, are employed.

For example, the cemetery of the Diva Tani site in Tsovinar is situated on a hilltop<sup>3</sup>. The cemeteries of Spitakajur 1 and Shirvakan, located in the Kashatagh region of the Republic of Artsakh, are positioned on the summits of conical hills and the adjacent plateau<sup>4</sup>. The Ayrk and Artsvanist cemeteries are located on an elongated hill<sup>5</sup>, while the Tsovak 2 cemetery is situated on a long, north-south-oriented ridge<sup>6</sup>. The cemetery of Kanagegh lies to the south of the fortress, on a promontory-shaped hill that today appears as a peninsula<sup>7</sup>. The Mrtbi Dzor cemetery is

also situated on a mound<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, the cemeteries of Van village (Kovsakan) and Berdik, both in the Kashatagh region of Artsakh, are located on leveled, promontory-shaped hilltops of the same form<sup>9</sup>.

The Baghaburj cemetery of Kapan is located in a high-altitude area<sup>10</sup>. The tomb near the Tanahat Monastery (Sisian) is situated on a hilltop<sup>11</sup>. Tombs have also been documented in Akhlatyan, on the summit of Jakhachi Glukh height<sup>12</sup>. Very often, cemeteries composed of large burial mounds are placed along clearly defined watershed lines of the terrain. The Keren cemetery in the Kashatagh region of the Republic of Artsakh is located on a watershed and the summits of adjacent hills<sup>13</sup>. A nearly identical placement is seen in the Novlu cemetery (also in the Kashatagh region), which is almost connected to the Shurnukh cemetery within the administrative boundaries of Artsakh, as well as in the Ghalajik cemetery<sup>14</sup>. The cemeteries are situated along the watershed on the summits of flat or artificially leveled hills<sup>15</sup>. Along the upper line of the watershed, twelve burial mounds of the “Shghasar 1” cemetery near the village of Shosh are arranged in a single, continuous row. On the adjacent watershed lie thirteen burial structures of “Shghasar 2”. The eight burial mounds of the “Khachot 1” cemetery are located along a watershed descending toward the Karkar River. From the village of Mehmana to the nearby village of Vardadzor, nearly forty large burial mounds – each up to 4 m high and about 20 m in diameter – are aligned in a single row along the watershed of a mountain spur<sup>16</sup>. The list of such cemeteries could go on. It is evident that the placement of notable persons’ tombs on heights was motivated not only by the imperative of ensuring their visibility.

The tomb, as the main element of ancestor worship, forms a sanctified area around itself, which, in terms of territory, should have dominance over the surrounding area. It is no coincidence that near the initially placed tomb – usually at a higher point – other burials appear later, dictated by the same logic. This results in the presence of chain-like, sequentially arranged cemeteries.

**Slope.** Being located on the tops of hills, cemeteries often extended onto their slopes as well. Excavations at the Keren Cemetery show that the construction may have been carried out from top to bottom. This pattern is revealed by the results of the investigation of tombs № 94 and 95, excavated in 2010. The rectangular chamber of tomb № 94 was aligned along an east-west axis. Although the tomb had not only been looted but also completely destroyed (only the southern wall was partially preserved, while the other three were barely distinguishable), the excavations uncovered a noteworthy feature: on top of the upper stonework of the southern wall, another layer of masonry had been built, generally aligned in the same direction. As was later revealed during further excavations, this wall belonged to another tomb – № 95. The fact that several stones from tomb № 94 had been wedged into the walls of the upper tomb suggests that the latter was built later.

The Vardenik 2 cemetery is also located on the slope of the hill, directly opposite the settlement<sup>17</sup>. The cemeteries of Kanagegh and Gutanasar of Angeghakot

likewise extend onto the slopes of hills<sup>18</sup>. The cemetery of Msheni occupies both the hill and the adjacent plateau. The Aghvani II and III, Khachi Khut of Khnatsakh, and Tadzaver II cemeteries are also located on the mountain slope<sup>19</sup>. Y. Lalayan notes that the cemeteries of Gestak Bulagh and Khazakhach are also situated on the slopes of hills<sup>20</sup>. The placement of cemeteries both on the hilltop and along its slopes can be explained in the context of the later expansion of cemeteries, as well as broader social developments. For comparison, the area known as Tapa in Lori Berd can be mentioned, where the wealthiest tombs were located<sup>21</sup>.

The placement of a cemetery on a slope or terrace may also be related to the presence of a fortress at the top of the hill. In such cases, the boundary of the settlement simultaneously served as the symbolic boundary of the cemetery. This phenomenon is documented at the cemetery adjacent to the Tsovak fortress, which is located on the slope of the hill, on a natural amphitheater<sup>22</sup>. The Herik cemetery is also situated on the slope of the hill, outside the fortress walls<sup>23</sup>. The Tsovinar cemetery was located between the fortress and the “lower town”<sup>24</sup>. The Urartian tomb of the Kare Dur fortress is also outside the fortress walls. In similar landscapes are located also the Balaki (to the south of the fortress, on a terrace), Khndzoresk, and Shaghat cemeteries<sup>25</sup>, while in Hatsavan, the cemetery is at the foot of Vasakaberd, which stands atop the hill<sup>26</sup>. In the village of Hak in the Kashatagh region of the Republic of Artsakh, the cemetery lies at the southern base of the fortress, while in Hak 2 fortress (within fortified cattle sheds), the tombs are located within the fortress itself. At the Yeznagomer fortress, the cemetery extends around its vicinity: a large burial mound is situated on the height, surrounded by smaller mounds and cromlech burials<sup>27</sup>.

In such cases, the question of the synchronization between cemeteries and settlements can only be resolved through excavations. There are instances where the areas of cemeteries and fortresses within settlements partially overlap, which may indicate that these sites are not contemporaneous and that the boundaries of settlements may have shifted over different periods. For example, in the Spitakajur fortress of the Kashatagh region in the Republic of Artsakh, the tombs are located within the territory of the fortress<sup>28</sup>. A similar phenomenon is observed at the Mirik 2 fortress, also in Kashatagh, where within the walled area, 3–4 semi-subterranean rectangular structures can be clearly seen. These are built of significantly larger stones and were once covered by false vaults. They are, in all probability, the looted burial chambers of earlier tombs that existed before the fortress was constructed. In the settlement of Ghushchi Ghala, the tombs most likely predate the formation of the settlement and were only incorporated into its area due to later expansion<sup>29</sup>. A similar picture is seen in Harzhis. However, in the Harzhis-Darabas section, the cultural remains are clearly of a later date and were in all probability built no earlier than the mid-1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC<sup>30</sup>.

**Plateau.** The next group of sanctuaries may be located on natural plateaus. In such cases, the natural edges of the plains or plateaus – such as the surrounding

mountains, ravines, etc. – can act as symbolic boundaries. For example, the expansive cemetery of Arvakan is situated on a plateau encircled by mountains<sup>31</sup>. The cemeteries of Tsg huk and Noravan are also located on plateaus<sup>32</sup>. In the Sevan Basin, the Vigoni cemetery is found in a plain surrounded by hills<sup>33</sup>. In Nakhijevan, the Gharabulagh cemetery is situated in a lowland area bordered by mountains to the north<sup>34</sup>. The Mozi cemetery is located in a flat landscape<sup>35</sup>. The monumental sites of Selim and Attash, along with the Harzhis and Yelpin cemeteries, are also situated on plateaus. The Berdik cultic complex-cemetery is located 1.8 km west of the village of Berdik, midway between the main and secondary roads leading to Hak, in a flat field on the left side of a small ravine, along the western edge of the cemetery.

The environment of the vishaps is also noteworthy. Most of them appear in groups, situated within clearly defined concave meadows, which significantly reduces their visibility. Similar topographical features – such as natural depressions sheltered from the wind, alpine meadows, or the slopes of low hills – are also often found at sites with rock carvings<sup>36</sup>. In contrast to grouped vishaps, there are a few isolated ones. These “alone standing” stones may be located either in relatively concaved meadows or in more visible places. Recent research<sup>37</sup> has revealed that vishaps are almost always associated with medium-sized cromlechs and their immediate surroundings, which may include tombs, rock carvings, tower-like structures or tombs resembling an “oghuz/giant house/kyalafa,” and artificial stone accumulations. Cromlechs with vishaps embody uniquely cultivated spaces at high mountain altitudes – sacred environments for ceremonies. Their distribution at altitudes of 2000–3000 m above sea level likely corresponds to time periods when highland regions had acquired particular symbolic and functional significance (2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC)<sup>38</sup>.

**Road and gorge.** Sacred places are sometimes located along roads or within gorges. Among them are the cemeteries near the Sisian mountain pass, such as the one near Mutsq and the one located just northeast of the Selim caravanse-  
rai<sup>39</sup>. The Darband cemetery in the Gegharkunik province is also situated in a small gorge<sup>40</sup>. In the same context, the complex located in the Vanki Dzor area, 3 km northeast of Khnatsakh, should be considered. In the eastern part of this complex, there is a natural cave (Fig. 21). Here, the gorge widens, forming a kind of natural amphitheater. During the medieval period, the area was used as a cemetery, and the cave served as a rock-cut chapel.

Human intervention in the formation of the cave is minimal. In the central part of the complex, there is a triangular altar and a stone with cup mark depressions<sup>41</sup>. As a parallel, the altar located above Byurakan in the Artavazdik Gorge should be mentioned. In the center of the gorge, which is about 80 m wide, a rocky mass about 5 m high stands. From the rear side of this rock, a carved stone stairway leads to the top, where a cubic altar rises. From this altar, a channel leads downward, connecting to a series of cup mark depressions. In front of the altar, on the eastern side of the gorge, a spring emerges from a natural cave, and on the



Fig. 21. Vanki Dzor of Khnatsakh, cave

exposed rock surfaces of the gorge, carved bench-like platforms can be seen<sup>42</sup>.

This type of sacred place is known from historical and ethnographic sources<sup>43</sup>.

**Cliff.** Particularly noteworthy are the altars located on cliffs. Among them, the altar located on a cliff of the gorge, 3 km east of the abandoned village of Basharajur (near Bardzrahan village in the Goris region), south of a 15<sup>th</sup>-century church can be mentioned. Traces of cyclopean masonry can also be observed in the area<sup>44</sup>. Altars placed on cliffs are not a coincidental occurrence in Armenia and are known from sites such as Shamiram, Garni, Hoghmik, and Tsitsernakaberd<sup>45</sup>.

**Water source.** The presence of water (river, spring, lake) is an important feature in the topography of cultic complexes. For example, A. Ivanovskiy noted that cemeteries are often located along riverbanks (he cites examples of cemeteries located on the left banks of the Getabak, Khachenaget, and Varanda Rivers)<sup>46</sup>. These tombs, including the Gharabulagh cemetery, are situated in the region between Varanda and Ishkhanaget, near multi-layered settlements such as Gharyopaktepe, Shekerjik Tepe, Shomulutepe, Kyul-Tepe 3, and others<sup>47</sup>. The cemetery of Karmir Vank is located on the banks of the Araxes River<sup>48</sup>.

The Yerku Jur cemetery is located between two rivers – the Artsvanist River and its left tributary, the Sarnajur River<sup>49</sup>. In Gegharkunik, the Vankidur 2 and Lernasakert cemeteries are situated on the right banks of the Astghadzor and Ashtichi Rivers<sup>50</sup>. The Sisian and Akhlatyan cemeteries are located on the right banks of the Vorotan River and its tributary, Ayri<sup>51</sup>. The Mrtbi Dzor cemetery is located on the right bank of the Gavaraget River<sup>52</sup>.

Along the shores of Lake Sevan, according to Y. Lalayan, the largest tombs of the Adiaman Cemetery were stretched. The same pattern is also noted for the Tsovinar<sup>53</sup>, Vanki Dur 2, Vigon, and Tsovak 2<sup>54</sup> cemeteries. Numerous cromlechs, burial mounds, and rock carvings have been recorded around the Al lakes.

According to Y. Lalayan, there was a mineral spring in the area of the Gavar Cemetery<sup>55</sup>. The rock carvings of Jermajur are also located in the region of mineral waters<sup>56</sup>.

The spring could also have been associated with the tripartite concept of life-death-rebirth in mythological beliefs<sup>57</sup>.

**Cave.** The cave holds significant importance within the cultic system<sup>58</sup>. Both archaeological and ethnographic data attest to the worship of caves. For example, the Hamo 1 cave, located in the Hrazdan Gorge not far from Yerevan, in all probability, served as a sacred place during the Early Iron Age. Several dozen statuette-idols have been found there<sup>59</sup>. Y. Lalayan attests to the existence of sacred caves in Shinnuhayr<sup>60</sup>. The cemeteries of Joj Dar, Gavar, and Arpi appear within the context of natural caves<sup>61</sup>. A form of cave worship can also be found in tombs located within artificial caves<sup>62</sup>. One such example is found in the village of Aghavnadzor, consisting of a rock-cut niche positioned on the upper rocky slope of a hill – typical of the Urartian period. The niche has an irregular square shape, rounded on the north side, well-crafted on all sides, and shows traces of fire at the top.

Also worth noting are naturally formed caves with minimal human intervention, which constitute a key component of sacred places. One such example is the cave on the eastern side of the Vanki Dzor sanctuary near Khnatsakh.

In mythology, the cave is primarily associated with the underworld<sup>63</sup>.

## 2.

### Topographic-functional significance

The above data make it possible to examine the sacred places of Syunik from the perspective of their topographic and functional characteristics, to identify the main components of the sacred landscape, and to trace patterns of transformation. Accordingly, the sites under consideration emerge either in the centers of social activity, in border zones, along roads, or they themselves symbolize the center, the boundary, or the path (textual Tab. 5). Sacred sites are often formed around natural objects.

**Center.** The distinction of the center plays a crucial role in the organization of any cultic complex. As the unique “holy of holies” of the given complex, the center serves as its axis.

The simplest way of emphasizing the center is through the unchanged use of natural objects, which serve as the “axis” of the site. For example, Y. Lalayan notes that in the village of Shaghat in the Sisian region, on the summit of Kech-

Relation	Location	Sacred object	Sites
Center	Settlement	Rock (natural)	Aghvesahaki (Kashatagh)
		Worked rock fragment	Ishak Meydan (Zangezur)
		Structure	Ali Bayramali (Karvachar), Sonasar 1, Hak 1 (Kashatagh)
	Cemetery	Rock (natural)	Aghvani (Zangezur), Khazakhach, Tiknadzor (Gegharkunik)
		Cave	Joj Dar (Vayots Dzor), Gavar (St. Hovhannes cave) (Gegharkunik)
		Water source	Tsovinar 2 (Gegharkunik)
		Worked rock outcrop	Bazarkhana, Ishak Meydan (Zangezur)
		Idol	Bazarkhana (Zangezur)
		Structure	Berdik (Kashatagh)
	Isolated	Worked rock fragment	Khnutsakh (Vanki Dzor) (Zangezur)
Rock (natural)		Shaghat-Kechaberd (Zangezur)	
Unknown	Worked rock outcrop	"Navel Stone" of Noravan (Zangezur)	
Border	Settlement		
	Cemetery	Water source	Vanki Dur, Vanki Dur 2, Erku Jur, Mrtbi Dzor, Astghadzor, Adiaman, Tsovinar, Vigon (Gegharkunik)
		Natural contour of the hill	Tsovak 2, Ayrk, Artsvanist, Tsovinar, Kanagegh (Gegharkunik), Spitakajur, Shrvakan (Kashatagh)
		Wall or fence	Kapan-Shahumyan (Zangezur), Khndzoresk, Shaghat (Zangezur), Tsovak, Herik, Tsovinar, Kare Dur (Gegharkunik), Berdik – cemetery and cultic complex (Kashatagh)
		Rock outcrop	Tsitsernavank (Kashatagh)
	Isolated		
	Unknown		
Road	Settlement		
	Cemetery	Tombs located on the watershed and mountain spurs	Keren, Novlu, Kalajik (Kashatagh)
		Alignments of tombs	Sisian (Zangezur), Joj Dar (Vayots Dzor), Patshar, Ghshlagh, Adiaman, Mrtbi Dzor, Perei Dzor, Sangar (Gegharkunik)
		Stone-paved road	Kuri Kharaba (Gegharkunik), Berdik (Kashatagh)
		Cemetery located in mountain passes and gorges	Mutsk (Vayots Dzor-Zangezur), Selim (Vayots Dzor-Gegharkunik), Darband (Gegharkunik)
	Isolated	Worked altar located on the cliff	Basharajur (Zangezur)
		Worked rock complex located in the gorge	Khnutsakh (Vanki Dzor) (Zangezur)
	Unknown		

Table 5. Topographic and functional relations of Bronze and Iron Age sanctuaries in Syunik

aberd Mountain, there is a prism-shaped rock with a circular hole, considered a sacred place, around which numerous pottery fragments have been discovered<sup>64</sup>. The same author also mentions a pilgrimage site in the Oster Plain near the village of Tandzik in Vayots Dzor, featuring a stone blackened by fire, worshiped by both Armenians and Turks<sup>65</sup>. In this context, the natural standing boulder located in the citadel of Aghvesahaki Fortress in the Kashatagh region of the Republic of Artsakh can be considered<sup>66</sup>. A similar rock is found at the Tiknadzor cemetery in Gegharkunik<sup>67</sup>. In the central part of the Aghvani cemetery, unworked stones have been placed<sup>68</sup>. In the Khazakhach cemetery of Gavar, the tombs were arranged around a rock with an opening a hole, which, notably, had not lost its religious function even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>69</sup>. At the Joj Dar cemetery of Yeghegnadzor, there is a cave at the top of the hill, around which the tombs are grouped. A similar scene is observed in Gavar, where the tombs are located around the cave of St. Hovhannes<sup>70</sup>. The Arpi cemetery is located near the Bear Cave<sup>71</sup>. While describing the Tsovinar (Zaghalu) cemetery, Y. Lalayan notes that “he observed openings from which steam was emerging, and the sides of the openings were reinforced with retaining walls”, which, according to the author, were remnants of altars, thereby indicating the site as the cultic center of the environment<sup>72</sup>.

Another way of forming a cultic “axis” was through the use of certain worked natural objects. It is in this context that we should consider the Navel Stone of Sisian or the sacrificial altar in the Vanki Dzor of Khnatsakh<sup>73</sup>. Within the settlement, a central position was occupied by the altar of Ishak Meydan.

In the Armenian Highland, the practice of artificially creating a center has been present since ancient times. For instance, as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, the temple at Mokhrablur was located in the central part of the settlement, in a public square. Notably, fragments of mica were added to the plaster of the cultic structure. As a result, the building gleamed in the sunlight, standing out against the backdrop of the gray architecture made of raw brick<sup>74</sup>.

It is also important to note the case of Bazarkhana (in the village of Khoznavar, Goris region), where a natural object is combined with a man-made idol. Here, on a terrace along the hillside, a sacrificial altar is situated. It is a circular platform with a diameter of 5 m, one part of which is made from a semi-circular stone slab, while the other part is built with stones. Next to it stands an idol<sup>75</sup>.

Data on the sanctuaries in the settlements of Syunik are still limited. In this regard, the so-called “public structure” of Ali Bayramli (in the Shahumyan region of Nagorno-Karabakh) is noteworthy. It consists of a complex made up of concentric circles<sup>76</sup>. At the same time, it must be noted that the simultaneous existence of rock carvings and the “public structure” is not yet clearly established. The structure at Khachaghbyur, with its concentric circular arrangement, is situated in an artificially leveled landscape<sup>77</sup>. Central positions were occupied by the mounds found in the central parts of Sonasar 1 and Hak 1, as previously mentioned. Among the central man-made structures, special attention is given to the central complex of Zorats

Karer and the mound located in the cultic complex-cemetery of Berdik. The Berdik mound is situated on a small dominating hill at the edge of the cemetery and is an artificially leveled stone-soil mound with a flattened top. It is surrounded by a massive cyclopean wall, with a large rock-fragmented entrance opening preserved on its southern side. In the central part of the flattened top, stone rings are visible, with a standing stone in the center of each. The true function of this structure can only be determined through excavations.

At Zorats Karer, the central position is occupied by a structure with a false vault, which is surrounded by menhirs. Although pottery from different periods, including as late as the Middle Ages, was discovered during excavations of this structure, it was probably constructed during the Middle Bronze Age. Like S. Lisitsyan and K. Kushnareva, O. Xnkikyan considers this structure a tomb, although Lisitsyan and Kushnareva<sup>78</sup> do not exclude the possibility that it may have later been regarded as a sanctuary. The logical center of a cemetery may not coincide with its actual center. E.g., in the Tsovinar 2 cemetery, the large tombs are concentrated at the periphery of the cemetery, while in the Vanki Dzor 2 cemetery, they are located on the left bank of the river<sup>79</sup>. This fact suggests that the determination of the center of the cemetery could have had not only cultic but also social significance<sup>80</sup>. Alongside societal development, clan centers emerge along with communal ones, and later, territorial sub-centers. As early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, in settlements of the Armenian Highland, there is evidence of sanctuaries located away from the central position<sup>81</sup>. In this context, the phenomenon of tombs concentrating around the main tomb should also be discussed (cf. examples of Joj Dar<sup>82</sup> in Yeghegnadzor, Moz<sup>83</sup>, Nerkin Getashen<sup>84</sup>, and Yeznagomer<sup>85</sup>).

**Boundary.** In the organization of sacred space, the concept of boundary acquires significant importance. The boundary is emphasized through both natural and man-made elements. Natural boundaries include hill contours, promontories, the ravines that border them, and rivers. For instance, the Artsvanist and Sarnajur Rivers may have served as natural boundaries for the Yerku Jur and Astghadzor cemeteries, while the Ashtichi River for Vanki Dur 2, and the Gavaraget River for the Mrtbi Dzor cemetery<sup>86</sup>. The boundary could also be emphasized by the lake-shore. The largest tombs of the Adiaman, Tsovinar, Vanki Dur, and Vigon cemeteries were located along the edge of the shore. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the presence of menhirs along lake shores in Europe (notably along the shore of Lake Geneva), a fact that is also referenced in sagas<sup>87</sup>.

At the same time, natural boundaries were often combined with walls. Such walls have been identified in the Berdik cemetery and in the adjacent cultic complex-cemetery (Fig. 22). These two complexes are separated by a ravine. Along the edge of the ravine surrounding the Berdik cultic complex-cemetery runs a line of walls, which closes off in the east, ascending along the course of a small seasonal stream<sup>88</sup>. The practice of enclosing cemeteries with walls was known in the ancient Near East; for example, within the territory of the Hittite state, the Gyavur Kala



*Fig. 22. Berdik, wall-boundary of the cultic complex*

cemetery was surrounded by a cyclopean wall<sup>89</sup>. Ghevond Alishan notes that burials could have taken place on the walls themselves, which is why the towers of such walls were often referred to as “gravestones”<sup>90</sup>.

A unique method of marking the boundary was used at the fortress of Tsitsernavank, where an altar stood along the outer edge of the fortress’s western wall, on the road leading to the cemetery. It is a natural rock fragment, the surface of which was shaped with a series of cup mark depressions connected by small channels resembling rivulets, all originating from a rectangular basin carved at the highest point of the stone. As mentioned earlier, in certain cases, the settlement wall itself could also be perceived as a boundary.

The Zirik cultic structure should also be mentioned here. It is located at the far end of a large cemetery, at the highest point, on the edge of a tongue-shaped terrace that descends sharply into a ravine. From the base to the summit, it is encircled by three to four successive semicircular retaining walls. The diameter at the base of the structure is approximately 15–20 m, and the vertical height of the built-up slope is about 7 m. At the summit, a circular platform measuring approximately 3–4 m in diameter is constructed from large stones and encircled by a double ring of masonry.

In the previously mentioned examples, the artificial boundary merely emphasized the natural one; however, in the case of the Shahumyan (Kapan) cemetery, it appears as a principle, where the area is separated from the settlement

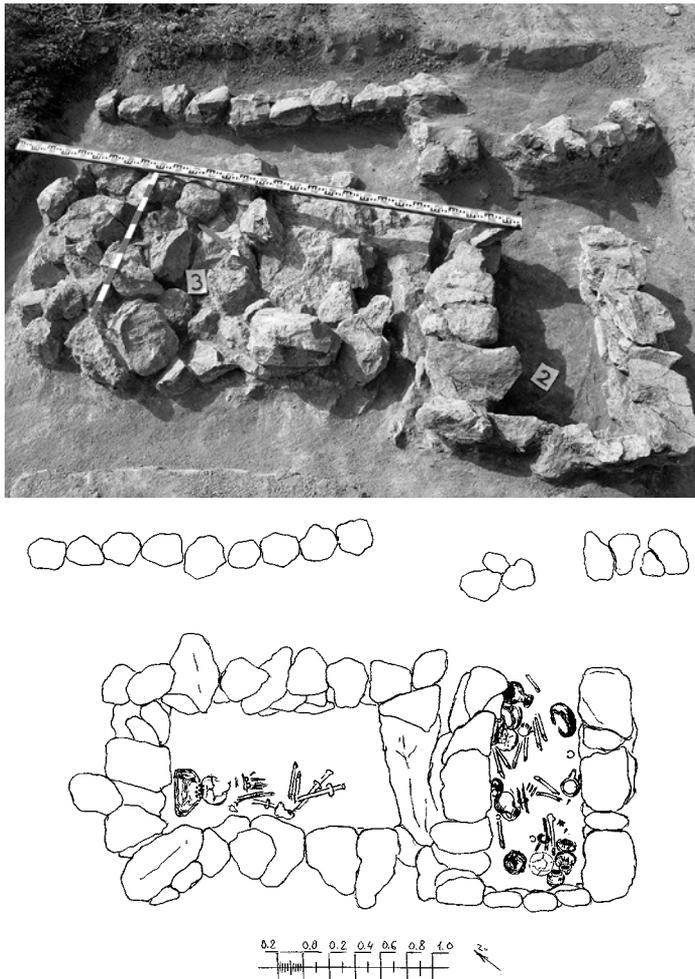


Fig. 23. Kapan, Tombs № 2–3, fence bordering the cemetery

by a barrier (Fig. 23). Unlike the earlier cases – where the cemetery was located outside the settlement wall, and the settlement’s boundary simultaneously served as a symbolic boundary for the cemetery – here, the wall belongs specifically to the cemetery itself. Moreover, the single-row wall scarcely could have had any defensive purpose.

In the context of boundaries, cromlechs, or certain varieties of them, can also be considered<sup>91</sup>. Typically, a cromlech would enclose one, and sometimes several, tombs<sup>92</sup>. Among their variations, it is worth noting the concentric circle cromlechs, where a single cromlech directly surrounds a chamber (cf. the № 1 tomb at Bjni<sup>93</sup>). A cromlech encloses several tombs at Nerkin Getashen<sup>94</sup>. In some cases, the area surrounded by the cromlech is not a burial mound. This phenomenon is observed in the cemeteries at Berdik (where the diameter of the cromlechs reaches up to 10 m, and the surface material is typical of the Late Bronze and Early Iron

Ages), as well as in the cemeteries along the road from Yerablur (Sisian) to Hak (in the Kashatagh region of Nagorno-Karabakh)<sup>95</sup>.

**Route.** The route leading to the sacred place holds significant importance. On one hand, it symbolizes the spiritual journey that the believer must undertake when visiting the holy place; on the other hand, the sanctuary itself could be perceived as a path that unites the visible and invisible worlds. Ultimately, the route itself could also become sanctified through the presence of a cultic structure along it.

From this perspective, the rows of tombs should be considered separately. For example, the Boghazkyoy cemetery was located outside the city, along the route leading to the sanctuary of Yazilikaya, while in the Ilija cemetery (not far from Gordion), the tombs were arranged in rows<sup>96</sup>. Studying European dolmens, M. Midgley suggests that the route itself was marked by tombs<sup>97</sup>. In Syunik, tombs are arranged in rows in the cemeteries of Patshar, Ghshlagh, Adiaman, and Mrtbi Dzor<sup>98</sup>. Similar rows of tombs have also been recorded in the Perei Dzor and Sangar cemeteries<sup>99</sup>. The tombs are arranged in rows as well in the Sisian II (Syuni Berd) cemetery<sup>100</sup>. Some of the tombs in Joj Dar are also aligned in an east-west direction<sup>101</sup>.

It is not excluded that the cemeteries located in mountain passes (such as Mutsq, Darband) are also connected with the symbolic significance of the route<sup>102</sup>. It should be noted that megaliths located in mountain passes (e.g., Saint Gotthard) are known in Europe<sup>103</sup>.

Ceremonial routes have been attested in Armenia since the Early Bronze Age. One of the earliest examples can be considered the cultic structure of Bjni (referred to as Tomb № 2 in field records and publications), where a path made of sifted clay led from a cromlech encircling the structure toward an open-air platform<sup>104</sup>. In all probability, the rock-cut path leading from the settlement of Amiranis Gora in Javakheti to the sanctuary located at the hilltop also carried symbolic significance<sup>105</sup>. Several rock-cut paths lead to the complex located 2 km east of the village of Gyulibulagh (Shirak province)<sup>106</sup>. A stone-paved route leads to the Shaori cyclopean complex (on the shore of Lake Paravana); along the road, there are numerous platforms, rock-cut steps, and menhirs. The Shaori cyclopean complex was not suitable for habitation and served a purely ceremonial and cultic purpose<sup>107</sup>.

Roads have also been identified at the Berdik cemetery-cultic complex (Fig. 24). A road bordered by orthostat walls branches off toward individual burial mounds and the central structure. Another, more monumental, straight road bordered on both sides by double-layered walls ascends approximately 70 m from the ravine and ends near three large burial mounds, evoking the impression of a "route of the dead". Similar roads are known in the Lake Sevan basin, at the Kuri Kharaba cemetery, where rows of stones oriented east-west lead toward the tombs. Each row consists of 35–60 stones, all aligned in a single direction<sup>108</sup>.

The most famous example of such ceremonial routes are those known from Trialeti, which, like those at Kuri Kharaba, are oriented along an east-west axis. Similar routes have been identified at Trialeti (tombs III, VI, VIII, XV, XVII, XLVII),



*Fig. 24. Berdik, ritual paths in the cultic complex*

and at Zurtaketi (tombs № 3 and 6), where they are paved, and their dimensions (including those of the tombs) significantly exceed those of the Khashatagh examples. Furthermore, unlike the branching paths of Berdik, at Trialeti, each route is directed toward a single tomb. The Trialeti and Zurtaketi tombs date to the second half of the third millennium BC to the first half of the second millennium BC. In the Late Bronze Age, ceremonial routes were no longer constructed<sup>109</sup>. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the Bedeni cemetery, where the burial mounds are connected by narrow stone pathways<sup>110</sup>. Although excavations have not been carried out at the Berdik complex, the surface materials overwhelmingly date to the Late Bronze Age.

Among the most distant parallels, it should be mentioned the route leading to the cultic structure of Stonehenge<sup>111</sup>. Pathways leading to tombs are also known in European dolmen cemeteries<sup>112</sup>. In general, megalithic alignments<sup>113</sup> can be interpreted as routes, considering their role in connecting “this” and “other” worlds<sup>114</sup> and their association with the tombs<sup>115</sup>, although alternative interpretations of their function are also possible<sup>116</sup>. Syunik is an important center for megalithic alignments, the most famous of which is the Zorats Karer, where menhirs are placed within the cemetery area, surrounding it in certain sections<sup>117</sup>. Megalithic alignments are also known from Khnatsakh (not far from the Bhavev Monastery), which differ from the examples of Zorats Karer in that no traces of tombs are visible in this area. The megaliths are located outside the settlement, at the foothill

and on the plateau. In the context of the megalithic alignments of Zorats Karer, the alignment of rectangular stones placed in the cemetery of Gyaur Damer – characterized by dolmen-type structures – should also be considered<sup>118</sup>. As a parallel, we can mention the triple-row parallel stone alignments located east of Ashotsk, on the edge of the Zuygaghbyur district, composed of standing stones up to 1.2 m high, spaced 1.5 m apart, and extending for about 1.5 km. There are no visible traces of a settlement or cemetery in the surrounding area, and the function of the structure remains unknown. Similar alignments also exist in the village of Navur in Tavush<sup>119</sup>. Another variation of megalithic alignments involves megaliths encircling a structure or group of tombs<sup>120</sup>. In Syunik, such structure is known in Kuri Kharaba<sup>121</sup>.

In the context of routes, the tomb dromoi – entrance corridors – should also be discussed. These could lead to the burial chamber either on a sloped path (as in the large tomb of Arvakan) or on a straight one (as seen in Tomb № 8 of area IV and Tomb № 2 of area V in the Shahumyan cemetery of Kapan).

The sanctification of routes is a theme found in the mythologies of various peoples<sup>122</sup>.

Thus, the study of the topographical features of sacred places of Syunik shows that these sites are located in diverse environments, typically characterized by rocky terrains or alpine meadows. These sacred places are generally situated on natural heights, on their slopes, on plateaus, along roads and gorges, on cliffs, near water sources, and around caves. They appear in the centers of public sphere, in border zones, along roads – or they themselves symbolize the center, the border, or the path. Sacred places often form around natural features, which become key components of the sanctified landscape. Moreover, the ancient inhabitants of Syunik made extensive use of the natural environment, transforming the original texture of natural elements. Along with other related sites, sacred places constitute vital components of the socio-cultural order of Syunik during the Bronze and Iron Ages.

## References

- 1 Gh. Alishan, *Ancient Beliefs*, p. 37; N. Taghavaryan, *op. cit.*, p. 7–8.
- 2 The mentioned sites were studied in 2014 by the expedition team of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic Tourism Department (G. Sargsyan, A. Gnuni, L. Hovhannisyan, Z. Yrkoyan).
- 3 Y. Lalayan, *Nor Bayazet or Gegharkunik: Prehistoric Period*, EJ XV, 1907, p. 180.
- 4 In 2014, the site was studied by the expedition of the Tourism Department adjunct to the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic government.
- 5 R. Biscione, S. Hmayakyan, N. Parmegiani, *op. cit.*, p. 116; Y. Lalayan, *Excavation of Tombs*, p. 107–108.
- 6 R. Biscione, S. Hmayakyan, N. Parmegiani, *op. cit.*, p. 88; Y. Lalayan, *Excavation of Tombs*, p. 70.
- 7 G. Areshyan, *Rescue Excavations in the Kanagegh Cemetery*, p. 2.
- 8 A. Piliposyan, *Survey Excavations at the “Mrtbi Dzor” Cemetery*, p. 32.
- 9 The cemetery of Berdik is mentioned in several publications as the Hak cemetery. This is due to the fact that in 1996, when the cemetery was first recorded by the expedition team of the Scientific Research Center of Historical and Cultural Heritage of the Ministry of Culture of RA (A. Gnuni, V. Gayseryan, G. Khachatryan), Berdik village, where the cemetery is located, was still uninhabited. A. Gnuni, G. Khachatryan, *Newly Discovered Sites in the Upper Stream of the Aghavno River*, p. 55. In 2014, the site was again studied by expedition of the Tourism Department under the government of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.
- 10 State List of Monuments, 8 Syunik Region, 1 Kapan City, 6 Baghaburj residential district, 3 Cemetery.
- 11 State List of Monuments, 8 Sisian, 13 Arevis, 2 Tanahat medieval village, 1 Tanahat Monastery, 2 Cemetery, 1 Tomb.
- 12 M. Hasratyan, *Historical and Archaeological Studies*, Yerevan, 1985, p. 168.
- 13 A. Gnuni, G. Khachatryan, *The Cemtery of Keren*, p. 139.
- 14 G. Sargsyan, A. Gnuni, A. Hakobyan, *op. cit.*, p. 164–165.
- 15 In 2014, the monument was studied by the monument documentation expedition of the Tourism Department under the government of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.
- 16 From a tomb looted by treasure hunters at this site, bronze and gold jewelry, a helmet, a mask, a large decorated rosette for the chest, and other unique artifacts were discovered. The items have been sold, and the treasure hunters have been prosecuted.
- 17 R. Biscione, S. Hmayakyan, N. Parmegiani, *op. cit.*, p. 147.
- 18 G. Areshyan, *op. cit.*, p. 2, State List of Monuments, 8, 13, 12.
- 19 State List of Monuments, 8 Syunik Region, 12 Aghvani Village, 2–3, 8 Syunik Region, 44 Khnatsakh, 10 Cemetery, 8 Syunik Region, 98 Tandzaver Village, 5 Cemetery.
- 20 Y. Lalayan, *Nor Bayazet or Gegharkunik*, p. 184, 186.
- 21 S. Devejyan, *Lori Berd II*, p. 51.
- 22 R. Biscione, S. Hmayakyan, N. Parmegiani, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
- 23 G. Sargsyan, A. Gnuni, A. Hakobyan, *op. cit.*, p. 159–160.
- 24 R. Biscione, S. Hmayakyan, N. Parmegiani, *op. cit.*, p. 147.
- 25 State List of Monuments, 8 Syunik Region, 20 Balak Village, 1 Fortress, 1 Cemetery, 8 Syunik Region, 45 Khndzoresk, 2 Settlement, 1 Cemetery, 8 Syunik Region, 69 Shaghat, 1 Settlement, 2 Cemetery.
- 26 State List of Monuments, 8 Syunik Region, 57, Hatsavan, 5 Cemetery.
- 27 G. Sargsyan, A. Gnuni, A. Hakobyan, *op. cit.*, p. 157–158.
- 28 G. Sargsyan, A. Gnuni, A. Hakobyan, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

- <sup>29</sup> The Mirik 2 settlement and the Ghushchi Ghala fortress were studied in 2014 by the expedition team of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic Tourism Department.
- <sup>30</sup> The sanctification of heights and mountains is reflected in the mythological systems of various peoples (S. A. Tokarev, *op. cit.*, p. 603–608), including that of the Armenians. Cf. the epic's "Bandzrik Maratuk Astvatsatsin", "Maruta Bandzr Astvatsatsin", and "Sasma Sar", whose "peak stands like a shining arch" (Sasuntsi Davit, IV Narrative, 27, 1570–1580; VI Narrative, 44, 1800–1810; VII Narrative, 14, 644–645). In addition to serving as dwellings for higher powers, heights are often associated with the symbolism of burial (cf. Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 3, XIV, 7).
- <sup>31</sup> A. Gnuni, G. Khachatryan, *Newly Discovered Sites in the Upper Stream of the Aghavno River*, p. 55–56.
- <sup>32</sup> State List of Monuments, 8 Syunik Region, 49 Tsghuk, 1 Cemetery; O. Xnkikyan, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
- <sup>33</sup> S. Hmayakyan, H. Hakobyan, N. Tiratsyan, H. Sanamyan, R. Biscione, N. Parmegiani, *Main Results of the 2004–2005 Fieldwork of the Armenian-Italian Mobile Expedition in Gegharkunik*, CAA XIV, 2008, p. 160.
- <sup>34</sup> S. Ashurov, *Early Bronze Age Kurgans in Nakhijevan*, AEFC, Tbilisi, 2004, p. 26.
- <sup>35</sup> State List of Monuments, 9 Vayots Dzor, 32 Malishka, 5 Moz, 1 Cemetery.
- <sup>36</sup> H. Martirosyan, H. Israelyan, *Rock Carvings of the Geghama Mountains*, p. 7; S. Sardaryan, *The Rock Carvings of Armenia: From the Stone Age to the Bronze Age*, Yerevan, 2010, p. 7–9.
- <sup>37</sup> A. Gilibert, A. Bobokhyan, P. Hnila 2012, *Dragon Stones in Context*, p. 144, 93–132.
- <sup>38</sup> The plateau has been sanctified in various mythological systems, especially those of Indo-European peoples, and has often been associated with the concept of the underworld: cf. J. Puhvel, "Meadow of the Otherworld" in *Indo-European Tradition*, *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung* 83, 1969, p. 64–69. In the Poetic Edda, the valley of Iðavöllr is mentioned, where the gods built their temples (Poetic Edda, *Völuspá* 7). The Earth was called a "valley" in the language of the celestial deities, the Aesir (Poetic Edda, *Alvíssmál* 10). In Irish sagas, there are mentions of "spirits of the plain" (Irish Sagas, p. 93). In Ireland, there existed the so-called "Valley of Worship" (E. Ross, *The Pagan Celts*, Moscow, 2005, p. 176–177).
- <sup>39</sup> State List of Monuments, 8 Syunik Region, 62 Mutsk, 1 Cemetery, 9 Vayots Dzor, 7 Aghnjadzor, 1 Fortress, 1 Cemetery.
- <sup>40</sup> R. Biscione, S. Hmayakyan, N. Parmegiani, *op. cit.*, p. 144.
- <sup>41</sup> I. Gharibyan, H. Simonyan, A. Gnuni, E. Ayvazyan, E. Kamalyan, G. Khachatryan, *New Discoveries in Syunik*, p. 132.
- <sup>42</sup> A. Gevorgyan, L. Petrosyan, *The Ancient Cultic Site of Byurakan*, AWNCA I, Yerevan, 1993, p. 20–26.
- <sup>43</sup> S. D. Lisitsyan, *Sanctuaries by the Passes*, p. 200–212.
- <sup>44</sup> I. Gharibyan, H. Simonyan, A. Gnuni, E. Ayvazyan, E. Kamalyan, G. Khachatryan, *op. cit.*, p. 138.
- <sup>45</sup> Data on the altars of Hoghmik and Tsitsernakaberd was provided to us by H. Hakobyan, to whom we extend our deepest gratitude. The observations of the Garni altar were made by L. Mkrtchyan.
- <sup>46</sup> A. Ivanovskiy, *op. cit.*, p. 88, 146, 153.
- <sup>47</sup> See also G. Ismailov, *Ancient Settlements*, p. 39–41, Fig. 15; H. Simonyan, A. Gnuni, *Study of the Ancient, Pre-Christian, and Medieval Settlements in the Liberated Territories of Artsakh*, 1993–1995, p. 70.
- <sup>48</sup> Y. Lalayan, *Municipal District of Nakhijevan or Nakhijevan*, EJ XIII, p. 205.
- <sup>49</sup> R. Biscione, S. Hmayakyan, N. Parmegiani, *op. cit.*, p. 138.
- <sup>50</sup> R. Biscione, S. Hmayakyan, N. Parmegiani, *op. cit.*, p. 157, 193.
- <sup>51</sup> P. Avetisyan, R. Badalyan, A. Gevorgyan, O. Xnkikyan, *Excavations at the Sisian Cemetery, Armenian Civilization from Ancient Times to the Adoption of Christianity*, Yerevan, 2000, p. 3.

- 52 A. Piliposyan, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
- 53 Y. Lalayan, *Nor Bayazet or Gegharkunik: Prehistoric Period*, EJ XIV, 1906, p. 32, 37. Although the fluctuations in the level of Lake Sevan make it necessary to accept the observation of Y. Lalayan with some reservations, the mention of the regularity itself is very significant.
- 54 R. Biscione, S. Hmayakyan, N. Parmegiani, *op. cit.*, p. 116, 157; S. Hmayakyan, H. Hakobyan, N. Tiratsyan, H. Sanamyan, R. Biscione, N. Parmegiani, *op. cit.*, p. 160; Y. Lalayan, *Excavation of Tombs*, p. 107–108.
- 55 Y. Lalayan, *Nor Bayazet or Gegharkunik*, p. 230.
- 56 H. Simonyan, *Map of the Historical Sites of the Karvachar Region*, Yerevan, 1996.
- 57 Cf. the analysis of this episode of late Zoroastrian mythology found in the work of Eznik Koghbatsi: “Others also say, though it is in no way believable, that when Vormizd died, he cast his seed into a spring, and near the end of time, a virgin is to be born from that seed” (Eznik Koghbatsi, *Refutation of the Sects*, Tbilisi, 1914, II, 10).
- 58 Gh. Alishan, *Ancient Beliefs...*, p. 37, For more details cf. A. S. Piliposyan, R. A. Mkrtchyan, *The Van-Tosp (Urartian) Cave-Tomb of Geghovit*, ASA 18/IV, Yerevan 2001.
- 59 A. Demirkhanyan, H. Azizyan, *Idols from the Hamo 1 Cave*, RFAW of the Annual Archaeological Works Conference, 1983–1985, Yerevan, 1986, p. 9.
- 60 Y. Lalayan, *Zangezur*, p. 42.
- 61 See, Y. Lalayan, *Nor Bayazet or Gegharkunik*, p. 230; *State List of Monuments*, 9 Vayots Dzor Region, 12 Arpi 2 Cemetery.
- 62 For examples cf. Y. Lalayan, *Excavation of Tombs*, p. 117.
- 63 Cf. *Classical Period Hymns*, Moscow, 1988; *Homeric Hymns to Hermes*, 1–5; *Orphic Hymns to Pluto*, 15.
- 64 Y. Lalayan, *Zangezur*, p. 186.
- 65 Y. Lalayan, *Province of Sharur Daralageaz*, p. 261.
- 66 G. Sargsyan, A. Gnuni, A. Hakobyan, *op. cit.*, p. 153, 156.
- 67 Y. Lalayan, *Nor Bayazet or Gegharkunik*, p. 189.
- 68 *State List of Monuments*, 8 Syunik Region, 49, Aghvani 3 Cemetery.
- 69 Y. Lalayan, *op. cit.*, p. 186.
- 70 Y. Lalayan, *op. cit.*, p. 230.
- 71 *State List of Monuments*, 9 Vayots Dzor Region, 12 Arpi 2 Cemetery.
- 72 Y. Lalayan, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
- 73 I. Gharibyan, H. Simonyan, A. Gnuni, E. Ayvazyan, E. Kamalyan, G. Khachatryan, *op. cit.*, p. 132.
- 74 G. E. Areshyan, *The Art of the Kura-Araxes Culture*, *Proceedings of the Second International Symposium on Armenian Art* (separate reprint), Yerevan, 1978, p. 5.
- 75 I. Gharibyan, H. Simonyan, A. Gnuni, E. Ayvazyan, E. Kamalyan, G. Khachatryan, *op. cit.*, p. 130.
- 76 N. S. Ibrahimov, *op. cit.*, p. 25–27. It should be noted that the simultaneous existence of the rock carvings and the “public structure” is not at all clear.
- 77 R. Biscione, S. Hmayakyan, N. Parmegiani, *op. cit.*, p. 97.
- 78 O. Xnkikyan, *op. cit.*, p. 27; S. D. Lisitsyan, *The Koshun-Dash Megalithic Settlement in Sisian*, p. 709–721; K. Kh. Kushnareva, *Ancient Monuments of Dvin*, p. 48.
- 79 R. Biscione, S. Hmayakyan, N. Parmegiani, *op. cit.*, p. 137, 157.
- 80 In mythological systems, central man-made complexes located in plains are frequently mentioned. Specifically, in “Sasuntsi Davit”, there is a reference to “An Iron house set in the middle of the field” (Sasuntsi Davit, *Tale VI*, 14, 390–400). The plain, marked by a central stone, appears in a number of myths and fairy tales (e.g., *Irish Sagas*, p. 130; A. N. Afanasyev,

Russian Folk Tales, № 168), including in the Armenian epic (Sasuntsi Davit, Tale VII, lines 730–740).

The transformation of the tomb into a central ritual and cultic object is also represented in mythology. The burial mound could serve as a place of oaths and possess purifying power (Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers*, 1–10, 100–130). In Germanic mythology, the burial mound functions as a unique center associated with the birth of new life (*The Saga of the Volsungs*, XVI). The process of turning an existing tomb into a sanctuary is also described in the Armenian epic (Sasuntsi Davit, Tale VIII, 37, 238–240; Tale IX, 11, 410–415).

- 81 A. Gnuni, *Sanctuaries and Cultic Structures in the Settlements of the Shengavit Culture*, HPJ 1, 2006, p. 245–246.
- 82 See V. Hovhannisyán's article in the appendix of this book. Here, the tombs are arranged in separate groups, sometimes with a certain distance between them. Some of them are grouped around larger tombs, and in some cases, common walls are used.
- 83 O. Xnkikyan, *Excavations in the Yeghegnadzor Region*, AWNCA I, Yerevan, 1993, p. 77; O. Xnkikyan, *op. cit.*, p. 70.
- 84 O. Xnkikyan, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
- 85 G. Sargsyan, A. Gnuni, A. Hakobyan, *op. cit.*, p. 157.
- 86 In the mythology of various peoples, the river serves as a boundary between this and the nether worlds (cf. Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 1, II, 4–5). The boundary nature of the river (and therefore of the bridge as well) is also reflected in the Armenian epic. The river marked the boundary beyond which the taboos associated with the city, particularly the taboo against bloodshed, no longer applied (see, for example, Sasuntsi Davit, Tale VII, 5, 170, 220, VIII, 17, 733). In Indian mythology as well, the river was connected to the idea of sacrifice and the underworld, particularly in the context of the god Soma, who was associated with sacrificial rites and had certain chthonic functions (*Rigveda*, I, 46, 3). In Russian bylines, the river Pachuy is mentioned as a boundary between life and death (Dobrynya Nikitich and Alyosha Popovich, Moscow, 1974, 2, p. 38–40).
- 87 A. D' Anna, F. Pinet, *Standing Stones from the Alps and the Mediterranean*, ODMM, 2002, p. 583–585; *Ynglinga Saga XXVII*. Cf. also the following references: the shore of the dead is mentioned in the Poetic Edda (*Völuspá*, stanza 38), and a coastal burial mound appears in *Beowulf* (*Beowulf*, Part III, lines 2241–2243). In Norse mythology, Odin's dwelling was located on the shore of a lake (*Ynglinga Saga*, Chapter V, in: Snorri Sturluson, *Circle of the Earth*, Moscow, 1980).
- 88 The synchronization of the walls and burial complexes of both the Berdik cemetery and the cultic structure-cemetery is fundamentally debatable. However, it should be noted that neither in one nor the other has any late-period pottery been discovered, and there are also no architectural remains indicating the presence of a settlement.
- 89 J. McQueen, *The Hittites and Their Contemporaries in Asia Minor*, Moscow, 1983, p. 133.
- 90 Gh. Alishan, *Ancient Beliefs*, p. 44.
- 91 At the same time, it is not excluded that the spiral-shaped cromlech may have symbolized a path leading to the chamber.
- 92 G. Tumanyan, *The Structure of Late Bronze Age Tombs in Armenia*, p. 173.
- 93 I. Gharibyan, H. Hakobyan, A. Gnuni, G. Khachatryan, T. Vartanesova, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
- 94 O. Xnkikyan, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
- 95 A. Gnuni, G. Khachatryan, *Newly Discovered Sites*, p. 55.
- 96 J. G. McQueen, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
- 97 M. Midgley, *The Megalithic Tombs of the North European Plain*, ODMM, p. 74.
- 98 Y. Lalayan, 1906, p. 8–11, 31; Y. Lalayan, *Excavations in the Region of Nor Bayazet in 1908*, EJ XIX, 1910, p. 60.
- 99 R. Biscione, S. Hmayakyan, N. Parmegiani, *op. cit.*, p. 141, 231.

- <sup>100</sup> P. Avetisyan, R. Badalyan, A. Gevorgyan, O. Xnkikyan, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
- <sup>101</sup> Cf. V. Hovhannisyan's article in the appendix of this book.
- <sup>102</sup> Cf. S. A. Tokarev, *op. cit.*, p. 603.
- <sup>103</sup> A. D' Anna, L. Pinet, *op. cit.*, p. 584.
- <sup>104</sup> I. Gharibyan, H. Hakobyan, A. Gnuni, G. Khachatryan, T. Vartanesova, *Bjni (Excavation Results)*, p. 71–72; I. Gharibyan, H. Hakobyan, F. Muradyan, A. Gnuni, *Report on the 2011 Excavations at Bjni*.
- <sup>105</sup> T. N. Chubinashvili, *On the Ancient History of the South Caucasus*, p. 230.
- <sup>106</sup> The sanctuary of Gyulibulagh was discovered in 1989 by H. Khachatryan and H. Hakobyan. See: H. Hakobyan, A. Gnuni, *Observations*, p. 90.
- <sup>107</sup> G. Narimanashvili, *New Discoveries in the Trialeti Culture*, p. 103–104.
- <sup>108</sup> A. Ivanovskiy, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
- <sup>109</sup> G. Narimanishvili, *op. cit.*, p. 97–100.
- <sup>110</sup> G. Gobejishvili, *Bedeni – The Culture of Kurgan Burials*, Tbilisi, 1981, p. 8.
- <sup>111</sup> N. Shirokova, *Myths of the Celtic Peoples*, Moscow, 2005, p. 100.
- <sup>112</sup> T. Wilson, *Megalithic Monuments in Brittany*, *American Naturalist* 259, 1888, p. 583.
- <sup>113</sup> To describe such arrangements, Western literature often uses the English term “alignment”, meaning “positioned in a uniform line” (T. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 585).
- <sup>114</sup> M. Toussaint, Ch. Frebutte, S. Pirson, F. Hubert, Ph. Masy, *Megalithic Monuments of Belgium*, ODMM, vol. 1 p. 95, 105; R. Bradley, *Prehistoric Stone Settings in Britain and Ireland: an Exception Case*, ODMM, vol. 2, p. 540, 542.
- <sup>115</sup> N. Bayens, *The Megalithic Remains of Anglesey*, London, 1911, p. 31.
- <sup>116</sup> Over the course of more than a century of research into megalithic alignments, numerous theories have been proposed. These structures have been interpreted as everything from simple idols to statues dedicated to ancestors (N. Shirokova, *op. cit.*, p. 104). G. Daniel interprets the latter (mainly circularly arranged megaliths) as gathering places (= centers) for various tribes, intended for both secular and spiritual ceremonies (G. Daniel, *Megalithic Monuments*, *Scientific American*, 1980, p. 80). Zorats Karer and similar megalithic sites have also been interpreted as boundary stones (G. Areshyan, K. Ghafadaryan, K. Hovhannisyan, *op. cit.*, p. 70).
- <sup>117</sup> O. Xnkikyan, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
- <sup>118</sup> The site was investigated in 2014 by an expedition of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic Tourism Agency (G. Sargsyan, L. Hovhannisyan, Z. Yrkoyan).
- <sup>119</sup> H. A. Martirosyan, *Late Bronze Age Settlements and Cemeteries*, p. 23.
- <sup>120</sup> In the literature, they are typically described using the term “enclosed” (see T. Wilson, *Megalithic Monuments in Brittany*, p. 583).
- <sup>121</sup> A. Ivanovskiy, *op. cit.*, p. 20. The burial mound № 28 at Karmir Berd is also ringed with orthostat-set stones (K. Kh. Kushnareva, *The Tazakend Cemetery in Armenia*, SA 1, 1960, p. 143).
- <sup>122</sup> In Scandinavian sagas, the Earth was referred to as the “route” in the language of the Vanir deities (The Poetic Edda, *Alvíssmál*, 10). In the Poetic Edda, stones placed along the roads are mentioned in commemoration of the deceased (The Poetic Edda, *Völuspá*, 72). In Greek mythology, the ruler of routes was considered to be Hermes, who accompanied souls to the realm of Hades, as well as Apollo (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, The Oresteia, Moscow, 1958, 1065, 1070, *Ancient Hymns, Orphic Hymns, to Hermes Chthonios* 1–5). One of the goddesses of the afterlife, Hecate, was perceived as the ruler of crossroads (Orphic Hymns to Hecate 1–5).

# Appendices

## Excavations at the Joj Dar cemetery in Yeghegnadzor

V. Hovhannisyan

In 1983, during the construction of the road leading to a new building of the cheese factory of Yeghegnadzor in a place called Joj Dar, tombs from the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages were uncovered<sup>1</sup>. The excavations of the tombs located in the construction zone were carried out by the archaeological team of the “Erebuni” Museum of Yerevan.

Joj Dar is an isolated height with steep slopes located on the eastern outskirts of Yeghegnadzor (Fig. 1). Surface material collected from the slopes and summit of Joj Dar consists of fragments of medieval pottery. Today, the Joj Dar cemetery comprises separate groups of tombs scattered across the hills and watersheds, sometimes at considerable distances from each other (up to 1 km). These groups are situated north, northeast, and south of the eponymous height. There were also tombs on the western foothill of Joj Dar, though that area is now fully built up. In the southern part, only one group of tombs has been preserved.



*Fig. 1. Joj Dar, landscape*



*Fig. 2. Joj Dar, one of the excavated tombs*



*Fig. 3. Joj Dar, Tombs № 11, 21, vessels*



*Fig. 4. Joj Dar, accidental finds, stone anthropomorphic head, clay shoe-shaped pendant, clay bear head*

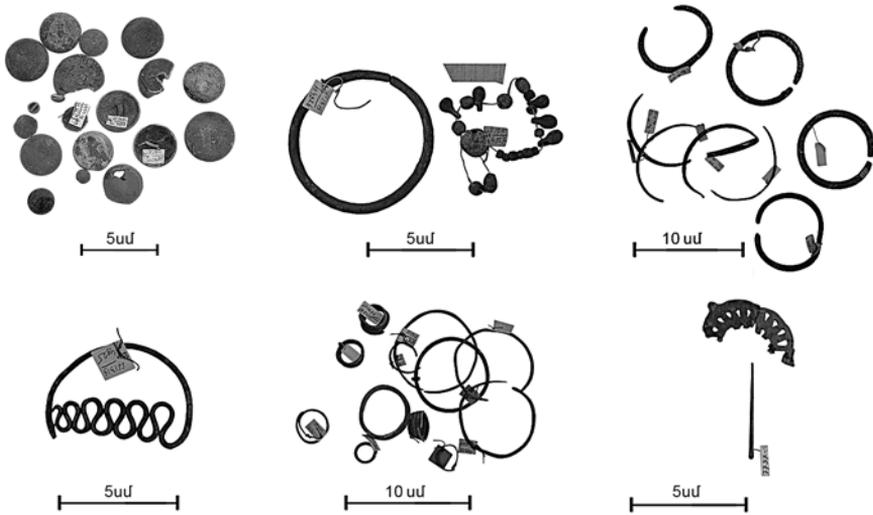


Fig. 5. Joj Dar, Tombs № 11, 18–19, metal jewelry

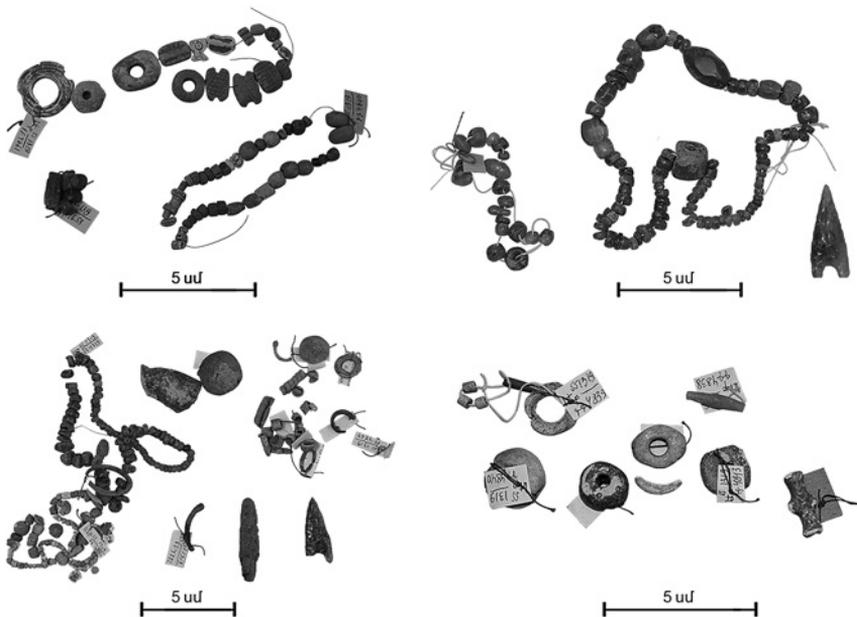


Fig. 6. Joj Dar, Tombs № 18–19, stone and shell jewelry

Each group contains from 3 to 15 tombs, arranged in rows extending from west to east. In some cases, a larger tomb structure is surrounded by smaller tombs (cf. Fig. 2). The tombs are oriented from north to south, with some deviations, and are surface structures without burial pits. They are built from one, and more rarely two or three rows of vertically positioned stone slabs or stone fragments. The tomb structures have oval, horseshoe-shaped, or rectangular plans. The dimensions of the tombs are as follows: length – 2.0 to 4.7 m; width – 1.5 to 3.5 m; height – 0.5 to 1.2 m.

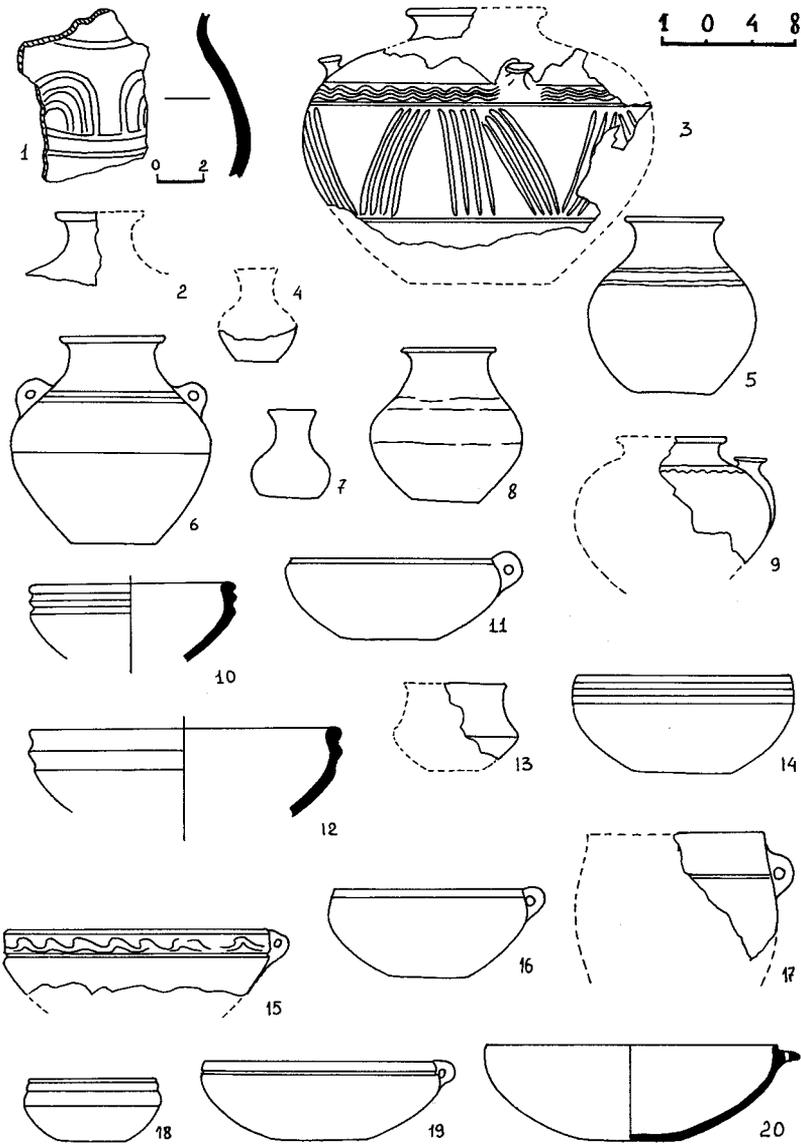


Fig. 7. Joj Dar, Tomb № 13

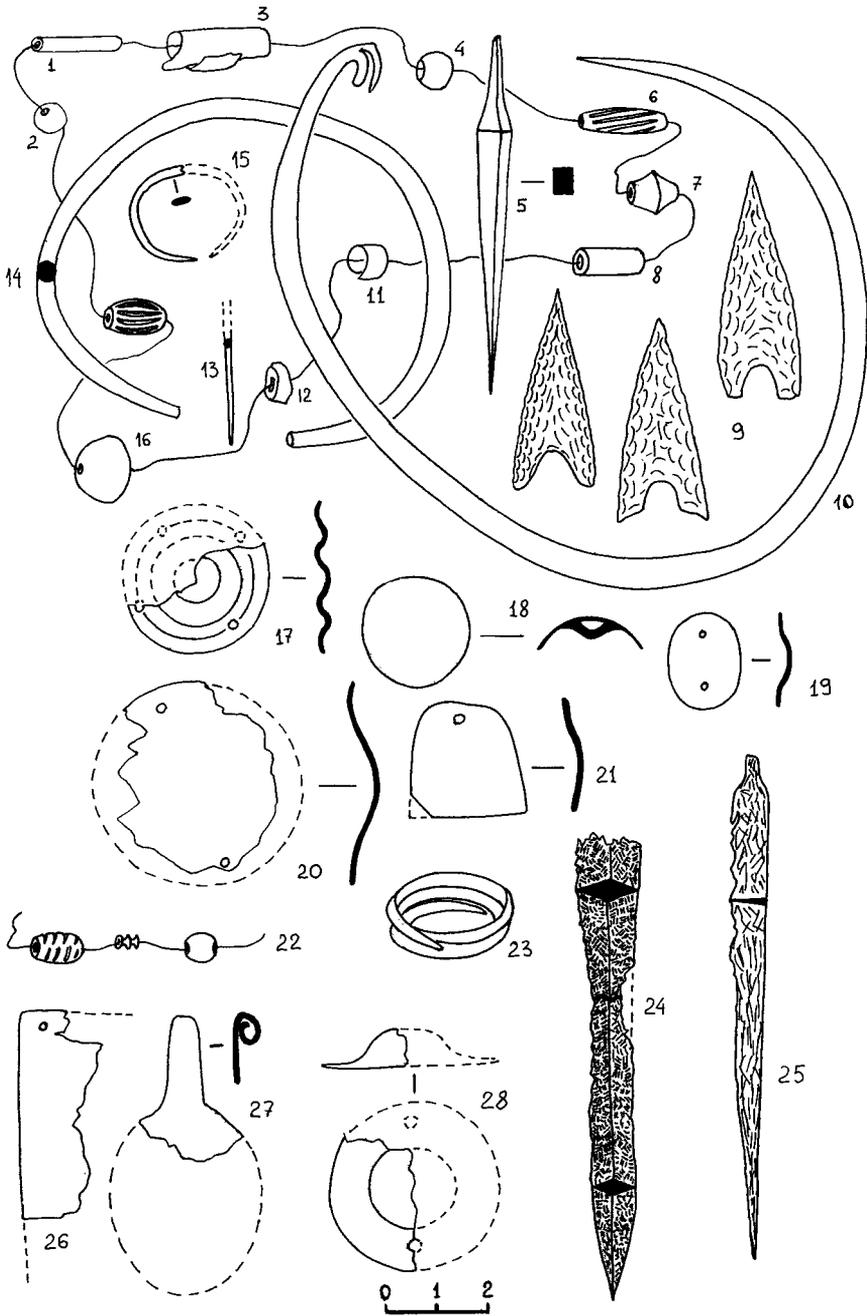


Fig. 8. Joj Dar, Tomb № 17

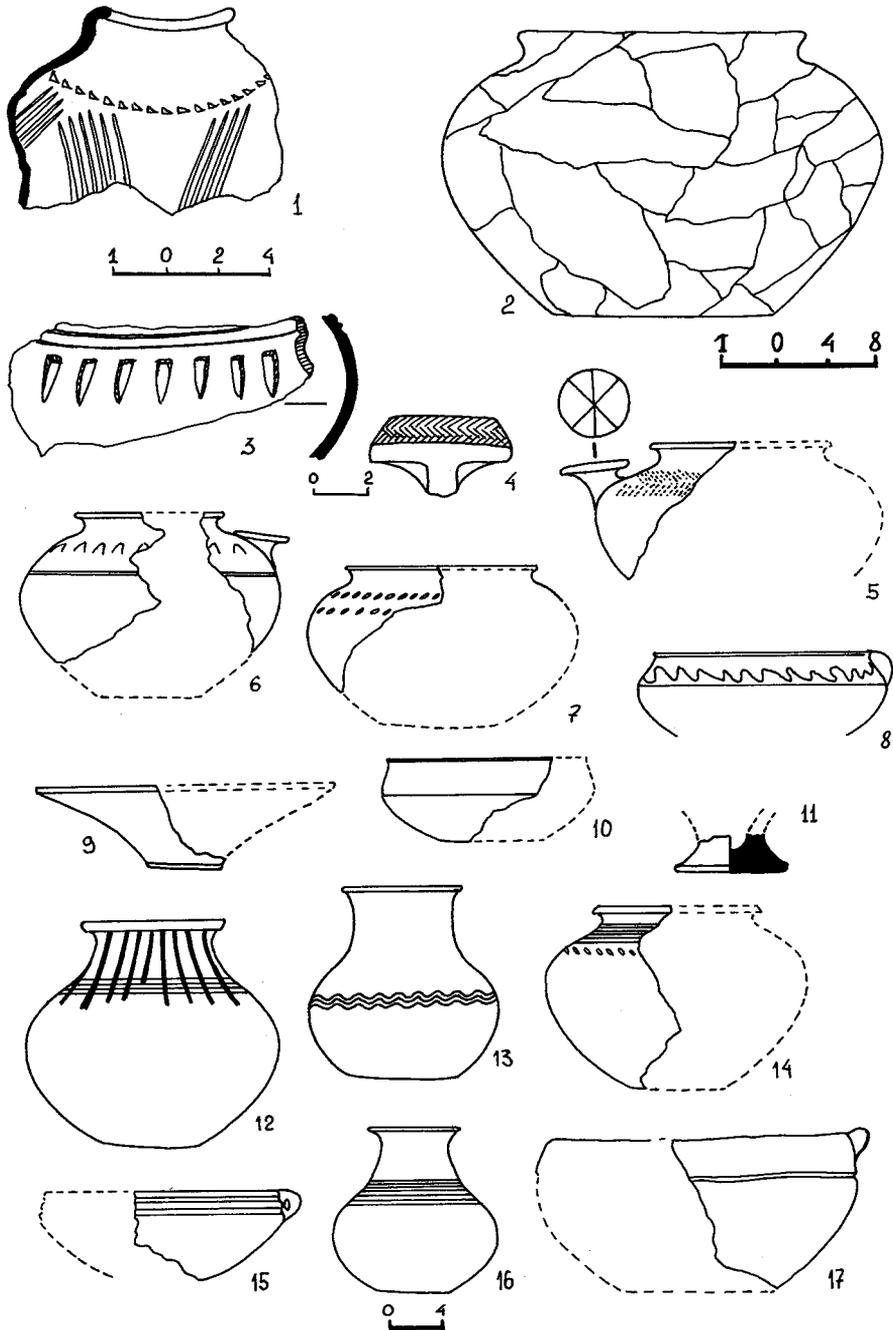


Fig. 9. Joj Dar, Tomb № 18

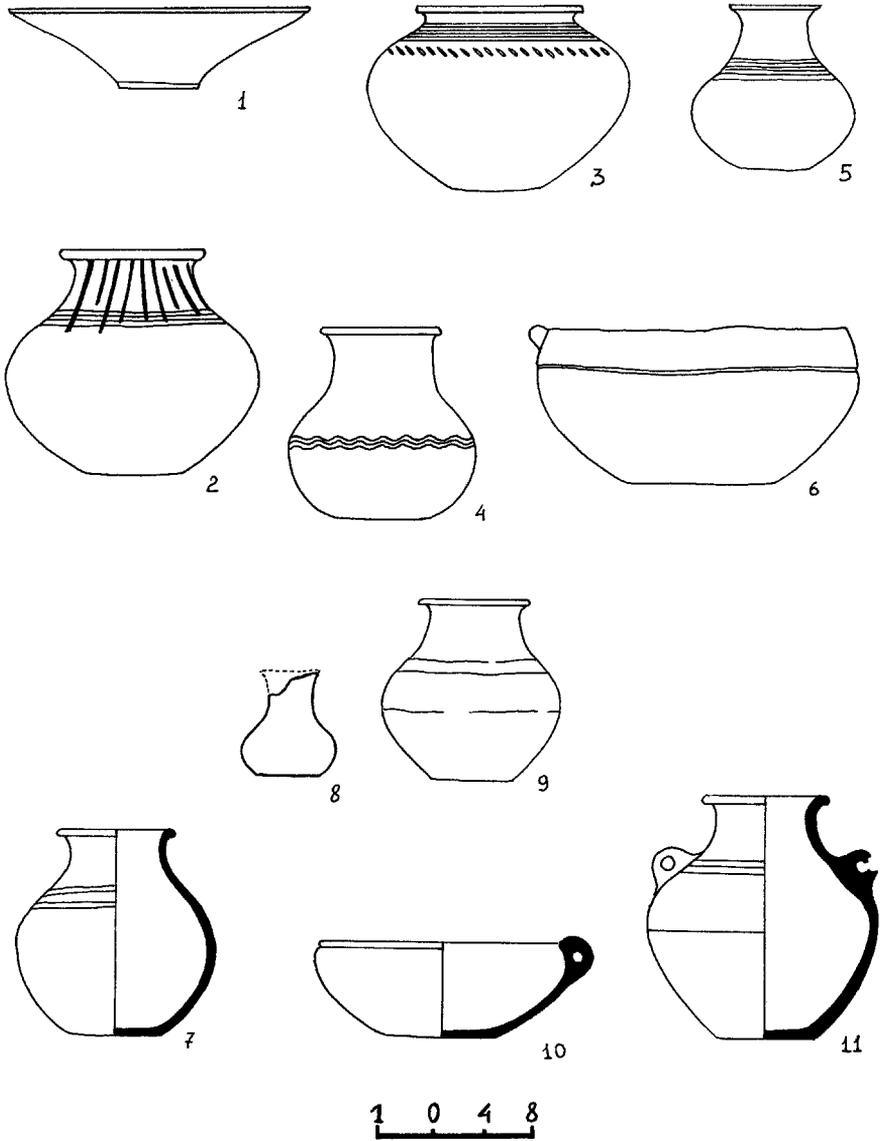


Fig. 10. Joj Dar, Tomb № 18

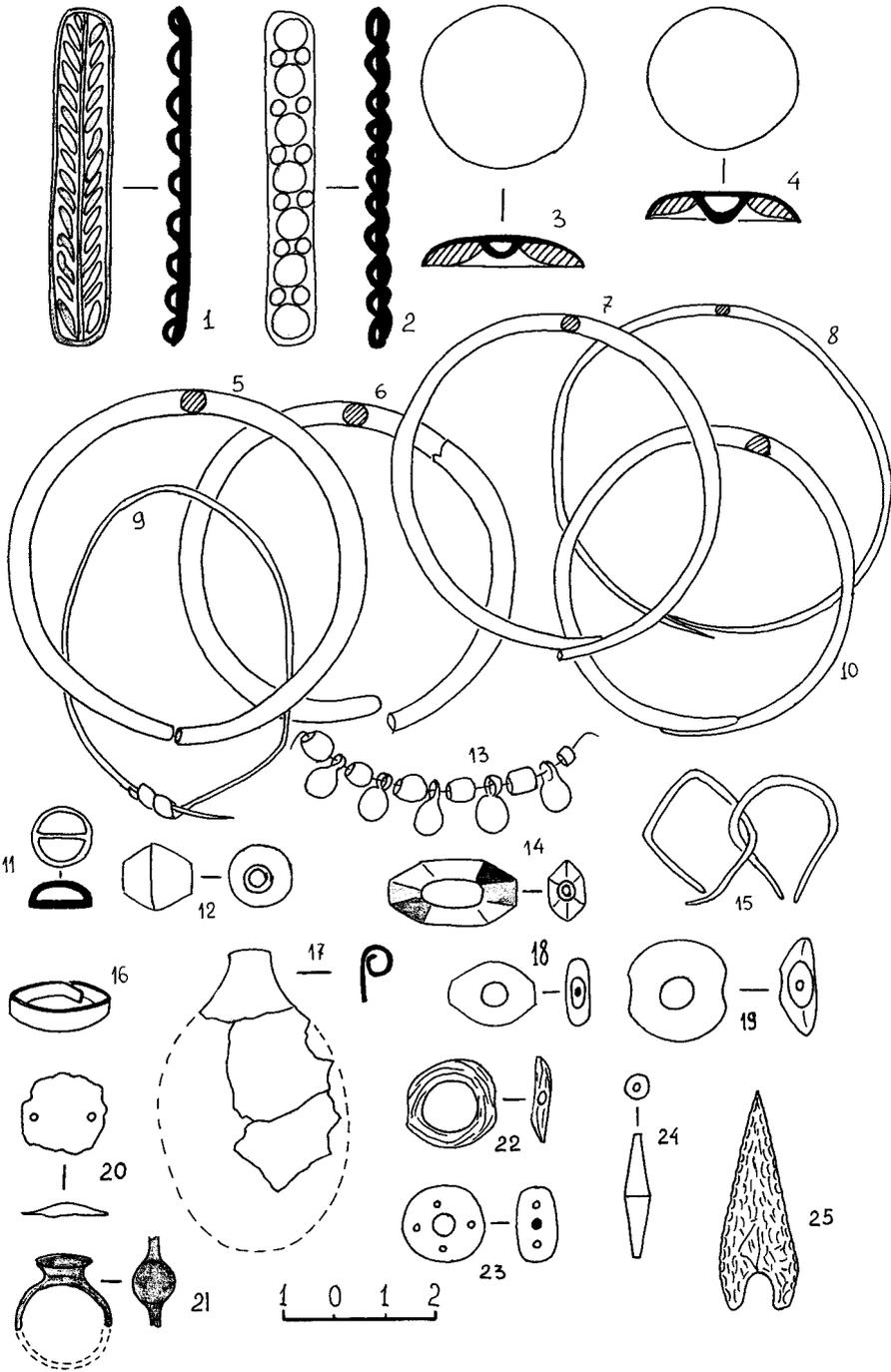


Fig. 11. Joj Dar, Tomb № 18

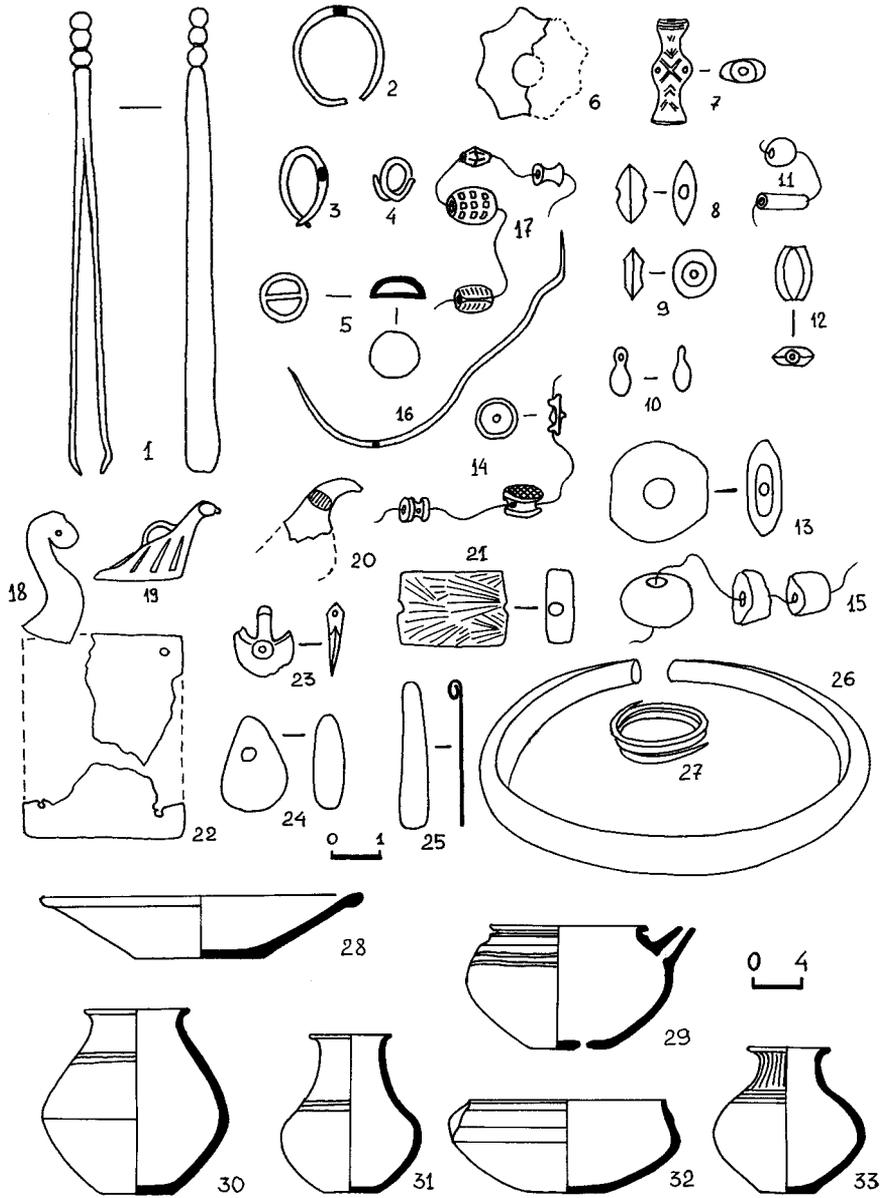


Fig. 12. Joj Dar, Tomb № 19

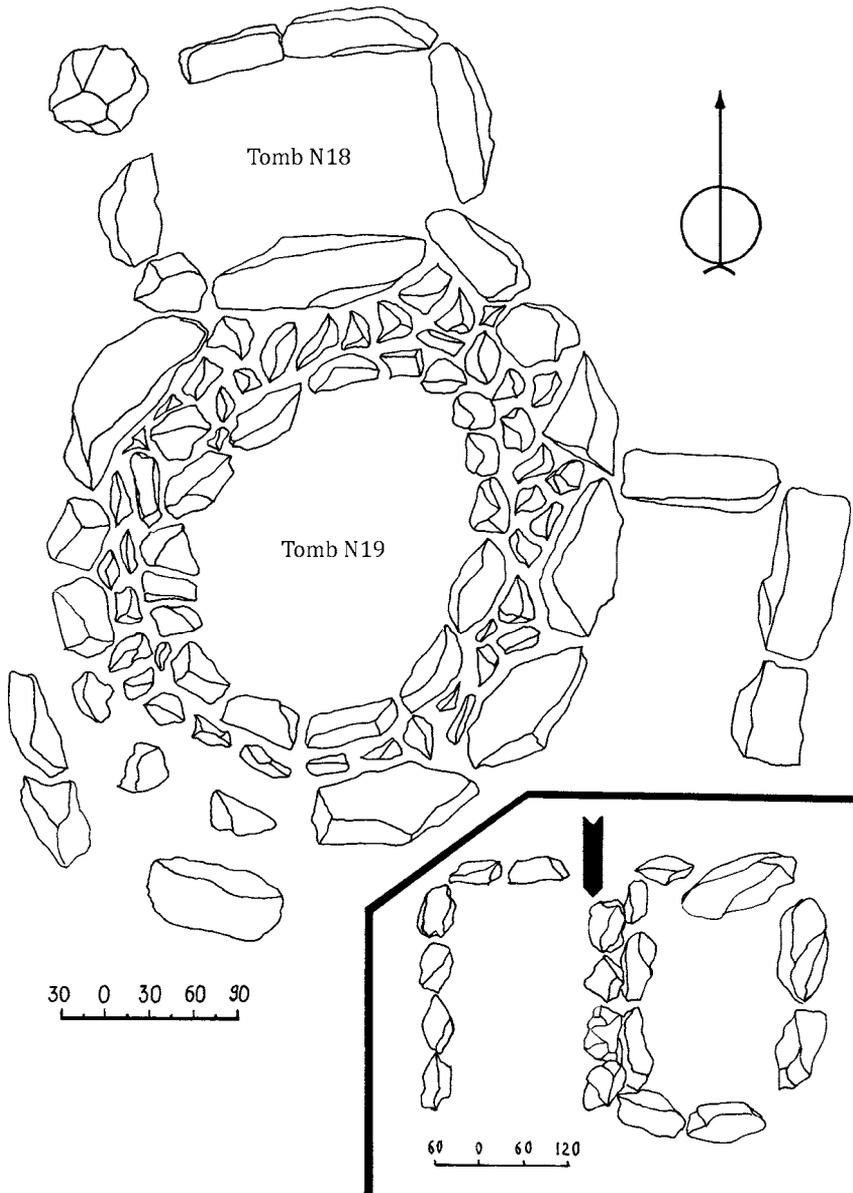


Fig. 13. Tomb № 18, 19

At present, the stones of the walls are displaced or have been pushed aside, and the massive basalt slabs that once served as coverings have mostly been removed from their original positions. The tombs were filled with soil mixed with stones.

The excavations revealed the following situation: starting at a depth of 15–20 cm, separate pottery fragments began to appear. As the excavation deepened, the quantity of these fragments increased, and the floors were completely covered

with remnants of burial inventory, particularly sherds of clay vessels. Notably, fragments of the same vessel could be found placed side by side or scattered throughout different parts of the tomb. The sparse skeletal remains were poorly preserved and scattered across the burial chamber, along with the remains of sacrificial animals (sheep and goats), tools, weapons, and jewelry.

It is difficult to assume that the current condition of the material remains can be explained by the characteristics of the burial rites, as complete or minimally damaged items were found in the hard-to-reach corners of the tombs and under fallen walls.

It is clear that the tombs were looted in ancient times, as evidenced by discovery of a broken iron ring from one of the tombs (N<sup>o</sup> 28b), which is characteristic of the Late Classical or Early Medieval periods.

In 1983, 20 tombs were excavated on the hills to the north of Joj Dar. The burial inventory include tools, weapons, jewelry, and pottery (Fig. 3–13).

I. Tools: Iron knives with pointed blades, bronze awls, needles, and tongs have been discovered.

II. Weapons and Armor: Finds include a tubular stem arrowhead, spearhead, bronze tanged and obsidian arrowheads, segments of a scale armor (some decorated with spiral patterns), and bronze pommels characteristic of Sevan-Artsakh type daggers.

III. Ornaments: Bronze bracelets with slanted grooves at the ends, spiral rings, fibulae, crescent-shaped and solar disc-shaped pendants, necklaces, small buttons, beads made of carnelian, agate, jasper, paste, and glass, as well as spacers of various shapes and sizes.

IV. Pottery: The material is represented by various types of bowls with straight, curved, or profiled rims; some bowls feature horizontal or vertical handles. Also vessels with trapezoid handles, jars, pots, plates, flasks, cups were discovered, as well as those with vertical walls. The decorative elements often include linear, dotted, dot-line, zigzag, cord-like, wedge-shaped, shaded, circular, granulated, and incised motifs, as well as spout-like protrusions imitating handles and zoomorphic appendages. Particularly noteworthy are teapot-like vessels with zoomorphic spouts, which are rare in Armenia.

In August-September 1986, with the resumption of construction work, the same team continued excavations at Joj Dar. Ten tombs (N<sup>o</sup> 21–30) were excavated. Seven of them (N<sup>o</sup> 21–27) were located to the north of Joj Dar, while three (N<sup>o</sup> 28–30) were on the hills to the south. The inventory from tombs N<sup>o</sup> 21–29 are similar to those found during the 1983 excavations at Joj Dar and show numerous parallels with early Iron Age sites in Armenia. Particularly close connections are observed with sites in the Ararat Valley (Dvin, the “burnt layer” of Metsamor, Tsitsernakaberd), in Zangezur (Davit Bek, Tandzaver, Akhlatyan), and in the sites of Nakhijevan. Notable connections are also evident with sites in northwestern Iran (Dinka III, Geoy-tepe, Gian I). Although there is insufficient material for precise chronological

dating, the aforementioned tombs (№ 21–29) from Joj Dar fall within the 10<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. Tombs № 28 and 29 are closer to the beginning of this period, and even to the boundary between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> millennia BC, while the remaining burials (№ 21–27) can be dated to the final phase of this period, i.e. the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC.

The Tomb № 30 was excavated in the central part of a long hill located to the south of Joj Dar. In its architectural form, it resembles the aforementioned burial structures, but it contained materials characteristic of the Late Classical period (2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD), including iron tools, numerous jewelry, such as rings with stamps, clay vessels, and glass flasks. In the upper layer of the filling of these tombs, many pottery fragments typical of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC were discovered. It is possible that the Late Classical burial was carried out in an earlier burial structure, the inventory of which had been removed beforehand.

## References

- 1 The manuscript of this report (in Russian and Armenian) is preserved at the Yeghegnadsor Local Lore Museum. We express our deep gratitude to the museum staff for making it available for publication.

The drawings used in the report are the author's own, while the photographs of the site and separate objects were taken in 2013 on-site and at the LLMY by the Yerevan State University expedition.

The source of some of the objects remains unclear. Additionally, the issue arises from the fact that the report discusses the 1983 excavations in general terms (tombs № 1–20), while the 1986 excavations are described specifically (tombs № 21–30). However, the drawings and museum materials primarily pertain to the 1983 excavations. Given that the materials from these two excavation seasons are essentially contemporaneous, the report and the images/diagrams are presented together below for circulation (Reference: H. Avetisyan, A. Gnuni, A. Bobokhyan).

## **Anthropomorphic stelae of the steppe Artsakh**

N. Yeranyan

The primary sources related to the ancient sacred landscape of the Armenian Highland are diverse in both form and content. Due to the scarcity – and often the absence – of written sources, archaeological data acquire primary importance. This is especially true for the sacred landscape of Artsakh, which is the focus of this report. Specifically, we attempt to reconstruct the sacred landscape of the region during the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, based on the stone anthropomorphic stelae discovered in the steppes of Artsakh.

The stelae of Artsakh are roughly rectangular, flat, elongated stone slabs, divided into three sections by two horizontal belts, highlighting the parts of the body: the head, torso, and the lower body. These stelae typically measure 30–40 cm in width, 120–140 cm in height, and up to 20 cm in thickness. All of them are nearly identical in iconographic terms. The facial section features depictions of the nose, eyes, and mouth. On the front of the torso, the arms are shown folded across the chest in every instance, with the wrists raised upward. The lower portion, where the legs are presumed to be, remains uncarved, as this part was intended to be vertically embedded in the ground or set into a stone base. On the reverse side, most of the stelae depict hair spread across the back, and in some cases, a sword or dagger appears to be “attached” at the waist. Currently, 17 such anthropomorphic stelae are known. Most of them are located in the courtyard of the Local Lore Museum of Martakert, and some in that of Stepanakert, and a few remain in the open fields. Although none of the stelae have been found in their original position, all were discovered in the field and lowland zones of Artsakh, particularly around the present-day Martakert region. Therefore, it is evident that their original placement was likely not far from where they were uncovered (Fig. 1, 2).

To help reconstruct the significance of the Artsakh stelae, similar examples known in the wider region provide valuable context. In particular, the Artsakh examples closely resemble the Scythian stone anthropomorphic tomb stelae, which are found across the North Caucasus, the Black Sea region, and Crimea, and typically depict a Scythian warrior (perhaps the ancestor)<sup>1</sup>. The Artsakh stelae also show parallels with similar anthropomorphic stelae discovered in the southeastern part of the Armenian Highland (Hakkari) and in northwestern Iran (Shahriyar)<sup>2</sup>.

The aforementioned stelae are diverse in nature and appear to have undergone morphological – and possibly even ideological – evolution over time. Accord-



*Fig. 1. Local Lore Museum of Martakert, anthropomorphic stele*



*Fig. 2. Local Lore Museum of Martakert, anthropomorphic stelae*

ing to P. Schultz, this development progressed from menhirs and anthropomorphic stelae toward the type of stelae discussed here, and eventually to semi-statues, in which greater emphasis was placed on the depiction of the head<sup>3</sup>. Schultz considers probable that the Scythian statues are linked to the anthropomorphic stelae of the Bronze Age and classifies the Scythian stelae into eight groups. In his view, the evolution of the form of the stelae was influenced not only by pre-Scythian monuments observed in the steppes, but also by those from the Ancient Near East, which the Scythians encountered during their military campaigns<sup>4</sup>.

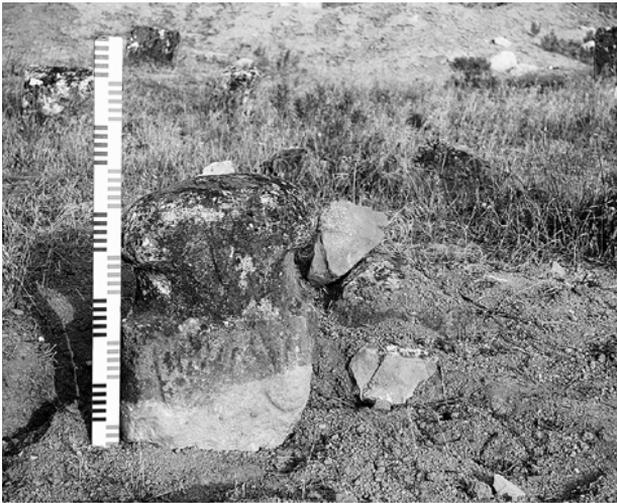
It is well known that all ancient art objects primarily represent a system of ideologically charged symbols – something far beyond of being a mere means

of satisfying aesthetic demands. V. Olkhovskiy and G. Yevdokimov note that such statues embody a generalized symbol of cosmogenesis – the creation of the world. There, the mythical cosmos is symbolically represented – centered around its vertical axis (the Tree of Life, the phallus, etc.). Over time, the anthropomorphization of this symbol became increasingly pronounced through processes of individualization, ultimately embodying figures such as the forefather, the tribal leader, the solar hero, or his “earthly representative” – the king or chieftain<sup>5</sup>. Within the framework of compositional and symbolic interpretations of similar stelae, other perspectives also emerge. Notably, D. Raevskiy sees in the Scythian stelae the depiction of deceased yet heroized individuals – warriors, possibly even kings. M. Artamonov likewise interprets the stelae as representations of “heroized warriors,” linking them to the Scythian cult of ancestors. He draws attention to the fact that the depiction of the *akinakes* (curved dagger) is a defining attribute found on nearly all of them<sup>6</sup>. Significantly, similar daggers or swords are also present on several of the Artsakh stelae, suggesting that they may have been erected in honor of individuals who held high social status.

It is noteworthy that in all of the stelae, the hands are folded across the chest, with the fingers pointing upwards. According to K. Kushnareva, this raised hand position is inherited from the Late Bronze Age and symbolizes a deity in a mythical prayer posture<sup>7</sup>.

In functional terms, Scythian statues served both as tombstones and as cultic symbols, typically placed at the tops of kurgans or at the center of shrines. It is no coincidence that in the steppe regions of Artsakh, where the stone stelae have been discovered – particularly in the left valley of Khachenaget – about 15 kurgans are scattered, a detail noted by Smbat Ter-Avetisyan. In the summer of 1924, as a member of the Scientific Association attached to the Central Committee of Transcaucasia, Ter-Avetisyan traveled through Khachen and Jraberd in Artsakh, providing valuable information regarding the cultural heritage of these areas. According to him, several of the tombs in the Tartar and Khachenaget valleys, of varying sizes, are characteristic of the South Russian steppes and belong to Scythian culture<sup>8</sup>.

The stelae were later reused by the local populations, but it seems they did not lose their original ceremonial and cultic function. Within the framework of the research conducted by the Artsakh expedition of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of RA, in June and July of 2013, survey was carried out in several areas to study the stone anthropomorphic stelae. As a result of these efforts, we were able to determine the initial locations of several previously known stelae and discovered five new anthropomorphic stelae. As a result of the work, one stone anthropomorphic stele was uncovered at the site of the former Mollalar village, and two other stelae were found in the medieval cemetery of Sofulu village (Fig. 3), to the northwest of the Gyarvurkala settlement. Of particular interest is the discovery of the next stele, located about 70 m east of the early Christian church of Gyarvurkala. The stele was discovered by H. Petrosyan



*Fig. 3. Sofulu,  
anthropomorphic stele*



*Fig. 4. Gyaurkala,  
anthropomorphic stele*

and L. Kirakosyan during survey works, embedded in the floor of a dug military trench. The excavations revealed that it had been placed on an early Christian cist burial, oriented east-west, indicating that it had been reused as building material. The front of the stele depicted a U-shaped nose and fingers raised upwards, while below it was broken. The opposite side of the stele had no imagery (Fig. 4). Based on the instances of the reuse of the stelae, we suggest that although they lost their original significance over time, however continued to bear a ritualistic and cultic function, having been repurposed and partially reinterpreted.

Thus, the study of the Artsakh stelae allows us to develop an initial understanding of the beliefs, ideology, art, and historical context of those who erected them. The stelae probably depicted deceased and heroized individuals – possibly warriors or other men who held prominent positions in society. They served to “immortalize” the memory of the deceased and functioned as objects of ceremonies dedicated to them. Based on their iconography, certain stylistic features, and parallels known from neighboring regions, they can tentatively be dated to the 7<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC<sup>9</sup>. The examination of these stelae suggests the presence of certain elements of Scythian influence in Artsakh. This was probably facilitated by the strategic location and favorable environmental conditions of Artsakh. It is no coincidence that all of the stelae have been found in the lowland regions of Artsakh, areas that would have been suitable for the semi-nomadic lifestyle of various tribes<sup>10</sup>.

## References

- 1 Currently, around 160 such stelae are known (V. L. Yanin, *Archaeology*, Moscow, 2006, p. 307).
- 2 V. Sevin, Who where the Naked Warriors of Hakkari? *AMIT* 37, 2005, p. 163–166; M. Azarnoush, B. Helwing, *Recent Archaeological Research in Iran: Prehistory to Iron Age*, *AMIT* 37, 2005, p. 189–246.
- 3 P. N. Schultz, *Scythian Statues of the Black Sea Region*, Antique Society, Moscow, 1967, p. 227.
- 4 V. S. Olkhovskiy, G. L. Yevdokimov, *op. cit.*, p. 10; cf. also P. N. Schultz, *op. cit.*, p. 329.
- 5 V. S. Olkhovskiy, G. L. Yevdokimov, *op. cit.*, p. 6–7.
- 6 D. S. Raevskiy, *Scythian Stone Statues in the System of Religious and Mythological Beliefs of the Iranian-Speaking Peoples of the Eurasian Steppes, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Foreign East in Antiquity*, Moscow, 1983, p. 40–41.
- 7 Cf. M. J. Khalilov, *Stone Statues of Azerbaijan (4<sup>th</sup> Century BC – 7<sup>th</sup> Century AD)*, Candidate Dissertation Abstracts, Yerevan, 1987, p. 12.
- 8 S. Ter-Avetisyan, *Armenological Studies*, p. 193. The data on the origin and ethno-cultural belonging of the tombs is incomplete; the issue requires separate investigation.
- 9 V. S. Olkhovskiy, G. L. Yevdokimov, *Scythian Sculptures of the 7<sup>th</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> Centuries BC*, Moscow, 1994, p. 41–44.
- 10 Cf. V. Belozor's view, according to which "the tradition of erecting stone statues is exclusively linked to a nomadic environment and is virtually absent in forested regions, something that reflects the nomadic worldview" (V. P. Belozor, *The Scythian Triad and Stone Statues (The Problem of Ethno-Cultural Attribution)*, *The Earliest Communities of Farmers and Pastoralists of the Northern Black Sea Region (5<sup>th</sup> Millennium BC – 5<sup>th</sup> Century CE)*, *Proceedings of the International Conference*, Kiev, 1991, p. 171).

## **Elements of the sacred landscape in the Sotk region**

M. Amiryan, H. Danielyan, H. Simonyan, H. Vanyan, A. Grigoryan

In recent years, a joint team of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences, Armenia and the State Office for Monument Preservation and Archaeology of Saxony-Anhalt, Germany, has been conducting archaeological research in the Sotk region of the Gegharkunik province of historical Syunik (headed by A. Bobokhyan and R. Kunze)<sup>1</sup>. The main goal of the expedition is to study the archaeological context of this metal-rich region and to clarify its role in local and regional developments. During the research, a number of sites also came to light (settlements, cemeteries, separate sanctuaries), which relate to the sacred landscape and are presented below.

### **Sotk 2 settlement**

The fortified settlement of Sotk 2 is located in the eastern part of the village of Sotk<sup>2</sup>. It is situated on a natural, east-west oriented, oval-shaped hill approximately 10 m high (Fig. 1). The hill consists of a flat top and slopes that descend in



*Fig. 1. Sotk 2, landscape*

a sloped and terraced formation, which are relatively accessible only from the northern side. The hill is about 90 m long and 45 m wide, with a total area of approximately 4.5 ha (the fortified upper part covers around 0.5 ha). Sotk 2 occupies a unique strategic position, lying on the route that connects the Sotk gold mines with the Sotk Pass, which in turn links southern and eastern parts of the Caucasus.

The hill on which the Sotk 2 settlement is located is referred to by locals as “Dar” (meaning “hill”). On old Soviet maps, the hill appears as “Five stones”, a name referring to the five largest stones of the defensive system clearly visible on the southern side of the hill. Until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the hill was essentially unknown to archaeologists. It was only in the late 1990s that an Armenian-Italian expedition<sup>3</sup> visited the settlement, and later, in 2010, our expedition also visited the site and collected pottery fragments from the surface – primarily from the Early Bronze Age, but also from the Middle Bronze and Late Bronze/Early Iron Ages.

Based on the excavations conducted at the Sotk 2 settlement between 2011 and 2013, it can be described as a multi-layered archaeological site. It became clear that Sotk 2 may have first been inhabited during the Chalcolithic period, although the primary phase of settlement deals with the Early Bronze, Middle Bronze, Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages. The site was inhabited by bearers of the Kura-Araxes culture from around 3500 to 2500/2400 BC. The main phase of the Early Bronze Age settlement dates to the 29<sup>th</sup>–27<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. The next significant phase in the region is the Middle Bronze Age, particularly the latest part of it and the transition to the Late Bronze Age, around 1700–1500 BC, during which Sotk 2, seen within the context of the Sevan-Artsakh culture, was fortified. The Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages are also of major importance in the region, as evidenced both at Sotk 2 and especially at the nearby site of Norabak № 1. Materials from this period are associated with the Lchashen-Metsamor culture.

Three types of architectural environments have been identified at Sotk 2:

1. Clay architecture, characteristic of the Early Bronze Age, and documented in Trenches C, D, and F. These are generally small structures with visible stone foundations set into clay floors, where various materials have been found *in situ* (cf. especially Trench C, where a platform surrounded by several stone tools was uncovered). In Trench F, the clay floor was consistently dug through in various places, and it is not excluded that this area may have been associated with an artificial stream.
2. Stone architecture, characteristic of the Middle to Late Bronze Ages and the Late Bronze to Early Iron Ages, documented in Trenches C, D, E, and H. This refers to round-rectangular, almost misshapen two-row or three-row structures.
3. The intentional working of rock, attested at all excavation sites, mainly in the Middle Bronze Age and Middle to Late Bronze Age transitional contexts (Fig. 2, 3). Notably, the rock-cut pits represent the final state of all trenches. In these sections, the rock was regularly worked into round



*Fig. 2. Sotk 2, Trench A,  
rock-cut depressions*



*Fig. 3. Sotk 2, Trench A,  
ash-filled rock-cut depression*

or sub-round pits measuring 20–200 cm in diameter, reaching depths of up to 1.5 m, and were used as storages for bones and grain (Trench A, E, and H), as well as fire places (cf. ash remains in the pits of Trench C), as workshops (silicate slag found in the pits of Trench A), or as storage/shelter (Trenches E and H). Almost all rock pits contained a cultural layer (a white-gray clay layer), and in some cases, they were demarcated with small stones (Trenches A, C, D, E, H). The pit in the southwestern corner of Trench A was carved into the rock in a stepped manner. The bottoms of some pits were covered with clay (Trench D). In some areas adjacent to the pits (Trench E), clay floors were uncovered, which may be directly related to those pits and their immediate surroundings. At Trench E, a nearly circular pit was excavated, with a depth of 130 cm and a diameter of 200 cm. It had an almost rectangular adjoining section on the southwest side and a platform/bench inside the pit (on the northwest side), and it may be defined as a storage area or shelter. Some of the smaller pits surrounding the large ones (particularly in Trenches A and E) may be interpreted as postholes intended to support the roof of the shelters. Thus, these pits have economic and partially cultic significance (especially the smaller-diameter ones filled with ash) and, for the first time, provide an opportunity to date the cup mark depressions that have emerged in the vicinity of the settlements.

### **Sotk 15 sanctuary**

On the edge of Sotk village, in the area known as Hasansu, about 1 km north of the Sotk-Karvachar road, there is a site located on a small hill, with a surface area of 30x20 m. It consists of a looted tomb (the upper part has been opened, and human bones are found in the surrounding area), which is delineated by a cromlech made of large stones, elongated stones resembling gravestones, as well as a stone



*Fig. 4. Sotk 15, landscape*



*Fig. 5. Sotk 15, the tomb carved in the central part*



*Fig. 6. Sotk 15, stone with cup mark depression*

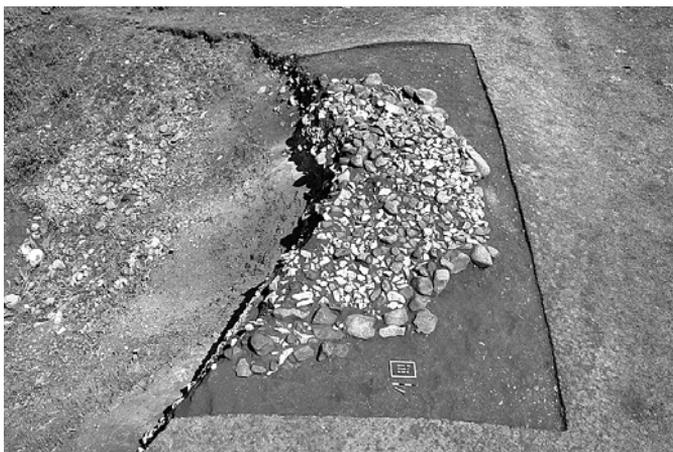
with cup mark depressions (Fig. 4, 5, 6). The location and nature of the site clearly indicate that it is a sanctuary, probably dating to the Bronze and Iron Ages.

### **Sotk 10 cemetery**

The Sotk 10 cemetery is located about 1 km southwest of the Sotk gold mine, on the right side of the road leading from Sotk village to the mine, in a depression. It was discovered in 2011 as a result of archaeological survey conducted by the Armenian-German expedition team. The cemetery consists of around 15 tombs spaced apart from each other. In 2013, excavations were carried out at Mound № 1. At the time of discovery, the burial mound was partially destroyed – probably due to gold prospecting activities or blasting/excavation carried out during the construction of the nearby railway (Fig. 7). The northern half of the mound was completely missing. The cromlech lacked an outer cover, while the inner cover was composed of densely arranged medium-sized stones – mainly limestone, with a smaller number of basalt stones (Fig. 8).



*Fig. 7. Sotk 10, landscape*



*Fig. 8. Sotk 10, Tomb № 1, burial structure*

The tomb was investigated within a trench measuring 5 m to the west, 4 m to the east, and 12 m to the south. It is a pit grave tomb, carved into the rock, with a length of 300 cm and a preserved width of 140 cm. The depth of the chamber is approximately 160 cm from the zero point (about 60 cm from the rock surface). The chamber had no cover slabs and was located directly beneath the cover. After the removal of the cover in the corresponding area, a platform composed of five large stones and some smaller ones was uncovered in the eastern part of the chamber. On this platform a single deceased is laid in a non-anatomical position, with some bones missing and the skull found in a fragmented state (Skeleton № 2). It is assumed that on this platform – which does not form part of the main chamber but rather marks its boundary and separates it from the inner cover (where no accompanying inventory was found) – a decarnation rite may have taken place.

Thus, we are dealing with a primary burial inside the chamber (Skeleton № 1, a 12–15-year-old girl<sup>4</sup>), and above it, on the platform, there was a second, dismembered – and possibly sacrificed – burial (Skeleton № 2, a 30–35-year-old man). It is impossible to determine what the situation was in the destroyed part of the tomb, or whether there were additional burials.

The study of the discovered vessels, the bronze dagger, and the results of radiocarbon analysis suggest that the examined burial mound dates to the first phase of the Middle Bronze Age, at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC.

### **Norabak 1 cemetery**

To the east of Norabak village in the Gegharkunik province, adjacent to the Norabak 1 settlement, lies a cemetery consisting of 21 cromlech-marked tombs. The first reference to this site was made by the Armenian-Italian survey expedition in the Sevan Basin<sup>5</sup>. In 2012, our team began the excavation of Mound № 1, which is located on nearly flat terrain and rises about 20–75 cm above the surface at various points. It is a circular cromlech with a diameter of 9 m, and including the covered area extending beyond the cromlech, approximately 12 m in total (Fig. 9, 10). The burial mound was investigated within a 12 x 12 m square trench. The cover of the mound was preserved only in the northwestern and northeastern sections and was composed of medium-sized stones, in contrast to the main cover, which consisted of a stone-soil filling. Four burial chambers were unearthed within the cover, oriented northeast/southwest (Chambers № 1 and № 3) and east-west with a slight southern deviation (Chambers № 2 and № 4).

According to the results of radiocarbon analysis, Norabak Mound № 1 spans a period from the developed Late Bronze to the Middle Iron Ages (14<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC), primarily corresponding to the Early Iron Age. Specifically, the earliest is the Chamber № 2, dated to the 14<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, followed by Chamber № 3 to the 11<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, Chamber № 4 to the 10<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, and Chamber № 1 to the 8<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.

At first glance, it seems unusual that Chamber № 2 is dated so early and lacks any inventory. However, considering the somewhat symmetrical arrange-

ment of all four chambers, the central position of Chamber № 2, and its earlier dating, it can be assumed that Chamber № 2 served as the central tomb of the burial mound, around which the other three were later added. Thus, it is possible that we are dealing with a family tomb that developed logically around a central burial – probably that of an important individual.

In fact, apart from Chamber № 2, the remaining three chambers contain group burials – specifically with the remains of 7 individuals in Chamber № 1, 3 in Chamber № 3, and 14 in Chamber № 4 – which is typical of the Bronze and Iron Age burial rite in the Sevan Basin. It is not easy to determine whether these are simultaneous or successive burial acts. Chamber № 1 had been looted, whereas the cover slabs of Chambers № 3 and № 4 remained intact. Taking into account that in both of the latter chambers the human remains and associated inventory were found on the same level, with no evidence of multiple layers, and that the inventory does not indicate significant chronological differences, it can be concluded that the burials were simultaneous or nearly simultaneous. In this context, the phenomenon of group burial may be viewed within the framework of certain burial rites – such as human sacrifice, decarnation (notably, skulls were absent in Chambers



*Fig. 9. Norabak 1, Tomb № 1, the burial structure before the opening of the chambers*



*Fig. 9. Norabak 1, Tomb № 1, the burial structure before the opening of the chambers*

Nº 1 and Nº 4), or excarnation (in Chamber Nº 4, an anthropological study revealed animal tooth marks on one of the bones of a young woman).

The preliminary study of the burial rite and inventory (including a large quantity of pottery, metal items, beads, etc.) from the Mound Nº 1 of Norabak indicates that we are dealing with cultural contexts characteristic of the Early to Middle Iron Ages in the Sevan Basin. These are well-documented in other cemeteries of the region (e.g., Karchaghbyur). Noteworthy in this context is the relatively early appearance of iron (Chamber Nº 4). The available data allow for the interpretation of the Norabak 1 burial mound within the framework of local developments of the Lchashen-Metsamor cultural tradition.

Thus, archaeological research in the Sotk subregion of historical Syunik reveals that this area, rich in metal mines, is also characterized by sites of cultic significance. In particular, the presence of cemeteries, separate sanctuaries, and settlements points to a sacred landscape composed of these elements. The study of these features once again affirms that, in order to understand any society, it is essential to view it as an area of interaction between sacral and profane domains - thereby constituting a distinct social system.

## References

- 1 For preliminary reports cf. R. Kunze, A. Bobokhyan, K. Meliksetian, E. Pernicka, D. Wolf, *Archäologische Untersuchungen zur Umgebung der Goldgruben in Armenien mit Schwerpunkt Sotk, Provinz Gegharkunik, Veröffentlichungen des Landesamtes für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt – Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte 64*, Halle, 2011, 17–49; R. Kunze, A. Bobokhyan, E. Pernicka, K. Meliksetian, *Projekt Ushkiani. Untersuchungen der Kulturlandschaft um das prähistorische Goldrevier von Sotk, Veröffentlichungen des Landesamtes für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt – Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte 67*, Halle, 2013, 49–88.
- 2 Other pronunciations are Sodk, Zod.
- 3 R. Biscione, S. Hmayakyan, N. Parmegiani, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
- 4 Anthropological studies at Sotk 10 and Norabak 1 were conducted by R. Mkrtchyan and H. Simonyan.
- 5 R. Biscione, S. Hmayakyan, N. Parmegiani, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

# **Sites of the sacred landscape of Syunik in state repositories**

L. Mkrtchyan

This work addresses the sites related to the sacred landscape of Syunik, which have been documented and archived over the years. We have used the preservation zones of monuments stored at the Agency for the Protection of History and Culture pertaining to Syunik province of the Republic of Armenia, as well as certificates, measurements, drawings, and photographic archives from the Scientific Research Center of Historical and Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Armenia<sup>1</sup>.

In the repositories, we primarily searched for cemeteries, megalithic sites (stelae/idols, menhirs, vishaps/vishapoids), rock carvings, and rock sanctuaries/ places of pilgrimage. Except for the latter, the selection of other monuments was based on relatively reliable examples dated to the Bronze and Iron Ages (mid-3<sup>rd</sup> to mid-1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC) using comparative methods employed by the original compilers. While classifying the monuments and compiling the catalog, we preserved the original texts and approaches of the compilers.

The research conducted in the repositories were primarily aimed at identifying cemeteries, megalithic sites (stelae/idols, menhirs, vishaps/vishapoids), rock carvings, as well as rock pilgrimage places/sanctuaries. Except for the latter group, the selection of other sites was guided by those relatively reliable examples dated by the compilers using comparative methods, which are attributed to the Bronze and Iron Ages (ca. 3<sup>rd</sup> to mid-1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC)<sup>2</sup>. During the classification of the sites and the compilation of the catalog, the original texts and approaches of the source authors were preserved.

The materials preserved in repositories related to the sacred landscape of Syunik are conventionally divided into the following four groups:

## **I. Rock platforms**

### **1. Sisian, Navel Stone, index 8.6.29<sup>3</sup>**

The site is located 12 km south of the Sisian crossroads, in the direction of Goris, on the left side of the road. The sanctuary known as Navel Stone is a rounded basalt rock of gray color, 3.5 m in diameter, with a convex protrusion at its center. Around this feature lies a slightly sunken, well-polished stone surface. The sur-

rounding area has been terraced and leveled; in certain places, remnants of walls constructed from large, medium, and small stones can be observed – some arranged in double rows, others in single rows. Compiled by A. Julfalakyan, 17.02.2006.

2. Sisian, Tsak Karer

The sanctuary of *Tsak Karer* is located on the left bank of the Vorotan River<sup>4</sup>.

3. Tasik, Ukhter, sanctuary, not included in the state register

The sanctuary of Ukhter is located 500 m north of the village of Tasik, near the cemetery, on a mountain slope. A massive boulder has been sanctified at the site, bearing numerous cavities (holes) on its surface. Visitors place offerings and light candles in one of these cavities. That part of the rock has been blackened by candle soot. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, June 1995.

4. Agarak, sanctuary-pilgrimage place, not included in the state register

The site is located about 3 km southwest of the village, at the highest point of Khachin Dzor, not far from the path leading to the Khacher settlement. The site consists of a large boulder, with a spring flowing directly from the northern side of the rock. On the other sides, particularly on the southern side, candles are lit on the surface of the rock and in the natural cavities. A short distance to the west of the rock, a series of large basalt stones arranged in a terraced pattern without mortar remain, which now serve as a fence for a kindergarten. Compiled by V. Harutyunyan, May 1991.

5. Karchevan, Mamkhach sanctuary, index 8.51.14

The site consists of two boulders, which rise on the northwestern edge of the village. The rocks have been sooted from the candles lit by pilgrims, giving them a mysterious appearance. The sanctified rock stands 3 m high and has a conical shape. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, November 1990.

6. Karchevan, sanctuary with an inscription, index 8.51.7

The site is located about 500 m north of the village, on the right side of a small gorge called Kshnatap, just north of the cemetery. On the flat surface of a massive boulder positioned southward, five crosses are carved in various places, each surrounded by an inscription (1244 May God have mercy // Atsevis parents). Candles are lit on this and other nearby boulders. Compiled by V. Harutyunyan, January 1990.

7. Karahunj, Okhty ororotsi kar, index 8.110.32 (Fig. 1)

To the south of the natural boulder (2.5 m high and 2 m wide), various relief carvings are engraved on its naturally flat surface. At the top of the stone, a rider is surrounded by carved crosses, holding a sword in his right hand, leading a captive person ahead of him. In the central part, another rider holds a cross in his left hand, with a figure standing before him, arms outstretched (in prayer), wearing a halo

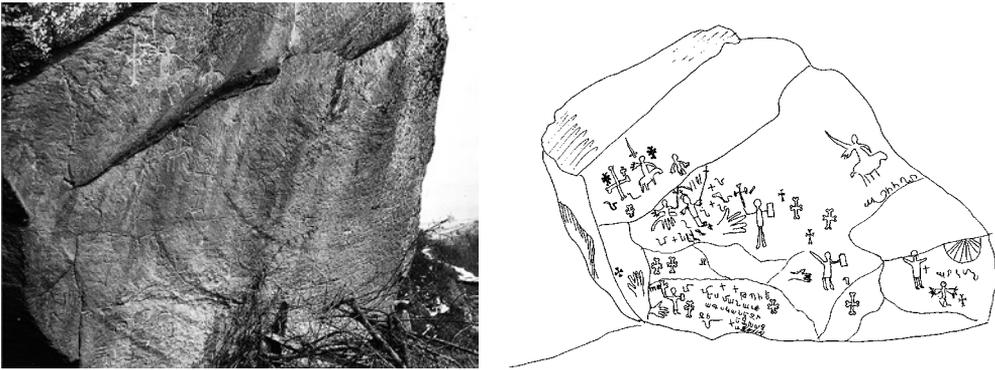


Fig. 1. Karahunj, "Okhty Ororotsi Kar"

(with a cross image on it). To the right of this figure's head, the right hand of the Lord is raised. Small cross images and carvings resembling the Armenian letter *u* can be seen around this pictorial group. In the lower right part of the center, two right hands of the Lord are engraved (one horizontal and the other vertical), which are directed towards a person holding a cross in the right hand and a Gospel in the left. On the right edge of the stone, there are two small cross carvings, an image of a rider holding a sword in his right hand (the sword raised), beneath which are unclear depictions. Below the inscriptions, a sundial is carved, with images of two figures standing with arms outstretched on its inner left side. In the lower left corner of the stone, the right hand of the Lord is engraved in both a vertical and horizontal position, near which stands a figure holding a cross in the raised right hand and a Gospel in the horizontal left hand. To the right of this image begins the inscription (five lines), three of which are legible. Compiled by V. Gayseryan, August 1989.

## II. Rock carvings<sup>5</sup>

### 8. Sisian, courtyard of Karadaran museum, index 8.6.31.1

The rock carving was transferred to the courtyard of the Karadaran in 1986 from Ughtasar. A goat (he-goat) is depicted on the vertical surface of the black rock fragment. The images are carved with grooves of 2–6 mm depth and 2–20 mm width. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, November 1995.

### 9. Sisian, courtyard of Karadaran Museum, index 8.6.32.2

The rock carving was transferred to the courtyard of the Karadaran in 1986 from Ughtasar. A bezoar goat/he-goat and the sun are depicted on the horizontal surface of the black rock fragment. The sun symbolizes the eternity of life, and the image has a cultic significance. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, November 1995.

### 10. Sisian, courtyard of Karadaran Museum, index 8.6.32.3

The rock carving was transferred to the courtyard of the Karadaran in 1986 from Ughtasar. A bezoar goat (he-goat) is depicted on the horizontal surface of the

black rock fragment. The image is carved with grooves of 2–6 mm depth and 2–20 mm width. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, November 1995.

11. Sisian, courtyard of Karadaran Museum, index 8.6.32.4

The rock carving was transferred to the courtyard of the Karadaran in 1986 from Ughtasar. A bezoar goat (he-goat) is depicted on the horizontal surface of the black rock fragment. The image is carved with grooves of 2–6 mm depth and 2–20 mm width. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, November 1995.

12. Sisian, courtyard of Karadaran Museum, index 8.6.32.5

The rock carving was transferred to the courtyard of the Karadaran in 1986 from Ughtasar. Hunting goats and tools (a bow and arrow, a trident) are depicted on the horizontal surface of the black rock fragment. The image is carved with grooves of 2–6 mm depth and 2–20 mm width. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, November 1995.

13. Sisian, courtyard of Karadaran Museum, index 8.6.32.6

The rock carving was transferred to the courtyard of the Karadaran in 1986 from Ughtasar. Hunting animals are depicted on the horizontal surface of the black rock fragment. The image is carved with grooves of 2–6 mm depth and 2–20 mm width. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, November 1995

14. Sisian, courtyard of Karadaran Museum, index 8.6.32.7

The rock carving was transferred to the courtyard of the Karadaran in 1986 from Ughtasar. Bezoar goats (he-goat, vishap) are depicted on the horizontal surface of the black rock fragment. The image is carved with grooves of 2–6 mm depth and 2–20 mm width. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, November 1995.

### III. Monumental stelae<sup>6</sup>

15. Tegh, Registration sheet of Syunik monuments<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 2)

Cuneiform stone. A stele of monumental art, measuring 46x35x28 cm. It is placed on the eastern side of the wall surrounding the Saint Gevorg Church. Compiled by: G. Goroyan, November 1986, Photograph 357.

16. Kornidzor, idol, index 8.52.3.2 (Fig. 3)

The stele is located 2.5 km west of Kornidzor village, at the site known as Shurnukhi Khacher (on top of a burial mound). It is a grayish, porous basalt sculpture, characterized by a pronounced vertical torso and horizontally extended arms. The neck area, connecting the torso to the head, is smoothly and roundedly shaped. The back is curved. The arms are positioned at different horizontal levels – one higher, one lower. The head of the sculpture is particularly noteworthy: on the flat triangular surface, characteristic markings of the eyes, nose, and mouth are visible, and the contour of the jawline is lightly sculpted. Dimensions: 93x38x43 cm. Compiled by A. Julfalakyan, September 2005.



*Fig. 2. Tegh,  
idol turned into a khachkar*



*Fig. 4. Khoznavar,  
idol turned into a khachkar*



*Fig. 3. Kornidzor, anthropomorphic statue*

17. Khoznavar, winged khachkar (idol), index 8.47.7 (Fig. 4)

It is located in the Bazarkhana area of Khoznavar village, 300 m northwest of Ashot's spring. The khachkar has irregular architectural outlines and is roughly carved, probably sculpted on a vishap. At the intersection of the cross wings, there is a circular ornament with a carved cross image inside. It is heavily covered with moss and tilted. There are four tombs around the khachkar. Dimensions: 1.2×0.96×0.2 m. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, August 2005.

## 18. Goris, Registration sheet of Syunik monuments

Phallus, 7<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. An art object of archaeological significance, measuring 65×32×18 cm. It is housed in the Goris Museum. Compiled by G. Goroyan and N. Keshishyan, October 1986.

19. Shinuhayr, Khachkar-stele (phallus), 8.73.2.1.3<sup>8</sup>

The khachkar is located in the village cemetery of Khachker. This unique khachkar-stele stands on a large rock fragment. It is boat-shaped, with a wide center and semi-circular back. The frontal surface is artistically worked, bearing a fir-ornamented central cross supported by a rope-patterned pedestal, with a floral motif at its center. The wings of the cross end in ornaments resembling pistil-fruit forms. On either side of the lower cross wing rise cross carvings resting on six-step, groove-ornamented pedestals. At the bottom of the composition, there are single carved crosses enclosed by two arches. At the top, on the striped cap, a circular headstone is embedded, in the center of which is a small carved cross, ending with a small cube. A ten-line inscription is carved on the lower section of the stele. It is made of gray basalt. Dimensions: 300×47 cm.

## 20. Harzhis, menhirs, index 8.56.2

They are located in the village of Harzhis, 200 m southeast of the caravan-serai, near the walls running north of the Harzhis settlement, which extends along the mountainside. One of the menhirs is standing, while the other is lying. The dimensions of the standing menhir are 1.9×0.55×0.30 m. The diameter of the cromlech is 3.5 m, with a hole diameter of 10 cm. The dimensions of the lying menhir, located 100 m east of the standing one, are 2.4×0.5×0.3 m, and the hole diameter is also 10 cm. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, September 2005.

21. Harzhis, menhirs, 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, preservation area

The site is located on the summit of the southern slope of Kartapa Mountain, at an altitude of 1985.5 m. The bases of the walls stretch 300 m uphill along the northeastern boundary. On the mountainside, traces of walls and rectangular structures are preserved. Near the walls stands one menhir, and 100 m to the northeast lies the second menhir. The settlement covers an area of 2.5 ha of unused land. The designated area for monument preservation occupies 3.0 ha. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan.

## 22. Harzhis, menhir, index 8.56.13

It is located about 6 km north of the village, at the beginning of the road leading to Harzhis, turning off from the Yerevan-Goris highway. In the area called Jukhtak Gyol. The geographic coordinates are N 39°28'12.7" E 046°14'06.2", with an altitude of 1798 m above sea level. The dimensions of the menhir are 1.6×0.5 m, and the hole is broken. It is placed in the center of a rectangular structure made of large basalt stone fragments. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, September 2005.



Fig. 5. Avarants,  
menhir turned into a khachkar



Fig. 6. Ishkhanasar,  
menhir turned into a khachkar

23. Avarants, khachkar (menhir?), index 8.85.6 (Fig. 5)

It is located 800 m east of the Avarants-Tatev road, on the left side. Stands alone in a plowed field. It is heavily moss-covered and wind-eroded. September 2005.

24. Ishkhanasar, khachkar (menhir)<sup>9</sup> (Fig. 6)

This khachkar was discovered by Ishkhanasar resident and freedom fighter Hakob Gyodakyan from Arinj. The khachkar is consecrated. It is located on the western edge of Ishkhanasar (Ghziugh), to the left of the road leading to the farms, and is carved from local bluish basalt. The khachkar has irregular architectural contours and a simple design. The wings of the carved cross end in linear spirals and grapevine ornamentation. It had been erected in the ground. Dimensions: 1.3×0.58 m, with a thickness of 0.22 m. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, October 1995.

25. Angeghakot, obelisk (vishap), index 8.13.4.28<sup>10</sup>

Nothing remains of the winged cross that once crowned the stele. Erected a few meters away from the stepped stylobate. Located in the section of ancient burials within the large cemetery extending along the northern edge of the village. The stele, crafted from gray basalt, consists of a stepped stylobate, a quadrangular pedestal, and an obelisk. The latter is situated a few meters away from the stepped stylobate (probably displaced due to an earthquake and later re-erected separately by the villagers). Currently, one khachkar dating from the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries is



Fig. 7. Bnunis, vishapoid menhir

placed on the obelisk and another on the quadrangular pedestal atop the stylobate. The stylobate consists of seven steps, made of large, smoothly hewn stones. On the corresponding groove of the upper row of steps rests a quadrilateral pedestal with slightly tapering sides that narrow toward the top. On its western face is a carved cross enclosed in a large circular frame; on the southern and eastern faces, there is one rosette each; on the northern face, a human figure is depicted within a frame, flanked on either side by bird carvings resting against small rosettes. There is also a corresponding groove on the upper surface of the pedestal, intended for embedding the obelisk. The obelisk is cylindrical, smooth, and tall, slightly widening at the top. Crosses were carved later on its front-facing side. Compiled by E. Abrahamyan and N. Hasratyan, March 1996.

26. Bnunis, cemetery (vishapoid)<sup>11</sup> (Fig. 7)

The cemetery occupies a triangular area located on the right bank of the “Gyavur Dara” ravine. It covers approximately 6.0 ha. The khachkars and grave-stones are made of granite and have a simple design. A significant number of tombstones have been overturned by treasure hunters. In the southwestern part of the area is located the newly built “Hazaraprkich” chapel. Compiled by H. Simonyan and E. Ayvazyan, July 2007.

27. Harzhis, cemetery (vishapoid, menhir), index 8.56.5<sup>12</sup> (Fig. 8)

It is located at the southern edge of the village, to the left of the road leading to Old Harzhis. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, 2005.

#### IV. Tombs<sup>13</sup>

##### *Dolmens*

28. Sisisan, cemetery, index 8.6.13<sup>14</sup>

The original appearance was disturbed. The site is located on the north-eastern edge of the city, on the elevated bank of the Vorotan River, in the vicinity



*Fig. 8. Harzhis, vishapoid menhir*

of the historic Syuni Fortress along the road from Sisian to Aghitu. The tombs are dolmen-like and heavily eroded. Only a few tombs – those exposed during road construction along the winding sections of the highway – are specifically noted. Two tombs were excavated by M. Hasratyan in 1956: one near the Syuni Fortress at a place known as “Tsak Kar”, and the other at the western foot of the fortress ruins.

29. Sisian, 800 m north of Syuni monastery, index 8.6.7

The original appearance of the monument was destroyed. The solitary tomb (a dolmen) is located 800 m north of Syuni Monastery, on a sloping hillside. The burial chamber is built of locally sourced, unworked quartz; the walls incline inward toward the top – a feature characteristic of dolmens. The chamber is covered by a large, unworked stone slab. Orientation: east-west. Dimensions: length – 6 m; width – 2.5 m. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, November 1985.

30. Akhlatyan, cemetery, index 8.10.5<sup>15</sup>

The site is located outside the village, on the left bank of the Ayri River, in a high area known as Jaghatsi Glukh. The preserved tombs are dolmen-like and originally had separate stones arranged in a cromlech pattern. Three tombs were

excavated. All three are large tombs constructed based on the dolmen principle. Excavations were conducted by M. Hasratyan in 1950 and 1952. Compiled by E. Abrahamyan, N. Hasratyan, December 1995.

31. Akhlatyan, cemetery, 3<sup>rd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> millennia BC, index 8.10.6<sup>16</sup>

The site is located around the village, primarily along the Ahlatyan-Tolors road. In a field known as Dolayi, one dolmen and one looted tomb were excavated. Excavations were carried out by M. Hasratyan. Compiled by E. Abrahamyan and N. Hasratyan, December 1995.

***Tombs with menhirs or unworked stones***

32. Zorats Karer, tomb, index 8.6.6.2.1

Although the entrance to the tomb has not been accessed, its cover has collapsed. Probably the tomb was looted in ancient times through the cover. The main tomb of Ghoshun Dash is located at the highest point of the Middle Bronze Age cemetery, near its eastern edge. It is surrounded by a low filling, on top of which are several menhirs, forming an external cromlech around the entire structure. The height of the menhirs, compared to the current surface of the filling, reaches 2.5 m. The diameter of the external menhir cromlech is 33 m. In the center, the internal cromlech has been preserved, which is constructed from elongated, medium-sized basalt slabs, laid on their narrow edges. In the past, it surrounded the pebble-covered burial chamber. On the western side there is an entrance to the dromos of the burial chamber. This entrance is tightly sealed with a vertically placed basalt slab. The burial chamber, together with the dromos (with a total length of 12 m), is constructed of unworked basalt slabs and covered with two rows of slabs laid in double layers, on top of which there was likely a third row. The width of the burial chamber is 2.80 m. The cemetery consists of a number of tomb structures. Each of these features a small courtyard from which the entrances to one or more tombs begin. The plans of the courtyards vary: rectangular, table-shaped, polygonal, circular, or oval. The main mausoleum was probably the central structure around which the Ghoshun Dash cemetery developed. It has no parallel among contemporaneous sites in the South Caucasus. Compiled by M. V. Hakobyan, July 1981.

33. Artsvanik, cemetery, 2<sup>nd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, index 8.18.5

It is located 2.5 km east of the village of Artsvanik, in the area known as “Hum Hogher”, near sand pits, along the edge of the Artsvanik-Kaghnut road. Externally, the tombs appear as mounds 0.5–1.0 m high, primarily made of soil filling, with a single unworked basalt slab placed at the center of each. The cemetery covers an area of 4.5 ha. Compiled by E. Ayzazyan, November 1998.

34. Aghvani, cemetery, index 8.12.3

The cemetery is located on the western edge of Aghvani village, on a mountain slope. It stretches up the slope. Stone-soil hills ranging from up to 1.5 m in height. The number of tombs reaches 20. From north to south, it measures 100 m,

and from east to west, 50 m, occupying an area of 5,000 square meters or 0.5 ha. Unworked rock fragments are placed at the tops of the mounds. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, September 2005.

35. Aghvani, cemetery, beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC,  
Preservation zone

The cemetery extends along the western edge, on a rocky mountain slope. The tombs are stone-soil mounds, ranging from 0 to 1.5–2 m in height. The cemetery stretches to the left of the field road and occupies an area oriented north-south and east-west. The field road runs along the eastern side of the site. Its northern boundaries are limited by wind-eroded mountaintop rocks and denudation deposits, while to the west, a slope-side ravine passes through. The area designated for the preservation of the site covers an area of 0.95 ha. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan.

***Tombs with stone circles (cromlechs)***

36. Sisian, cemetery, 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, index 8.6.11<sup>17</sup>

The site was excavated in 1982–83 by the expedition studying the early archaeological sites of Zangezour, organized by the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia. The original appearance has been disturbed. It is located about 4 km north of the city, along the Sisian-Goris highway. The cemetery consists of several dozen burial mounds, some of which are circles with stone accumulations made from stones of various sizes, measuring 8–16 m in diameter and 0.6–1 m in height. Others are low mounds with stone-soil filling, 20–25 m in diameter and 1.8–2.5 m in height. Compiled by E. Abrahamyan, N. Hasratyan.

37. Sisian, Karaberd, cemetery, index 8.6.4.1

The cemetery is located on the southwestern edge of Sisian, at the geographic coordinates N 39°32'22.2" E 046°02'50.3", at an altitude of 1,750 m above sea level. The tombs are often encircled by double-row cromlechs. The elongated chambers with rectangular plans are built with stone masonry. Compiled by H. Simonyan, 2005.

38. Tandzaver, cemetery, 2<sup>nd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC

The cemetery was damaged as a result of land reclamation. It is located 500 m north of the village of Tandzaver, in a wide glade. A significant portion of the site has been ploughed and is now used as arable land. Adjacent to the cemetery lies the site of the ancient Tandzaver settlement. The tombs appear as earthen mounds 1–2 m high, the “magic” circles (cromlechs) of which are arranged with unworked basalt stones. The site covers an area of 6 ha. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, November 1992.

### 39. Aghvani, cemetery, index 8.12.1

The site is located on the southeastern edge of Aghvani village, within the area of livestock sheds. It has been largely destroyed; five burial mounds remain, each up to 1 m in height. The “magic” circles (3–5 m in diameter) are arranged with unworked local yellowish-white quartz. Most of the circles have not been preserved and are heavily distorted. The site covers an area of 1.0 ha. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, November 1992.

### 40. Aghvani, cemetery, index 8.12.2

It is located 400 m northeast of the Aghvani River, on the sloped foothills flanking both sides of the Yerevan-Kapan highway. Based on the remains of tombs visible in the roadside soil layers, they appear to have been cists, with walls built from unworked local yellowish-white stone. The tops of the chambers are covered with 3–5 m unworked basalt slabs. Externally, they appear as cromlechs, with circles formed of unworked stones. The burial mounds reach up to 1m in height. The cemetery covers an area of 2 ha. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, November 1992.

### 41. Shaharjik, cemetery, index 8.1.9.4

The cemetery is located 1 km northwest of the Vahanavank complex, in a forested area. It consists of cromlechs; the burial mounds are 1–1.5 m high and are topped with rough local basalt slabs. The circles are formed with unworked local basalt stones and have diameters ranging from 1.5 to 3.0 m. The site covers an area of 1 ha. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan, April 1993.

### 42. Gandzasadz, burial mound, index 8.1.21.4

The burial mound has a diameter of approximately 30–35 m and rises 5–6 m above the surrounding area. Although the cromlech stones have not been fully preserved, the arrangement of the remaining few stones suggests that the mound was once enclosed within a circle symbolizing sun worship. Compiled by V. Gayseryan, October 1988.

### 43. Zorats Karer, separate burial mounds

The site is located in the vicinity of Ghoshun Dash, on the left bank of the Vorotan River, in the area between Angeghakot and Sisian. The smaller burial mounds were probably destroyed due to soil and land reclamation work. The larger mounds are spaced 50–200 m apart and are situated either on flat sections of the terrain or on the tops of small natural hills. The fillings of the burial mounds are composed of stone and soil. One of the mounds has a diameter of 37 m (located not far from a cemetery surrounded by menhirs); on the surface of the eroded filling, the boulders of the cromlech are still visible, forming a circle 24 m in diameter. In the upper part of this mound, basalt slabs covering burial chambers can be seen, oriented east-west. The number of burial mounds between Angeghakot and Sisian reaches several hundred. Compiled by M. V. Hakobyan, September 1981.

#### 44. Sisian, cemetery in the area of the experiment station

Surface features have been significantly affected by earthworks. Compiled by E. Abrahamyan, 1990.

#### 45. "Sisian 1" cemetery, 19<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, preservation zone

It is located on the northwestern edge of the town of Sisian, within the area of the experiment station, at an altitude of 1.665 m above sea level. The boundaries of the core area of the site and its preservation zone coincide. The borders of the preservation zone run along the edges of roads to the northeast and southeast, along the boundary of the grave yard to the northwest, and along the cemetery edges to the south and southwest. The designated zone, established for the continued preservation of the site, covers an area of 6.0 ha. Compiled by V. Hovhannisyan.

#### 46. Angeghakot, cemetery, 9<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> centuries BC

The original appearance of the site has been disturbed. It is located about 1 km to the west of the village. The cemetery consists of burial mounds made of medium and large stones, with diameters of 8–12 m and heights ranging from 0.8 to 1.6 m. Compiled by: E. Abrahamyan, N. Hasratyan, March 1997.

#### 47. Angeghakot, cemetery, 12<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, preservation zone

The site is located 1.5 km to the northwest of the village. The cemeteries stretch in separate groups on both sides of the Angehakot-Spandaryan road, extending from the plains north of the St. Vardan chapel to Gutanasar/Gutanablur. A significant portion of the area has been converted into arable land. There are over 100 tombs in the cemetery. The designated zone for the continued preservation of the site covers an area of 100+5 ha. Compiled by V. Hovhannisyan.

#### 48. Angeghakot, cemetery, 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC

It is located in the Vorotan Gorge, on its left bank, at the lower horizon of the vertically descending rock outcrops, on the sloped terrace opposite the "Vorotan" cave group. The cemetery consists of cist burials, mainly looted. In some places, traces of burial mounds and cromlechs can be observed. The surface material dates back to the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC. The designated zone for the continued preservation of the site covers an area of 36.2 ha. Compiled by F. Muradyan.

#### 49. Lor, settlement-cemetery, 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, preservation zone

The complex is located at the northern edge of the village, in the "Shlorut area", on a hill. The hill has a leveled, oval-shaped summit stretching in a north-south direction. It is bordered by the Shenatagh River from the north and east, while to the west runs the highway leading to Sisian. On the flat summit of the hill, traces of stone-built residential structures are visible. The settlement was surrounded by a wall made of unhewn basalt fragments, parts of which have been preserved along the eastern edge of the hill. Kurgan-type tombs sur-

rounded by cromlechs have been preserved on the western slopes of the hill. The designated zone for the continued preservation of the site covers an area of 0.9 ha. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan.

50. Karahunj, cemetery, 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, preservation zone

The cemetery extends over the unused rocky lands on the left bank of the “Yengiji Gorge”, south of the “Yengija” settlement. In the cemetery, the diameters of the “magic” circles of cromlechs range between 1.5 and 3 m. The burial chambers are covered with stone-soil mounds, each topped with a single unhewn rock fragment. The designated zone for the continued preservation of the site covers an area of 2.4 ha. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan.

51. Karahunj, cemetery, 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, preservation zone

The site is located 1 km southwest of Lake Sedigi, covering an area of 6.1 ha. It is situated on the right-bank slope of a ravine that cuts through an unused, rocky mountain plain. There are approximately 15 tombs in the area. These are cromlechs, “magic” circles of which range in diameter from 5 to 10 m. The cromlechs are constructed from unhewn basalt rock fragments, with each burial mound topped by a single unhewn stone. The designated zone for the continued preservation of the site covers an area of 6.1 ha. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan.

52. Tegah, cemetery, 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, preservation zone

It is located in the northern part, in an area called “Karmir Hogh”, not far from the bridge, on the eastern side of the road and slightly below it. The site extends across a terrace and reaches to the edge of the gorge. The burials are substantial cromlechs built with large stone fragments, measuring 15–18 m in diameter. Of particular interest are 6–8 tombs, notable for their above-ground features, with irregular arrangements and varying distances between them. The burials have little to no above-ground elevation, and the cromlechs are buried in the soil. Probably the cemetery was damaged during road construction. No surface artifacts have been observed in the area. Based on typological analysis of the burials, the cemetery is dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. The designated zone for the continued preservation of the site covers an area of 0.9 ha. Compiled by A. Julfalakyan.

53. Tegah, fortress-cemetery “Karakal”, 2<sup>nd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, preservation zone

The site is located 4.85 km east of the village, on a high promontory sloping steeply on three sides. Access is from the west via a gently inclined slope. The fortress walls, built without mortar from large stones, are especially well-preserved in this area and extend across the full width of the promontory. Two rows of walls remain intact, and in some places, a third row is visible. Below the walls, remnants of structures made from small to medium-sized stones can be observed. The area is rich in surface archaeological material, particularly a wide variety of

pottery fragments. On the southwestern side of the fortress lies a cemetery, which stretches down to the steep slope of the ravine. The burials are cromlech-type. The cromlechs are mostly semi-subterranean and, in some areas, barely noticeable. In certain spots, large, elongated, unhewn slabs covering the burials are visible. The burials have little to no above-ground elevation. The designated zone for the preservation of the site covers an area of 2.2 ha. Compiled by A. Julfalakyan.

54. Gorayk, settlement-cemetery, 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, preservation zone

The site is located 1 km southwest of the village, on the right side of the Goris-Yerevan highway, on a hill naturally bordered by streams originating from springs to the west, north, and east. The southern boundary of the site is the Goris-Yerevan highway. On the flat summit of the hill and the adjacent plateau, traces of various stone-built residential structures are visible. Kurgan-type tombs surrounded by cromlechs, some of which have been looted, are situated on the western slopes of the hill. The designated zone for the continued preservation of the site covers an area of 25.38 ha. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan.

55. Gorayk, settlement-cemetery, 3<sup>rd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, preservation zone

It is located 1 km southwest of the village, on the right side of the Sisian-Vayk road, on a height, at 2.220 m above sea level. The southwestern and southeastern slopes of the height are difficult to access. During the Soviet era, the area was damaged due to land reclamation efforts and was turned into pastureland. The summit of the height was recently leveled, and an "Orange" company telecommunications antenna mast was installed there. On the eastern edge of the plateau, the foundations of walls made of unworked stone blocks are still visible. Cromlechs of the tombs can also be seen. The "magic" circles are formed from unshaped basalt, and the burial mounds are low, with basalt boulders placed atop them. The designated zone for the preservation of the site covers an area of 2.2 ha. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan.

56. Khnatsakh, Bina cemetery, 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC

The cemetery occupies an area of 3.4 ha, located in the area adjacent to the "Bina" summer pasture, on the slopes and foothills of a height rising to the north-east. The tombs are marked by cromlechs composed of unworked small stones. At the center of the low burial mounds, single unshaped stone boulders are placed. The diameters of the "magic" circles reach 5-6 m. The designated zone for the preservation of the site covers an area of 4.6 ha. Compiled by E. Ayvazyan.

Thus, the data from the state repositories of RA concerning the sacred landscape of Syunik indicate that the region is quite rich in cultic sites. Most of them have been documented, and some have been delimited for preservation. Except for the cemeteries – which have been studied to some extent – the remaining sites are

still awaiting thorough investigation. Of particular importance are the megaliths (menhirs, dolmens, cromlechs, etc.), firstly because Syunik is the epicenter of their distribution in Armenia (where the main types are represented), and secondly because many megaliths are located within or by settlements and cemeteries. This spatial context could assist in resolving questions related to their dating and function. The available material shows that through interaction with the natural environment, the ancient inhabitants of Syunik developed distinctive beliefs, which were directly reflected in the sacred landscape. The axis of the Syunik landscape is defined by stone and rock, which served not only for protection and habitation but also to fulfill spiritual needs. It is no coincidence that one of the unique expressions of the sacred landscape of Syunik is the sanctifying of natural, unhewn, stone boulders, a form of worship, which has endured for centuries, still holds a firm place in the worldview of the people. Another manifestation of tradition is the presence of those stone boulders in areas rich with renowned monastic complexes. Even today, devout pilgrims continue to visit such sacred sites with their most heartfelt wishes – seeking relief from infertility, healing for a sick child, and more. The high concentration of sacred sites in Syunik further affirms that “the Armenian world – like the foothills of the Himalayas or the hills of Rome – is profoundly religious. Removed from the economic routes that crisscross the world, these places serve as mystical points where the earth pauses for a moment and takes a deep breath<sup>189</sup>”.

## References

- 1 We would like to thank S. Shakaryan, Head of the Protection Department of the Agency for the Protection of Monuments of History and Culture, H. Karapetyan, Head of the Archive of the Scientific Research Center of Historical and Cultural Heritage, as well as V. Gasparyan, Head of the Repository of Measurements, Sketches, and Photographs of the same institution, for providing the materials.  
In the presented list, “protection zone” is indicated when the archival document is kept in the archive of the Agency for the Protection of Monuments of History and Culture, and the index is noted when it has been extracted from the archive of the Scientific Research Center for Historical and Cultural Heritage.
- 2 They may also date back to an earlier time, such as some rock carvings or megalithic stelae, however the dating is not our main goal within this contribution.
- 3 Cf. S. Lisitsyan, *The Armenians of Zangezur*, p. 98, 107.
- 4 Cf. A. Ghanalanyan, *Traditional Folk Tales*, p. 55.
- 5 The rock carvings of the Sisian Karadaran Museum were transferred from Ughtasar in 1986. They were discovered by G. Karakhanyan, a researcher at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia, in 1968.
- 6 In preservation zones and certificates, aside from khachkars, other historical or archaeological monumental stelae of Armenia are not distinguished separately; they are presented together with fortress-settlements. The nature or function of the object is not addressed. In this catalog, we have attempted to classify and group the available materials, adding the type (in parentheses) where appropriate.
- 7 In the Repository of Measurements, Sketches, and Photographs of the Scientific Research Center of Historical and Cultural Heritage, we came across this registration sheet, where the object is listed as a cuneiform inscription. Unfortunately, the photograph is colorless, of

- rather poor quality, and the visible image clearly shows no trace of any cuneiform inscription. Probably we are dealing with an ancient stele – possibly an idol.
- 8 S. Barkhudaryan, *Regions of Goris, Sisisan and Kapan*, p. 55.
  - 9 This stele is documented as a khachkar. However, we believe it was originally a menhir and was later transformed into a khachkar – as evidenced by its atypical shape for a khachkar and the carved groove at the top.
  - 10 A. Shahinyan, *Medieval Monumental Stelae of Armenia, Yerevan, 1984*, Fig. 13 (reconstruction) and 15.
  - 11 In the documentation of the Bnunis cemetery, photographs have been preserved showing a large stone fragment, which is simply labeled as a vishap on the back of the photo.
  - 12 There is no information about the stele itself; the documentation refers only to the cemetery. It is classified among the vishapoids based on the available photograph.
  - 13 In the preservation zones of Syunik province, we identified 26 cemeteries, most of which date to the 2<sup>nd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> millennia BC (according to the dating provided by the compilers).
  - 14 M. Hasratyan, *Historical and Archaeological Studies*, p. 168–173.
  - 15 M. Hasratyan, *op. cit.*, p. 173.
  - 16 M. Hasratyan, *op. cit.*, p. 173.
  - 17 O. Xnkikyan, *Cemeteries in the Sisian Region*, HSS 9, 1984, p. 59.
  - 18 K. Zaryan, *The Mission of the Armenians*, *Goyamart Weekly* 38, July 24, Baghdad, 1952, p. 3.

## Conclusions

In recent years, the concept of the “sacred landscape” has received considerable attention in scientific literature as a component of the “social” landscape. Interdisciplinary approaches have been discussed in relation to the issue, aimed at reconstructing the image of the society under study based on the specific features of the analysis of the natural-historical environment. This work aimed at examining the characteristics of the sacred environment of the Bronze and Iron Age Syunik by analyzing the available data, and proposing a preliminary classification of sacred objects.

Although the available material is generally insufficient for a complete understanding of the proposed research questions in the given region, the existing data nonetheless allow for some preliminary conclusions. These facts indicate that the cultic sites of Syunik are characterized by considerable diversity, and that the sacred landscape – marked by shared features – was shaped as a result of complex social processes during the Bronze and Iron Ages. This landscape incorporates both natural elements and those resulting from human activity.

Accordingly, we propose to conventionally divide the cultic sites of the Syunik region into two major groups: platforms and monumental stelae. The platforms are subdivided into platform structures and platforms placed on rock outcrops and boulders. The monumental stelae are subdivided into sculptures and sculpted stones (table-shaped, rectangular, cylindrical, domed, cross-shaped – characterized by anthropomorphic and phallic features, and more rarely by zoomorphic features), menhirs (standing monoliths shaped by minimal human intervention on natural stone), and vishaps (quadrangular stelae carved with the image of a bull’s head and downward-facing legs on the front side, or sculpted in the shape of a fish, or combining features of both types).

As a preliminary attempt, this research primarily reveals a number of issues that may become subjects of future clarification. The first of these concerns the typology of cultic sites. The scarcity of data does not allow for a comprehensive functional typology or for definitive conclusions about the main purpose of the cultic sites. Although the examples cited above primarily reveal the association of these stelae with ancestor worship (altars, statues, menhirs, vishaps) or fertility cults (phallic idols, navel stones), they should nevertheless be viewed, by their very nature, as syncretic in character. At the same time, it is also possible to identify the non-ritualistic function of certain elements (e.g., menhirs may have served as boundary stones or may have been secondarily used as such).

The clarification of the archaeological context is also of significant importance. While the cromlech context (= tomb or platform) is gradually becoming clearer in relation to menhirs and vishaps, rock carvings along with traces of settlements and burial structures have been identified in the vicinity of platforms placed on rock outcrops and boulders. At the same time, it should be noted that, in terms of ritualistic functions, the concepts of settlement and cemetery may overlap.

The issue of dating the aforementioned sites and their environments is particularly complex, as these elements, being culturally stable features, appear over extended periods of time and often bear traces of secondary use. In this sense, it is often only possible to speak in terms of chronological boundaries. For example, in the absence of contextual information, cultic platforms can generally be considered a phenomenon of the Bronze and Iron Age (especially the Iron Age), although their use may have continued consistently into later periods (cf., e.g., navel stones). As for the statues and sculpted stones, from the Late Bronze Age – especially in the Early and Middle Iron Ages – there is a noticeable process of anthropomorphization, as well as the combination of various images on a single stele. The menhirs and vishaps are, in all probability, contemporaneous (this is also suggested by the fact that they sometimes appear as components of the same environment, cf., e.g., Selim 1–2, and possibly also Attash 1–3), and they should be viewed within the context of the megalithic complex of Armenia and the surrounding regions, which is visible in the pre-Urartian period, more specifically, within the late 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC to the early 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC.

The study of the topographical features of the sanctuaries in Syunik leads us to the conclusion that these sites are geographically situated in various types of environments, which are primarily characterized by rocky terrain or alpine meadows. They are generally located on natural heights, along their slopes, on plateaus, near roads and gorges, on cliffs, and around water sources and caves. They appear in the centers of social life, in borderlines, along routes, or they themselves come to symbolize the center, the boundary, or the route. Sanctuaries are often formed around natural objects that become key components of the sacralized environment. Notably, the ancient inhabitants of Syunik made extensive use of the features of the landscape, transforming the original appearance of natural objects. Together with related sites, the sanctuaries form a crucial component of the social structure of the Bronze and Iron Age Syunik.

Archaeological studies indicate that in ancient Armenia, and particularly in Syunik, there existed three levels of domesticated spaces: lowlands, foothills, and high-mountains, which are conditionally referred to as “low”, “middle”, and “high”. This “vertical zoning”, dictated by geographical conditions, has shaped the entire course of cultural developments in the Armenian Highland. In this sense, it can be said that the past of the Highland, in general can be defined as the process of interaction among these three levels, as a result of which the cultural potential created by its inhabitants emerges as a system/chain, where each link, during specific

periods, has been either active or passive. Research shows that the objects of the sacred landscape are located at the key points of these three hearths and exhibit trends of the combined “replication” of geographical and cultural environments, which supports the idea of viewing these three environments as parts of a single social system.

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## Abbreviations

- ACA – Ancient Culture of Armenia, Yerevan  
AD – Archaeological Discoveries, Moscow  
AEA – Archaeological Excavations in Armenia, Yerevan  
AEFC – Archaeology, Ethnology, and Folkloristics in the Caucasus, Holy Etchmiadzin, Tbilisi, Makhachkala  
AEIA – Archaeological and Ethnographic Investigations in Azerbaijan, Baku  
AMIT – Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran und Turan, Berlin  
ASA – Archaeological Sites of Armenia, Yerevan  
ASAF – Achievements of Soviet Archaeologists in the 11<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, All-Union Archaeological Conference (Abstracts of Presentations), Baku, 1985  
AW – Antike Welt, Mainz am Rhein  
AWNCA – Archaeological Works at New Constructions of Armenia, Yerevan, 1993  
BAR – British Archaeological Reports, International Series, Oxford  
BAS – Bulletin of Armenian Studies, Yerevan  
BCIA – Brief Communications of the Institute of Archaeology, Moscow  
BCIHMC – Brief Communications of the Institute for the History of Material Culture, Moscow  
BYU – Bulletin of Yerevan University, Yerevan  
CAA – Culture of Ancient Armenia, Yerevan  
CMDLTC – Collection of Materials for the Description of the Localities and Tribes of the Caucasus, Tbilisi  
COE – Corpus of Armenian Epigraphy, Yerevan  
EJ – Ethnographic Journal, Tbilisi  
HA – Handes Amsorya, Vienna  
HEME – Historical and Ethnographic Museum of Etchmiadzin  
HMA – History Museum of Armenia  
HPJ – Historical-Philological Journal, Yerevan  
HSS – Herald of Social Sciences, Yerevan  
JAH – Journal of Ancient History, Moscow  
JAS – Journal of Armenian Studies, Yerevan  
LLMG – Local Lore Museum of Goris  
LLMK – Local Lore Museum of Kashatagh  
LLMY – Local Lore Museum of Yeghegnadzor  
MAC – Materials on the Archaeology of the Caucasus, Moscow  
MDOG – Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft, Berlin  
MJSAHMC – Monthly Journal of the State Academy of the History of Material Culture, Leningrad  
ODMM – Origin and Development of the Megalithic Monuments of Western Europe, Musée des Tumulus de Bougon, International Conference, Bougon, 2002  
OIP – Oriental Institute Publications, Chicago  
OLPAN – Uniwersytet Przyrodniczy w Lublinie, Lublin

- PAB of the USSR AS – Proceedings of the Azerbaijan Branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Series on History, Philosophy, and Law, Baku
- PAS of the Armenian SSR – Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR, Social Sciences, Yerevan
- PAS of the Azerbaijan SSR – Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR, Baku
- PCO – Proceedings of the Collegium of Orientalists at the Asiatic Museum of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow
- PSAMCH – Proceedings of the State Academy of Material Culture History, Leningrad
- RAS – Russian Academy of Sciences
- RAS of the Armenian SSSR – Reports of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR, Yerevan
- RÉA – Revue des études arméniennes, Paris
- RFAW – Abstracts of Reports from the Scientific Session dedicated to the Results of Field Archaeological Works in the Armenian SSR, Yerevan
- SA – Soviet Archaeology, Moscow
- SE – Soviet Ethnography, Moscow
- SMEA – Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici, Roma
- SRCHCHMCRA – Scientific Research Center of Historical and Cultural Heritage of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Armenia
- VLDA – Veröffentlichungen des Landesamtes für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt – Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte, Halle

# **TABLES**



*Tab. 1. Noravan, rock platform with an outcrop called "Navel Stone"*



*Tab. 2. Ishak Meydan, rock platform with cup mark depressions*



*Tab. 3. Gyaur Damer, dolmen-like structure*



*Tab. 4. Yelpin, worked rock system*



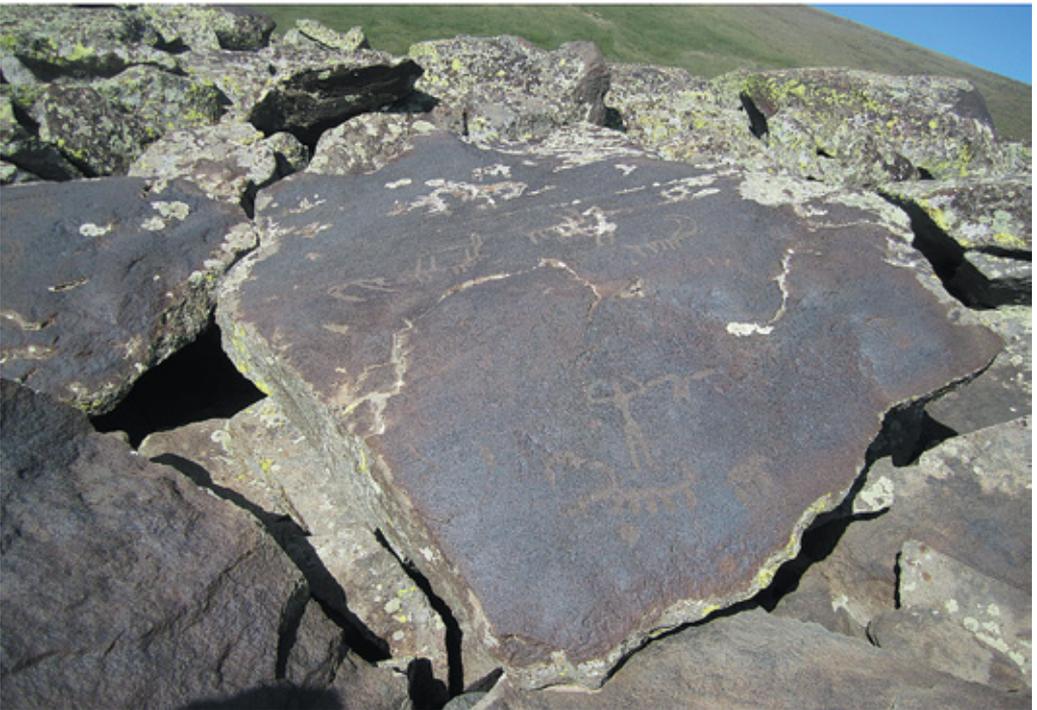
*Tab. 5. Aghavnadzor, rock-cut niche*



*Tab. 6. Allich, landscape and rock carvings*



*Tab. 7. Allich, rock carvings*



*Tab. 8. Ukhtasar, landscape and rock carvings*



Tab. 9. Pokr Paytasar, landscape and rock carvings



Tab. 10. Pokr Paytasar, rock carvings



*Tab. 11. Vishapasar, landscape and rock carvings*



Tab. 12. Vishapasar, rock carvings



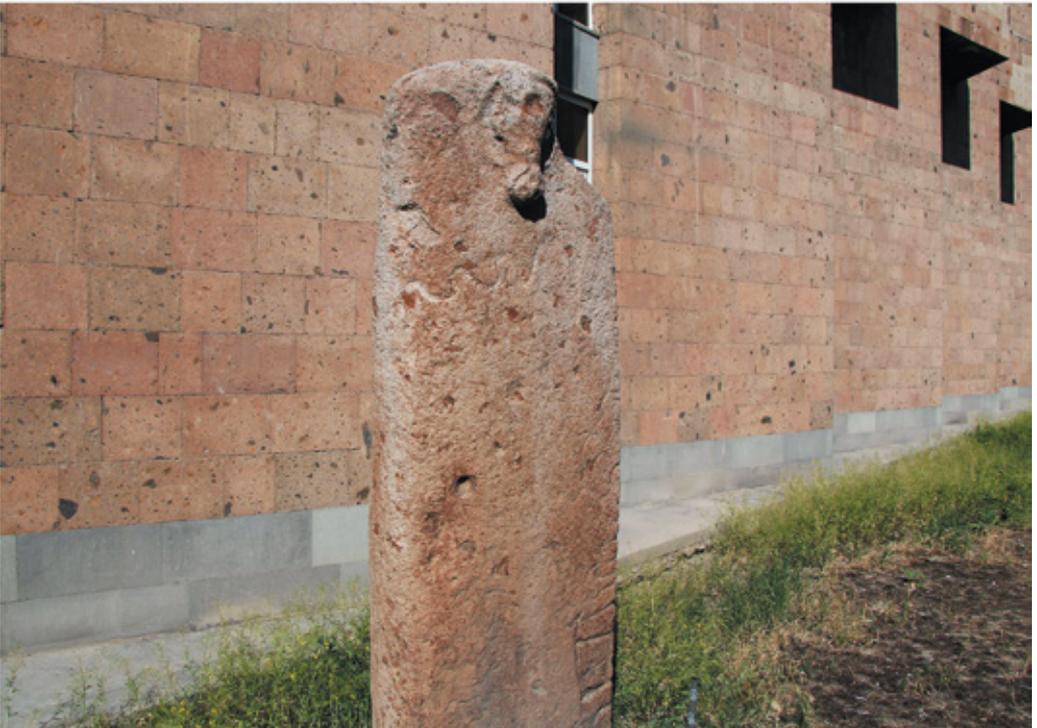
*Tab. 13. Keren, Tomb № 64, clay anthropomorphic statuette*



*Tab. 14. Areni, LLMY, clay zoomorphic (bear) statuette*



*Tab. 15. Aghdam, phallus-shaped stele*



*Tab. 16. Goght 1, currently in Yerevan, in front of the Museum-Institute of Architecture, vishap*



Tab. 17. Azhdaha Yurt 2, currently in Yerevan, in the Circular Park, vishap



*Tab. 18. Azhdaha Yurt 5, currently in front of the Sardarapat Museum, vishap*



*Tab. 19. Garni 1, vishap*



Tab. 20. Tokhmakhan Gyol 1, vishap



Tab. 21. *Ulgur 1, vishap*



Tab. 22. Ulgyur 2, vishap



*Tab. 23. Selim 1, currently in the Momik Park of Yeghegnadzor, vishap*



*Tab. 24. Selim 2, menhir*



*Tab. 25. Attash 1, vishap*



*Tab. 26. Attash 2, menhir*



*Tab. 27. Attash 3, menhir*



Tab. 28. Attash 4, menhir



*Tab. 29. Rind 1, vishap turned into a khachkar*



*Tab. 30. Rind 2, secondarily used vishap*



*Tab. 31. Vayk 1, menhir turned into a khachkar*



Tab. 32. Vishapasar 1, menhir



*Tab. 33. Angeghakot 1, vishap turned into a khachkar*



Tab. 34. Khnatsakh 1 (Khachkari Khut), stele turned into a khachkar



*Tab. 35. Khnatsakh 2 (Tsits Kar), secondarily used stele*



*Tab. 36. Harzhis 1, menhir*



Tab. 37. Harzhis 2, menhir



*Tab. 38. Harzhis 3, menhir*



*Tab. 39. Harzhis 4, menhir*



Tab. 40. Harzhis 5, menhir



Tab. 41. Harzhis 6, menhir



Tab. 42. Harzhis 7, menhir



*Tab. 43. Harzhis 8, menhir*



Tab. 44. Harzhis 9, menhir



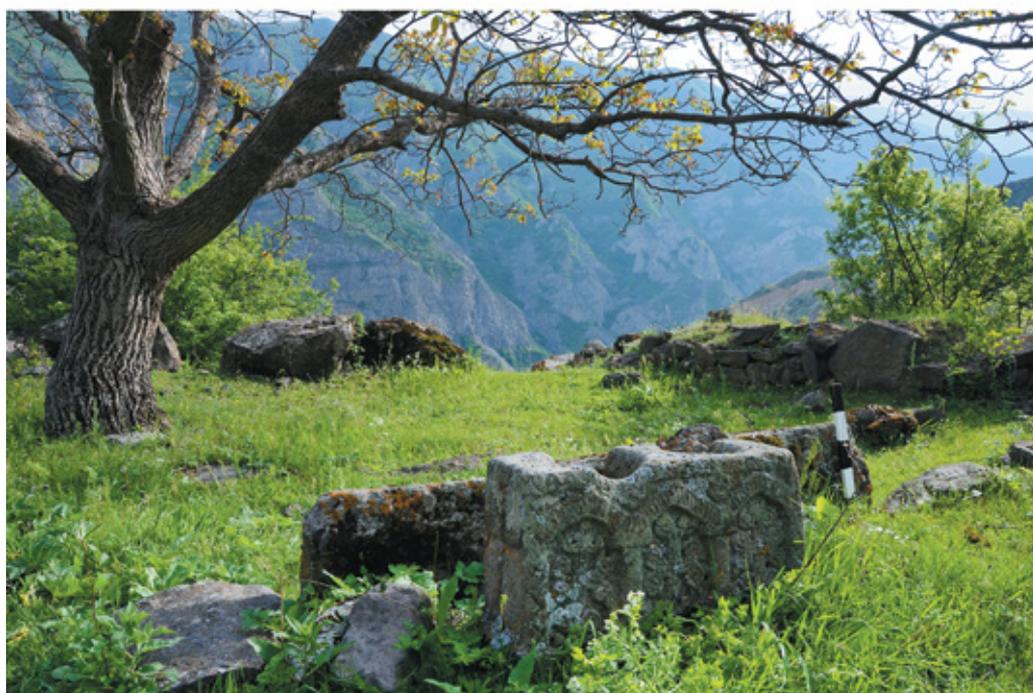
*Tab. 45. Harzhis 10-11, menhir*



Tab. 46. Harzhis 12, menhir



Tab. 47. Harzhis 13, 14, 15, menhirs



Tab. 48. Harzhis 16, menhir



*Tab. 49. Zorats Karer, alignments of menhirs*



*Tab. 50. Gyaur Damer and Khnatsakh, alignments of menhirs*

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