

**SISIAN (SISAVAN)**

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The mountainous region of Sisian is situated 6 km to the south of the road Yerevan-Goris-Stepanakert, on both banks of Vorotan River /altitude 1600 m/, 217 km far from Yerevan. Sisian is the administrative centre of the region. The highest peak is the extinct volcano of Mets Ishkhanasar /3552 m/. Sisian was the centre of the province Syunik of Armenia Mayor, the sit of the lords of Syunik.

Sisian is rich in historical sites. Thus, 2 km to the north of Sisian is situated the site of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> millennia BC Zorats Karer with its citadel, settlement and tombs. The life here continued also during Hellenistic period.

Syunik is one of the centres of old rock art with rests of rock carvings from the 5<sup>th</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> millennia BC. On the slopes of the mountains Ukhtasar and Jermajur of Sisian, at the altitude of 2900-3000 m, there are thousands of carvings representing everyday life details, flora, and fauna of the region with its full richness /Fig./<sup>1</sup>.

Syunik is also rich in antique and medieval sites. The architectural school of Syunik was well known in medieval times. One of the known constructions of Sisian is St. Gregory temple, built during the last quarter of the 7<sup>th</sup> century by Lord Kohazat and with the help of the spiritual head of the province Hovsep the I /663-682/ and the priest Theodoros, whose sculptural portraits can be seen on the temple wall. There are also mason symbols present on the temple walls. It is built from basalt stone, on three-row stylobates. According to its plan and peculiarities, it resembles the well-known Avan-Hripsime type. From the inner side, it has four apses all of which are equal to each other and have three big windows. The corner rooms have wide and canonical sacristies. The outer frontons are elaborated by wide and on sides triangular harmonious niches which are interesting solutions to space organization. The cornice ornamented with wattle is especially noteworthy, on the main four facets of which sculptural portraits of the evangelists are depicted with corresponding inscriptions<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> **Karakhanyan G. H., Safyan P. G.** *The Rock-Carvings of Syunik, Archaeological Sites of Armenia 4, Yerevan 1970, 5-46, fig. 7-10 /in Armenian/, with corresponding literature.*

<sup>2</sup> **Barkhudaryan S.** *Corpus of Armenian Epigraphics, v. 2, Yerevan 1996 /in Armenian/; S.Ch. Mnatsakanyan, The Syunik School of Armenian Architecture, Yerevan 1960 /in Armenian/; S. Mnatsakanyan, The Sculptural Portraits of Sisavan and the Problem of the Building Period of the Temple, Herald of Social Sciences 10, 1961 /in Armenian/; Eremyan A.B., The Temple of Hripsime, Yerevan 1955 /in Russian/; Tokarskiy N.M., The Architecture of Armenia. 5-14<sup>th</sup> Centuries, Yerevan 1961 /in Russian/.*



Fig. 1. Map of the Sisian region



Zorats Karer



Oughtasar



Oughtasar



Oughtasar



Church VII.

### The Cist-Grave of Sisian

In spring of 1988 on the place of Shharstan /city place/ of Sisian, on the western slope of the hill named Sacrifice, 50 m north of the tomb of the lord of Syunik, a cist-grave was accidentally opened. Only the basalt stone of its eastern edge was in situ, the other parts were fragmented and were spread around. Investigations showed that there had been a double burial. The content of the first was thrown out during the second burial. The black polished pottery fragments found on the site allowed us to presume, that the first burial took place at the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC. When was the second tomb erected, to be robbed for the second time in 1988? Only the silver coin of the emperor Augustus Octavianus and a bronze ring with oval dashboard were found in the grave. The human bones thrown away were in bad condition. It was possible to identify that the skeleton was that of a young man.

Silver Aureus /Av./ of Augustus Octavianus (fig.4,5)

- the head of Augustus in laurel wreath /looking to the right/.

CAESAR AUGUSTUS DIVI PATER PATRIAE

/R/ C.L. CAESARES AUGUSTI F COS DESI PRINC IVVENT.

Gayus and Lucius Caesars wear togas and stand erect, their hands resting on two shields standing between them, beyond the shields there are two spears, on the upper part a simpulum /to the left/ and a sacrificing vessel - litus /to the right/.

The coins of Augustus Octavianus were in circulation for a long time and this coin type was widespread. They boast depictions of Gaius and Lucius Caesars, as well as Agrippa's offspring and Augustus' daughter.

It is supposed that these coins were minted in the all-imperial minting house of Lugudun /contemporary Lyon/ of Gallia where golden and silver coins were produced during a long time span. The time of minting these coins dates back to 2 BC-11 AD<sup>3</sup>. The fact that these coins are spread in many regions /Armenia,

<sup>3</sup> Mashkin N. A. *Principate of Augustus. The Origin and the Social Content*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1949, Tab. IX/12-13 (in Russian); Zograf A. *Antique Coins*, Moscow-Leningrad,

Georgia, the Near East, Asia Minor, Southern India, the Balkans, Germany, Spain etc./ helped the experts arrive at conclusion that there also existed other all-imperial minting houses, which could produce them<sup>4</sup>. By the way, this type of coins has many imitations to be minted in different local minting houses of the empire.

#### A Ring with Gemma ( fig. 2,3)

The ring is made of bronze semicircular and thin wire, which slightly widens in the place where it meets the oval dashboard /diameter 1,9 cm, width of the wire 1,5 mm, dashboard 1,5 x 1,3 cm/. The gemma is divided into three parts by white /opal/ wire, the central glass is blue, and the sided glasses are green. It wears a gilded theatrical mask and represents a face of an angry old man with half-opened semicircular mouth and deep eyes. His hair is combed to the back and is tied on forehead with a winding and wide band. The beard is depicted in more lush and direct lines.

Theatrical masks were popular in Hellenistic and late antique periods. Such masks often appear in Armenia, as well. In the bullae archives of Artashat there are many depictions of masks of man /both old, and young/, women and children<sup>5</sup>. Among them, there are masks of an old man, a slave as well as of Silen reminiscent of the Sisian sample.

It is worth mentioning a late antique bronze lamp<sup>7</sup> found in Artsakh /Lachin/ (fig. 6), the dashboard of which boasts a stylized mask of a bearded man. The way of elaboration of the beard and of hair reminds us of the mask of Sisian gemma. Both Sisian and Artsakh masks do not represent a certain image. These are only theatrical masks which are very often seen on silver bowls with Bacchic plots, on mosaics especially from the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, as well as on seals and other objects of applied arts. The lamp from Artsakh is made in one of the eastern provinces of Roman Empire, supposedly in Syria, and dates back to the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD. The gemma of Sisian is made evidently in Cappadocia or Syria, with whose regions Armenia maintained close political and economic relationships. It does not belong to the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, as some authors think<sup>8</sup>. The fact that the flat type of

1951, Tab. XXII/3 (in Russian); **Dundua G. A.** *Numismatics of Antique Georgia, Tbilisi, 1987*, 158, nos. 48-56, 160, nos 68-76 (in Russian).

<sup>4</sup> **Mattingly H.** *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum, vol. I, London, 1923*, 81-91, nos. 519-538, 540-543, Pl. CXIII; **Golenko K.W.** *Money Circulation of Colchis in Roman Times, Leningrad, 1964*, 41-42 (in Russian).

<sup>5</sup> **Khachatryan Zh., Neverov O.** *The Archives of Ancient Artashat, Yerevan, 2008*, Pl. VI/457, 460c-476 (in Russian).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 461, 467, 468.

<sup>7</sup> **Kinzhalov R. B.** *A Bronze Lamp from Zerta (Reports of Azerbaijan SSR Academy of Sciences X, 1954, 667-672, fig. 1, 2 (in Russian); Trever K.W.* *Studies on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania. 4<sup>th</sup> Century BC-7<sup>th</sup> Century AD, Moscow-Leningrad, 1959*, 345 (in Russian).

<sup>8</sup> **Manukyan A. B.** *Glyptik of Ancient Armenia /6<sup>th</sup> Century BC-3<sup>th</sup> Century AD/, Autoreferat of PhD Dissertation, Yerevan, 1992*, 14, 16, 17 (in Russian).

gemma is typical of the late antique period and that Augustus Octavianus coins were in circulation later as well, highlights the idea that the Sisian ring can date to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD /fig. 2, 3/. From what has been said above, it is clear that the tomb under consideration was erected in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

#### ՄԻՍԻԱՆ (ՄԻՍԱՎԱՆ)

ԽԱՉԱՏՐՅԱՆ Ճ. Դ.

Ամփոփում

*Միսիան բնակավայրը գտնվում է Երևան-Գորիս-Ստեփանակերտ ճանապարհից 6 կմ հարավ, Որոտան գետի երկու ափերին (բարձր՝ 1600 մ): Շրջափակված է լեռներով: Պատմական Հայաստանի Մեծ Հայքի Սյունիք նահանգի նախարարական տան ոստանն է եղել: Հնավայրը հարուստ է պատմական հուշարձաններով: Միսիանից 2 կմ հյուսիս պահպանվել են մ.թ.ա. III-I հազարամյակների «Ձորաց քար» անունով հուշարձանախումբը, ամրոցը, կրովելիներ: Սյունիքը ժայռավեւտի հնագույն օջախներից է. հայտնի են մ.թ.ա. V-II հազարամյակների ժայռապատկերները: Այն հարուստ է նաև անտիկ և միջնադարյան հուշարձաններով: Նշանավոր է Սուրբ Գրիգորի տաճարը (VII դ. վերջին քառորդ): 1988 թ. Միսիան ավանի «քաղաքատեղի» կոչված վայրում «Ձոհաբերության» բլրի արևմտյան լանջին բացվել է կրկնակի թաղումով սալարկղային դամբարան: Առաջինը թվագրվում է մ.թ.ա. I հազարամյակի սկզբով (հայտնաբերվել են խեցեղենի մնացորդներ), երկրորդը՝ մ.թ. I դարով:*

*Գտնվել են Օգոստոս Օկտավիանոսի շրջանի արծաթե դրամ և բրոնզե կիսաբոլոր բարակ լարով մատանի, որի ապակե ներդիրի վրա պատկերված է թատերական ոսկեգոծ դիմակ: Վերջինս աղերսվում է Արցախից (Լաչին) հայտնաբերված՝ ուշ անտիկ շրջանի բրոնզե ճրագի վահանակին պատկերված մորուքով տղամարդու դիմակին:*

#### СИСИАН (СИСАВАН)

ХАЧАТРЯН Ж. Д.

Резюме

Поселение Сисиан расположено в 6 км к югу от трассы Ереван-Горис-Степанакерт, на обеих берегах р. Воротан. Поселение богато историческими памятниками, в частности, периода античности и средневековья. Здесь находится церковь Св. Григора (последняя четверть VII века). В 1988 году в пос. лке Сисиан, на западном склоне холма “Жертвоприношение” была выявлена гробница с вторичным захоронением, при этом первое датируется началом первого тысячелетия до н. э., а второе – первым веком н. э. В результате раскопок обнаружены керамические изделия, серебряная монета эпохи Августа Октавиана и бронзовый перстень, на стеклянной вставке которого была изображена позолоченная театральная маска, которую можно соотнести с античной бронзовой геммой из Арцаха (Лачин) с маской борода-того мужчины.