



WORLD
HERITAGE SITES IN
ARMENIA

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The current edition features eight articles on Armenian properties listed in the World Heritage and Tentative Lists. Each article highlights the key components and unique characteristics of these properties, showcasing their outstanding universal value.

The publication is aimed at a broad audience interested in Armenian historical and cultural heritage.



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FOREWORD

The tangible and intangible cultural heritage created by the Armenian people over millennia is rich and diverse, consistently attracting specialists and tourists from around the world. Each year, thousands of visitors and researchers come to Armenia to personally explore, study, and admire this heritage, leaving with vivid impressions.

Armenia’s unique natural landscape, combined with monuments from various periods situated in deep valleys and high mountains—such as ancient settlements, archaeological sites, monasteries, churches, bridges, and castles—enhances its appeal. The diverse cuisine, folk crafts, and arts, along with numerous museums showcasing the layers and nuances of Armenian history, further enrich the cultural, scientific, and tourist attraction of our country year after year. The genuine hospitality of the Armenian people adds to this allure.

As an integral part of universal heritage, Armenian cultural heritage is valued on the highest professional platforms. This is evident in the inclusion of Armenian values and properties in UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and World Heritage Lists, highlighting their many components and manifestations. The Tentative List also features several significant properties, each with its own rich and unique history and universal value.

This album presents a summarized overview of Armenian properties included in the World Heritage and Preliminary Lists for a broad audience. The state is actively involved in the protection, conservation, and promotion of these sites. Recently, the nomination “The Vishaps and the Cultural Landscape of Tırinkatar” was added to the Preliminary List, and significant efforts are underway to register a new property on the World Heritage List.

Despite the daily challenges threatening cultural heritage today, we believe that heritage has the power to unite humanity, fostering peace and harmony. Therefore, let us commit to preserving, promoting, and passing on a stable legacy and a peaceful, creative environment to future generations.

Alfred Kocharyan
*Deputy minister
of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports
of the Republic of Armenia*

PREFACE

Dear Reader,

The Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, commonly known as the World Heritage Convention, was adopted on November 16, 1972, by UNESCO member states. To date, more than 190 countries have ratified the Convention. Its goal is to preserve cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value as part of the world's heritage for future generations.

The Republic of Armenia ratified the Convention on September 5, 1993, and is represented in the World Heritage List with the following sites:

- “Monasteries of Haghpata and Sanahin” (1996, 2000, Dossier: 777bis)
- “Cathedral and Churches of Echmiadzin and the Archaeological Site of Zvartnots” (2000, Dossier: 1011)
- “Monastery of Geghard and the Upper Azat Valley” (2000, Dossier: 960)

In 2018, the property “Monastery of Geghard and the Upper Azat Valley” was granted enhanced protection status, becoming the first monument in Armenia to receive this designation. The “Enhanced Protection” status is a mechanism established by the 1999 Second Protocol to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. This mechanism requires parties to a conflict to refrain from attacking the protected monument or using it and its immediate surroundings for military purposes. Additionally, the Protocol establishes criminal penalties for individuals who violate the enhanced protection of cultural property.

There is also a list known as the “Tentative List,” where sites are pre-registered before being included in the World Heritage List. To date, Armenia has five nominations on its Tentative List:

- “The Monastery of Noravank and the Upper Amaghov Valley” (1995)
- “The Basilica and Archaeological Site of Yererouk” (1995)
- “The Monasteries of Tatev and Tatevi Anapat and the Adjacent Areas of the Vorotan Valley” (1995)
- “The Archaeological Site of the City of Dvin” (1995)
- “The Vishaps and the Cultural Landscape of Tirinkatar” (2024)

Armenia is rich in cultural and natural heritage. Local inventories include over 25,000 historical and cultural sites and more than 100 natural monuments. The majority of these heritage sites are archaeological and architectural. Many of these sites hold universal value, meet the criteria set by the World Heritage Convention, and deserve to be included on the World Heritage List.

Unfortunately, there was no active work on this Convention for more than 20 years after 2000. However, starting in 2022, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports has intensified efforts to reassess these heritage sites and promote the nomination process.

For the first time, the “Scientific Research Center of Historical and Cultural Heritage” SNCO has prepared Management Plans for the three Armenian nominations currently on the World Heritage List. This process involved the participation of prestigious international experts. The next step was the preparation of a new application, commissioned by the Ministry and coordinated by the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia (NAS RA). As indicated in the Tentative List, “The Vishaps and the Cultural Landscape of Tirinkatar” has already been registered.

Currently, the nomination dossiers for “The Basilica and Archaeological Site of Yererouk” and “The Monasteries of Tatev and Tatevi Anapat and the Adjacent Areas of the Vorotan Valley” are under review. The “Urartian Heritage of Yerevan” nomination file is being prepared by the “Scientific Research Center of Historical and Cultural Heritage” SNCO, while the nomination file for “The Archaeological Complex of Garni and the Columnar Joint ‘Symphony of Stones’” is being prepared by the “Service for the Protection of Historical Environment and Cultural Museum-Reservations” SNCO.

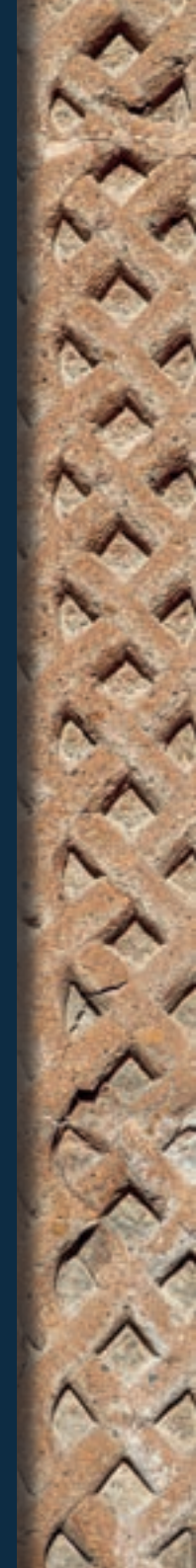
As can be seen, the involvement and successful collaboration of scientists and experts in the field has given new momentum to the work on this Convention. The ongoing work also contributes to the development of local experts' capacities, which will allow continuous and fruitful work without significant interruptions to register and preserve the invaluable treasures of Armenian culture and nature on the World Heritage List.

Harutyun Vanyan

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ARMENIAN
PROPERTIES ON THE
WORLD HERITAGE LIST



HAGHPAT AND SANAHIN MONASTERIES

Khachik Harutyunyan

The Haghpat and Sanahin monastic complexes, which share common historical significance, similar architectural features, and a comparable environment, were jointly included in the UNESCO World Heritage List under a single nomination, meeting two criteria (serial number: 777):

- ii to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;
- iv to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble, or landscape that illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history.

This nomination was initially accepted in 1996, covering only the Haghpat Monastery complex. In 2000, the Sanahin Monastery complex was added to the property, as it is historically and culturally linked to the Haghpat Monastery. We can confidently demonstrate that both monasteries are integral parts of the same cultural and spiritual environment.

We will first present the historical details of each component of the property separately, followed by an overview of their significant values.

SANAHIN VILLAGE AND ITS MONASTERY

Sanahin village is situated in Lori Province in the northeast of the Republic of Armenia, at an elevation of approximately 1,020 meters above sea level. The village is now part of the expanded community of Alaverdi. Its landscape is characterized by varying elevations (ranging from 750 to 1,400 meters) and steep slopes (up to 35 degrees).

Sanahin village is notable for its rich historical and cultural heritage, including a medieval bridge, a significant monastic complex, and other historic monuments. The area is lush



*Fig. 1. The courtyard of Sanahin monastery
(photo: Khachik Harutyunyan)*

with vegetation, and the forested region is in close proximity to the monastery complex. The complex itself covers around 2 hectares and comprises several large and small structures.

The Sanahin monastic complex is one of the largest examples of Armenian medieval architecture (Fig. 1). As a spiritual institution, it played a crucial role in the religious, educational, scientific,



*Fig. 2, The Lori Fortress
(photo: Nanar Kalantaryan)*

and political life of medieval Armenia. It received patronage from the Bagratid dynasty, their descendants the Kyurikyans, as well as the Zakaryans and other noble families. Specialists have proposed that an earlier religious or cultic structure may have existed on the site of the monastic complex, although no records of this earlier structure have been preserved.

Epigraphic and bibliographic sources concerning the foundation of the Sanahin monastery are fragmentary. The earliest written references to the monastery date back to the first half of the 10th century. Information about church construction in Sanahin has been documented by several chroniclers, including: Stepanos Asoghik (10th-11th centuries), Samuel Anetsi (around 1100/11005-1185/1190), Vardan Areveltsi

(1198-1271), Vardan Bardzraberdtsi (around 1200-1271), Mkhitar Ayrivanetsi (1230/1235-1297/1300), Kirakos Gandzaketsi (13th century), Stepanos Orbelyan (1250-1305).

According to historians Vardan Areveltsi and Kirakos Gandzaketsi, a group of Armenian clergymen were persecuted by Byzantine Emperor Romanos I (920-944) for rejecting the Chalcedonian creed and refusing to join the Byzantine Church. They fled Byzantium and, during the reign of Armenian King Abbas I (928-953), arrived in Armenia. Upon settling in the village of Sanahin, they constructed monasteries and a church dedicated to the Virgin Mother. Some specialists suggest that they may have rebuilt existing religious structures rather than constructing entirely new ones. It is possible that, like other monasteries, Sanahin had been abandoned during the Arab invasions and their rule (7th-9th centuries).

After the fall of Arab rule, the Bagratid kingdom was established in Armenia. To strengthen the connection between the country's border regions and the center and to ensure national security, the Armenian Kingdom created new feudal units. One such unit was the Tashir-Dzoraget administrative region, formed by merging the Tashir and Dzoraget provinces. This was done to protect the northern part of Armenia from attacks by mountain tribes. Armenian King Ashot III the Merciful (953-977) appointed his youngest son, Gurgen, as the governor of this new province, granting him significant political and ecclesiastical authority. His successor, King Smbat II (977-985), further elevated the legal status of this administrative unit. He established a kingdom in Tashir-Dzoraget and assigned it to a younger branch of the Bagratids. In 979, King Smbat II Master of the Universe designated the Sanahin monastery as the episcopal spiritual center of this newly created administrative unit. However, in 1064, the episcopal center was moved to Haghpat. The Bagratid rulers of the region were succeeded by the Kyurikyans, a branch of the Bagratid family. Gurgen, known in history as Kyurike, is recognized as the king of Tashir-Dzoraget from 982/978 to 989. The kingdom's seat was initially at Shamshulde and later moved to the fortified city of Lori in 1065 (Fig. 2), which had been fortified by King Kyurike I (1048-1089).

The favorable political situation in Bagratid Armenia, combined with the establishment of the Tashir-Dzoraget kingdom, provided the ideal conditions for the continued development of the Sanahin monastery. This period allowed for the construction of new buildings, the creation of a cohesive architectural ensemble, and the enhancement of the monastery's spiritual, scientific, and educational impact, as well as its economic growth.



*Fig. 3, Big vestibule of the Sanahin monastery
(photo: Khachik Harutyunyan)*

The St. Astsvatsatsin Church, constructed in the 30s-40s of the 10th century, became the focal point around which further construction of the monastery revolved. By the 12th and 13th centuries, this church was surrounded by a distinctive and harmonious architectural environment, reflecting the monastery's continued importance and development.



*Fig. 4, Reliefs of Gurgun and Smbat, sons of King Ashot the Merciful and Khosrovanuysh, eastern facade of St. Amenaprkich church, Sanahin
(photo: Khachik Harutyunyan)*

Queen Khosrovanuysh, with the support and on behalf of her husband, King Ashot III the Merciful, constructed the main church of the monastery, St. Amenaprkich (Holy Savior). The completion of St. Amenaprkich Church significantly enhanced the monastery's status, increasing its fame and prestige. This church is four times larger in plan size and eight times larger in volume compared to the existing St. Astvatsatsin Church (Fig. 3).

St. Amenaprkich Church, with its innovative architectural design, spatial solutions, and overall

significance, became the central church of the monastery, known as the Katoghike. It is referred to by this name in inscriptions, manuscripts, and in various documents related to the monastery's construction, history, and economic activities.

Following the church's foundation, the Sanahin congregation was formally established, with Poghykarpos recorded as its first abbot from 966 to 970.

During the reign of the Kyurikyans, the Sanahin monastery experienced significant expansion. In addition to the construction of St. Amenaprkich Church, the monastery saw the addition of several new structures, including the narthex, St. Grigor Church, the library, and other buildings (Fig. 4). The monastery also became the ancestral cemetery of the Kyurikyans.

An inscription from the monastery, dated 1063, reveals that St. Grigor Church and the library were built under the initiative and leadership of Patriarch Dioskoros.

The flourishing development of Sanahin monastery under the Kyurikyans was short-lived due to the Seljuk invasions that began in the latter half of the 11th century. In 1064, the Seljuk army led by Sultan Alp-Arslan (1063-1072) captured Lori and proceeded southwards, capturing Ani in 1065. The Seljuk conquests were marked by widespread massacres, looting, destruction, and the taking of captives. Following these events, Sultan Alp-Arslan's successor, Sultan Malik-Shah I (1072-



*Fig. 5. St. Harutyun Chapel
and Grigor Tuteordi's khachkar
(photo: Arman Nalbandyan)*

1092), further devastated the region by occupying the entire Tashir-Dzoraget area in 1074.

The Seljuk rule in Lori was short-lived. During the reign of David IV of Georgia, known as David the Builder (1089-1125), Northern Armenia was liberated from the Seljuks in 1118 with the assistance of Armenian princes. This marked the beginning of a new era in Lori under the rule of the Zakaryan-Yerkaynabazuk (Long-Armed) noble family. During this period, efforts were made to repair the structures damaged by the Seljuk invasions, including those of the Sanahin monastery, and new buildings were also constructed.

From the 80s of the 12th century until the 30s of the 13th century, significant developments took place at the Sanahin Monastery. During this period, the courtyards of St. Astvatsatsin and St. Amenaprkich churches were constructed, along with the bell tower, the vestibule of the library-scriptorium, and the guest house (which has not survived). The family tombs of the Zakaryans were established,

and high-art khachkars by Grigor Tuteordi and Sargis were erected (Fig. 5). St. Amenaprkich Church was also renovated. At the end of the

12th century, the famous Sanahin Bridge was built across the Debed River, facilitating access to the monastery, and a spring was constructed in the village.

Epigraphs preserved on the monastery walls indicate that during the Zakaryan era, Sanahin Monastery reached its zenith of development and, according to Kirakos Gandzaketsi, was ranked among the principal monasteries of Armenia.

In the subsequent years, the Sanahin monastery complex endured invasions by the Mongols and later by Turkish and Persian forces, which caused significant damage. As a result, the monastery never fully recovered its former glory.

From the 16th century until the mid-17th century, the Sanahin monastery fell into decay and abandonment. However, from the mid-17th century onwards, significant repair and restoration work began, as documented in the monastery's epigraphs. This marked the beginning of a new era in the monastery's history, during which the deteriorated buildings were restored and improved, and the monastery's rights over several estates were reaffirmed. Sanahin once again emerged as a prominent religious center of the time. The extensive reconstruction efforts undertaken during the leadership of Archbishop Sargis, who served as the monastery's leader in 1652 and 1656, attest to this revival.

The beginning of the 19th century brought favorable conditions for the development and revival of the Sanahin monastery following its previous destructions. The village of Sanahin and its surrounding lands were inherited by the Yerkaynabazuk-Arghutyans, descendants of the Zakaryans, from Russian Empress Catherine the Great. Emulating the Zakaryans, the Yerkaynabazuk-Arghutyans also established the monastery as their ancestral cemetery.

In 1831, Archbishop Harutyun Ter-Barseghyants, the abbot of the monastery, constructed a spring within the monastery's courtyard and carried out renovation work on several structures. These efforts are documented in inscriptions preserved at the monastery.

In the second half of the 19th century, the Sanahin monastery experienced a period of decline. By the early 20th century, it had ceased to function as a major religious center.

With the establishment of Soviet rule in Armenia, the monastery was no longer used for religious and spiritual purposes. Instead, it was primarily recognized as a significant example of Armenian medieval architecture. This shift in focus led to the proposal of creating a separate museum dedicated to the site. In 1988, work on this project was initiated following Council of Ministers decision No. 380 of July 14, 1988, by the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. However, the project was never completed.

After Armenia gained independence, the Sanahin monastery complex was transferred to the Armenian Apostolic Church by Government decision No. 55 of February 5, 1991. Following this transfer, the monastery resumed its religious activities.



*Fig. 6, Haghpats Monastery complex
(photo: Nanar Kalantaryan)*

HAGHPAT VILLAGE AND ITS MONASTERY

Haghpats village is situated in the northeast of the Republic of Armenia, in the Lori region, at an elevation of 950 to 1,050 meters above sea level. The village is bordered on the west by steep valleys and on the east by the Surb Luys and Terunakan mountains, which historically served as fortresses to guard against raiders. The settlement of Haghpats dates back to the 8th-7th centuries BC.

The climate in Haghpats is relatively uniform, with moderately hot and dry summers and mild winters. The administrative area of the village spans 5,745.6 hectares, including 667.77 hectares of agricultural land, 95.43 hectares of residential areas, and approximately

30 hectares designated as a specially protected area. The village is lush with vegetation, and the surrounding regions are densely forested.

In the Middle Ages, Haghpats was also called capital, but not from the point of view of being crowded or of political importance, but as a great spiritual center. The village is known for its historical and architectural structures and first of all for the famous Haghpats monastery, which was founded in 976, through the means of Queen Khosrovanuysh, the wife of a prominent representative of the House of Bagratuni (Bagratid), the Armenian King Ashot the Merciful. According to some sources, the monastery had more than 500 priests.

Haghpats Monastery was one of the prominent spiritual, cultural, and scientific centers and large monastic institutions of medieval Armenia, many studies have been written about its foundation, subsequent history, and architectural structures (Fig. 6).

The earliest Armenian chronicler to mention the Haghpats and Sanahin monasteries is Stepanos Taronetsi Asoghik, who lived in the second half of the 10th century and the first half of the 11th century. Although he does not provide the exact year of their founding, he indicates that both monasteries were built during the reign of King Ashot III the Merciful (953-977). Historian Vardan Areveltsi (1198-1271) provides similar information about the monasteries' foundation.

Samuel Anetsi (1105-1185) chronicles the sponsorship of the monasteries' foundation by Queen Khosrovanuysh. Additionally, Kirakos Gandzaketsi (1201/1203-1271), Mkhitar Ayrivanetsi (1230/1235-1297/1300), and Stepanos Orbelyan (1250-1303) also provide significant information about Haghpats.

According to the preserved lithographic inscription of the construction of St. Nshan Church, the monastery was dedicated to the glory of Smbat and Gurgen, sons of King Ashot and Queen Khosrovanuysh (see Fig. 4).

The congregation of Haghpats monastery was initially formed by the transfer of members from the Sanahin Monastery's brotherhood following the establishment of Haghpats. This transfer was not due to any disagreements but was a result of the growing number of congregation members at Sanahin, driven by the special attention and patronage of the Kyurikyan royal house. In addition to the Sanahin congregation, scholars and teaching monks from other parts of Armenia were also invited to Haghpats. Simeon was appointed as the founding abbot of the newly established Haghpats monastery congregation.

In 1064, Haghpat monastery was designated as the Episcopal See of the Kyurikyan kingdom, with Bishop Sargis appointed as the leader of the Church Diocese of the Kingdom. In addition to becoming the episcopal seat, the monastery also served as the royal dynastic cemetery. Over time, Haghpat emerged as one of the influential centers of medieval Armenia. This is evidenced by the consecration of Bishop Barsegh of Ani-Shirak as the vicar of the Catholicos at Haghpat in 1081. Later, from 1105 to 1113, he served as the Catholicos of All Armenians, known as Barsegh I Anetsi.

As a result of the Seljuk invasions of Armenia (1025-1045, 1047-1063), the region was fully incorporated into the Sultanate. Under Sultan Malik-Shah (1072-1092), Seljuk control over Armenia was firmly established. Subsequently, the division of the Sultanate led to the emergence of various Seljuk authorities in Armenia, which continued the destructive raids initiated by their predecessors.

In 1105, during one such raid, an amir named Ghezel attacked, destroyed, and looted several settlements and monasteries, including Lore, the capital of the Tashir-Dzoraget kingdom, as well as the monasteries of Sanahin and Haghpat.

In 1139, the main church of Haghpat monastery, St. Nshan (Katoghike), was destroyed by an earthquake.

The latter half of the 12th century marked the beginning of a resurgence for the Haghpat congregation, a period that extended into the 13th century under the rule of the Zakaryan nobles. Recognizing the significance of Haghpat monastery, Queen Tamar of Georgia (1184-1213) appointed Bishop Barsegh Artsruni, the leader of the monastery, as the archbishop of Kartli in Georgia.

During the Zakaryan period, Haghpat monastery entered a new era of development. Not only were the buildings damaged by the Seljuk invasions and the earthquake restored, but new structures were also constructed, further enhancing the monastery's prominence.

Under the leadership of Bishop Hovhannes Khachenatsi, significant improvements were made to Haghpat monastery. The hall-tomb of the Kyurikyan kings was entirely reconstructed and transformed into a spacious vestibule. The three chapels-tombs of the Ukans family were built, the roofs of St. Nshan and St. Grigor churches were restored, and the monastery's territory was expanded. Additionally, work was carried out on the monastery's walls and the surrounding area, and the construction of the refectory was undertaken.



*Fig. 7, Haghpat monastery's bell tower
(photo: Khachik Harutyunyan)*

On the eve of the Mongol invasions in 1233, during the abbacy of Hovhannes Matznaberdtsi, the Kayan fortress was constructed on a hard-to-reach mountain cape near Haghpat Monastery to provide protection for the congregation. Unfortunately, this fortress was destroyed by the Mongols in 1241.

In the following years, large-scale construction continued at the monastery, uninterrupted even during the Mongol rule. Under the next abbot, Hamazasp, new additions included a spacious vestibule, a bell tower, and an eastern entrance to the wall (Fig. 7). During the second half of the 13th century, under the leadership of Hovhannes, a monk from the Dopants family, several significant projects were completed. These included the reconstruction of the library roof, the construction of a hall adjacent to the library, and the erection of the renowned khachkar "Amenaprkich" (the Most Savior) in honor of Amirspasalar Sadun Artsruni (Fig. 8). Additionally, a spring was constructed outside the monastery grounds.

These various constructions and reconstructions gradually shaped and refined the architectural identity of the monastery.



Fig. 8, The Amenaprkich (Savior of all) khachkar, Haghpats Monastery (photo: Khachik Harutyunyan)

The 11th to 13th centuries were also marked by significant advancements in education, science, and culture at the monastery. During this period, the Haghpats school and library-scriptorium became prominent centers of learning and had a significant impact on Armenian intellectual life (Fig. 9).

The period of prosperity for Haghpats Monastery was unfortunately short-lived due to the Mongol invasions. Despite the repeated attacks and looting by various Mongol leaders, including Lenk Temur (Tamerlane), the monastery managed to continue its activities. Bibliographic sources, particularly the colophons of manuscripts copied at the monastery, provide valuable insights into the difficulties faced by the monastery and its members during these years. Despite these challenges, which led to a decline in active monastic life and a reduction in the number of clergy, the monastery persisted in its functions.

The difficulties for Haghpats Monastery were compounded by the forced deportations of Armenians by Persian Shah Abbas the Great (1588-1629) in the early 17th century, as well as the impact of the Turkish-Persian wars. These conflicts led to the destruction and near abandonment of Haghpats village and monastery by 1730. The situation worsened in 1736 when Haghpats was attacked by Nader Shah of Persia, and again in 1772 by northern mountain invaders. These invasions resulted in the thorough destruction of the monastery.

The persistent instability caused by frequent attacks led to the temporary relocation of the Haghpats Prelacy to Tbilisi (Georgia) from 1751 to 1776. In

1776, through the efforts of Archbishop Abraham, the abbot of Haghpats Monastery, the village was resettled and the Prelacy was re-established in Haghpats. Georgian King Heraclius II (1744-1798) provided support for the repair and improvement of the neglected monastery. However, due to continued instability, the Prelacy moved back to Tbilisi in 1783. The monastery also suffered further destruction from the invasion of Agha Mahmud Khan (Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar), Shah of Persia (1742-1797).

Archbishop Hovsep Erkanabazuk-Arghutyan, who arrived at Haghpats with the Russian army on the orders of Russian Empress Catherine, witnessed the extensive destruction of the monastery. His visit, which occurred during the Persian army's retreat and the Russian army's advance, was crucial for Haghpats Monastery. Thanks to the efforts of the Arghutyans, the monastery was restored and acquired additional estates.

A special school was established next to the monastery, where Khachatur Abovyan, a prominent figure in modern Armenian literature and pedagogy, taught from 1826 to 1828. Despite these efforts, the former glory and prominence of Haghpats Monastery were not fully restored.

By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the monastic community had dwindled to just one priest and an abbot. The last abbot of Haghpats Monastery was Bishop Serovbe Araratyan, who is noted for overseeing the construction of a stone bridge across the Debed River in 1873.

After the establishment of the Soviet regime in Armenia, Haghpats ceased to function as a religious and spiritual institution. Instead, it was prominently recognized as an exceptional example of Armenian medieval architectural thought. As such, it played a key role in cultural, scientific, and educational events and programs organized by the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia.

In the first year following Armenia's independence (1991), the Government of the Republic of Armenia issued decision No. 616 on July 9, 2001, which transferred Haghpats Monastery to the Armenian Apostolic Church. Since then, it has resumed its role as a functioning religious institution.

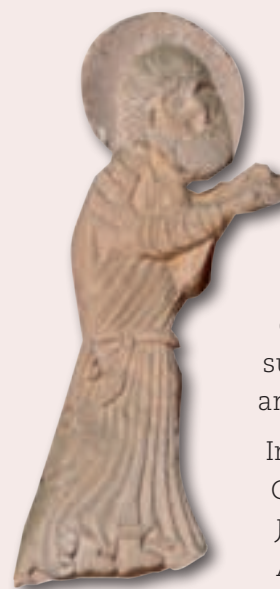




Fig. 9. The library of Haghpat monastery, later converted into a cellar, whence the jars under the floor (photo: Khachik Harutyunyan)

Medieval Scriptoria of Haghpat and Sanahin Monasteries

Both monastic complexes were significant centers of Armenian writing during the Middle Ages, where science and education flourished. In these scriptoria, the creation of manuscripts developed almost simultaneously.

Both Haghpat and Sanahin had their own schools and scholars, skilled scribes, and master miniaturists, many of whom gained great renown throughout Armenia and beyond its borders. The preserved manuscripts and the information contained within them indicate that the 10th and 11th centuries marked the formative years of these writing centers, with the 12th to 14th centuries being the most prosperous period. Although manuscripts continued to be produced in later centuries, the centers gradually lost their former prominence and significance.

Several notable scribes and miniaturists from these periods have been identified including Abbot Simeon, the founder of the Haghpat Congregation, Sargis, Davit Kobayretsi, Grigor, Hovhannes, Arakel the Priest, and Kirakos the Philosopher, among others.

Among the known manuscripts, some are particularly notable for their writing and miniatures. The most famous of these is the “Gospel of Haghpat”, a parchment manuscript copied in 1211 at Haghpat. This manuscript shares similarities with the writing traditions of Ani, once the capital of the Armenian Kingdom of the Bagratides. Its beautiful and original miniatures are striking, depicting not only scenes from the Gospels but also secular figures in elaborate attire. The Gospel was copied by the scribe Hakob and illustrated by the miniaturist Margare, who worked at the Bekhents Monastery of Ani.

It is noteworthy that manuscript production, especially at Haghpat monastery, continued until the end of the 19th century and ceased with the decline of monastic life there.





Fig. 10, Haghpat Gospel, Matenadaran, ms. 6288, 8v, 1211 AD (photo: Matenadaran)

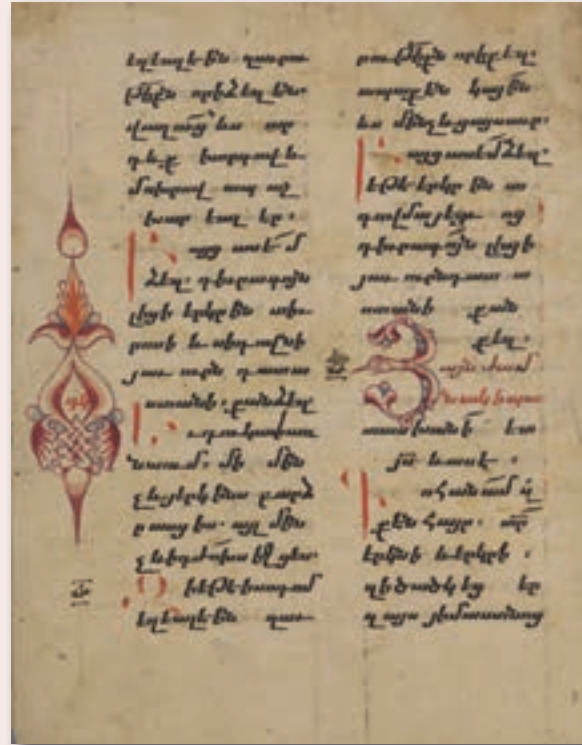


Fig. 11, Four Gospels, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, ms. 24, 32v, 1504 AD, Sanahin Monastery (photo: [https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:423203552\\$69i](https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:423203552$69i))

Manuscripts from these centers are now held in various collections worldwide, with some displayed at the Matenadaran in Yerevan (Fig. 10 and 11).

The Epigraphic Heritage of the Monasteries

The monastic complexes boast a rich epigraphic heritage, with inscriptions engraved or painted in various corners of the complexes, on khachkars, and murals.

For instance, the Sanahin monastery complex has preserved 189 different

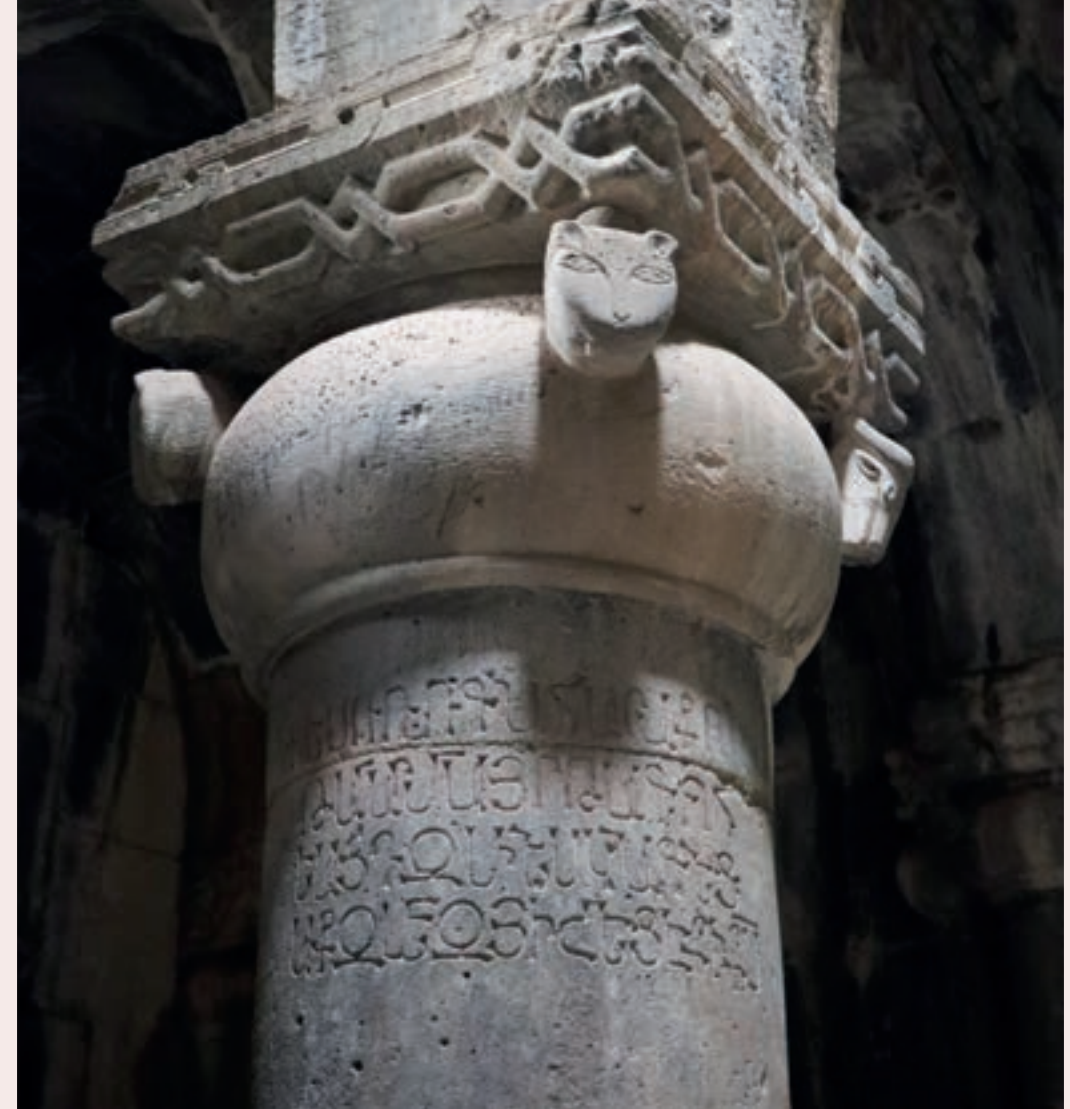


Fig. 12, Inscription on a pillar, Sanahin monastery (photo: Khachik Harutyunyan)

inscriptions spanning from the 10th to the 19th centuries, while the Haghpat monastery features 257 inscriptions. This count includes only the published inscriptions; additional graffiti and newly discovered inscriptions are not yet fully accounted for. Consequently, the total number of inscriptions in both complexes likely exceeds 500.

These inscriptions are valuable not only for their contribution to the written heritage

but also for their historical significance. They provide crucial information about the construction and renovation of monastic structures, monastic and daily life, and donations made to the churches. This data offers a detailed understanding of various historical events, prominent figures, and architectural developments.



Fig. 13, Ligatured inscription, Haghpat monastery (photo: Khachik Harutyunyan)

These inscriptions have preserved unique examples of Armenian writing, offering insights into the paleography and calligraphy of the Armenian alphabet. They showcase various expressive techniques such as abbreviations, ornaments, ligatures, and cryptography. These elements should be regarded as significant aspects of intangible heritage. Notably, in 2019, the Armenian alphabet and its cultural expressions were recognized and included in the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage. Among the best examples of Armenian writing art are the inscriptions found in the Haghpat and Sanahin monasteries (Fig. 12 and 13).

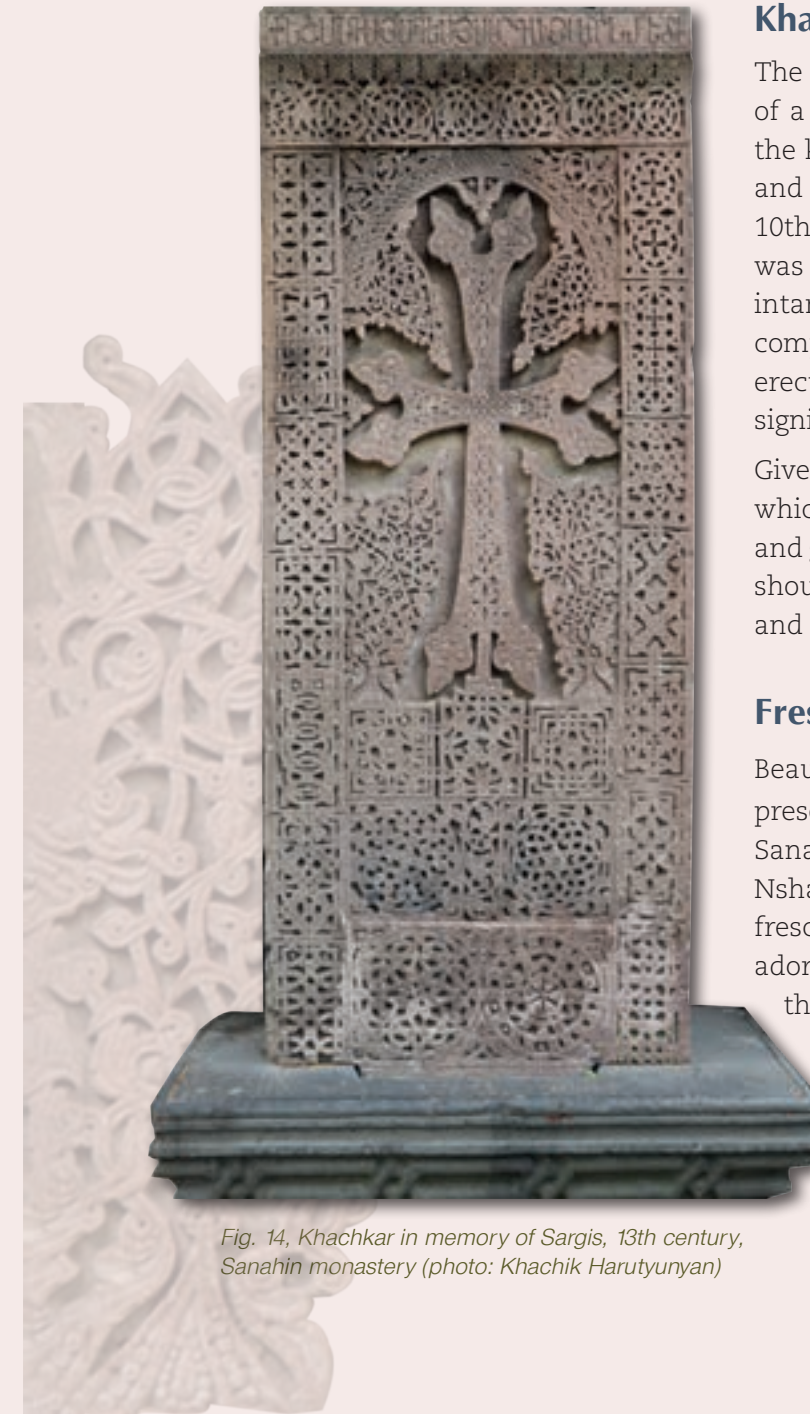


Fig. 14, Khachkar in memory of Sargis, 13th century, Sanahin monastery (photo: Khachik Harutyunyan)

Khachkars (cross-stones)

The two monastic complexes are vital repositories of a unique element of Armenian and global culture: the khachkar. Dozens of khachkars have been created and preserved here, with the oldest dating back to the 10th and 11th centuries. The art of crafting khachkars was recognized and included in the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage in 2010. In these monastic complexes, as throughout Armenia, khachkars were erected for various purposes, primarily to commemorate significant events or individuals (Fig. 14).

Given the large number of khachkars present, many of which hold exceptional significance for both Armenian and global cultural heritage, these monastic complexes should be highly valued for their role in the creation and preservation of this important art form.

Frescoes of the Property

Beautiful frescoes, or their fragments, have been preserved in various churches of the Haghpat and Sanahin monastic complexes. Among these, the St. Nshan Church of Haghpat monastery is the richest in frescoes. The southern wall of the church is entirely adorned with frescoes, which are organized into a three-layer series of images separated by horizontal and vertical decorative zones, including vegetal patterns and ribbon-like motifs.

In the right corner of the lower floor is the fresco of Khutlu Bugha, the son of Office Sadun, who died in 1293. This portrait is notably



Fig. 15, Detail from a fresco with inscription, 13th century, Haghpat monastery (photo: Khachik Harutyunyan)



well-preserved, depicting Khutlu Bugha in princely attire. An inscription on the left side at waist level reads: “BARON (i.e., Mr.) KHUTLU BUGHA” (Fig. 15).

In the left corner, the fresco is a composite of two or three layers. The upper part features an inscription and two distinct ornaments: one with floral motifs and another with a triangular prism pattern. This ornamentation is reminiscent of those found in the frescoes of the Main Altar of the St. Amenaprkich Church in Sanahin.

Fresco paintings have also been preserved in the main altar of St. Nshan Church. In the apse, a prominent fresco depicts Christ in the iconography of the Intercession. Christ is shown seated on a throne, with his right hand raised in blessing and holding an open Gospel in his left hand. The Gospel features Armenian and Georgian writings. Flanking Christ, the Virgin Mary is positioned on the left and St. John the Baptist on the right.

Below the apse, frescoes illustrate episodes from the life of Christ. To the left of the window is the Nativity scene, which depicts the three Magi, the Virgin Mary reclining, and the newborn Jesus lying in a manger, surrounded by two angels. In the central part of this fresco, the Star of Bethlehem is prominently featured, with an inscription in Armenian and Georgian reading: “THE BIRTH OF JESUS” to the left of the star.

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CATHEDRAL AND CHURCHES OF ETCHMIADZIN AND ZVARTNOTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

Khachik Harutyunyan



*Fig. 1, Cathedral of Etchmiadzin
(photo: Hrair Hawk Khatcherian)*

The property is mainly located in the city of Vagharshapat, about 20 km from the capital Yerevan. Geographically, the city is located in the Ararat Valley, which has been the cradle of Armenian statehood and culture since ancient times, whose natural borders are Aragats, Geghama, Sis and Masis (mount Ararat), and Armenian Par (i.e. Dance) mountains. The plan is more than 100 km long, up to 25 km wide. The city is located at an altitude of 800-850 m above sea level.

Vagharshapat, as a settlement, has existed since ancient times. This is evidenced by the archaeological monuments of the stone, bronze, and iron ages in and around the city. The spiritual center of the Armenian people is also located here - the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin with the Cathedral (Fig. 1) and the churches adjacent to it, which are part of the property included in the UNESCO "List."

The property consists of several components: the Zvartnots archaeological site, St Hripsime, St Shoghakat churches, St Gayane monastery, and the Cathedral of Echmiatsin (Fig. 2). The components of the property, except for the Zvartnots archaeological site, belong to the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, and the Zvartnots archaeological site is currently a state reserve with its special features. The property was included in the World Heritage List in 2000 with two criteria:

- ii to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;
- iii to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared.

We consider it necessary to introduce the historical parts of the property's components separately, after which the outstanding universal value, attributes, and other values will be presented.

CATHEDRAL OF ETCHMIADZIN

The Cathedral of Etchmiadzin (Fig. 1) is the principal Cathedral of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the current residence of the Catholicos of All Armenians. According to 5th-century sources, the Cathedral was founded between 301 and 303 AD, during the reign of King Trdat (Tiridates) III the Great (298–330) and the time of Gregory the Illuminator (302–325). This was shortly after Christianity was declared the state religion of Armenia in 301 AD. The Cathedral was established on the site of a pagan temple, with remnants of the pagan altar preserved beneath the main altar. Following the adoption of Christianity, the site became a patriarchal seat.

Various traditions surround the construction of the Cathedral. The most renowned is the legend of Gregory the Illuminator's vision, in which the only begotten Son of God descended from heaven in a luminous form. He struck the ground with a golden hammer and indicated the location where the first Christian church in Armenia should be built. This legend is the origin of the Cathedral's name, "Etchmiadzin," which means "The Only Begotten Son of God Descended."

Since its founding in the 4th century, the Cathedral has undergone numerous repairs and

complete restorations, leading to changes in its architectural form. Over the centuries, due to the shifting political landscape around Armenia, the Cathedral has also suffered significant destruction

According to the 5th-century Armenian historiographer Pavstos Buzand, in the 360s, the Persian king Shapur II (309–379) invaded Armenia, captured Vagharshapat, and destroyed all its buildings. Following these invasions, Catholicos Nerses I the Great (353–373) undertook repairs to the church. Later, Catholicos Sahak I Parthev (387–439) also carried out restoration work on the Cathedral, as noted by the 10th-century Armenian historiographer Samuel Anetsi in his chronicle.

It is important to note that some experts believe the current layout and size of the Cathedral are the result of reconstructions carried out by the Armenian ruler, Prince Vahan Mamikonyan, between 483 and 484. The Cathedral's floor plan features a four-apse design with a central cross base and a quadrilateral, dome-covered structure.

Due to unfavorable political conditions at the end of the 5th century, the seat of the Catholicos of All Armenians was relocated from Vagharshapat to the city of Dvin. It was not until ten centuries later, in 1441, that the seat was returned to its original location in Holy Etchmiadzin. Despite this relocation, the Cathedral continued to function throughout the centuries and endured frequent attacks and destruction. It suffered significant damage during the Arab raids in the 9th century, the Seljuk-Turk invasions in the 11th century, and the Tatar-Mongol invasions in the 12th and 13th centuries.

Following the return of the Catholicos' seat to Etchmiadzin, the 17th century witnessed the most significant destruction and alterations in the Cathedral's history.

At the beginning of the 17th century, the Cathedral was severely damaged by Persian Shah Abbas I the Great (1587–1629) in 1604. To prevent the return of approximately 350,000 Armenians who had been deported to Persia during the "Great Surgyun" (deportation) and to establish them in a new area, Shah Abbas decided to demolish the Cathedral, transport its stones to Persia, and use them to build a new church near Isfahan. Due to the challenges involved in moving all the stones, the project was only partially completed.

By the Shah's order, in 1615, Tahmaz Ghuli Khan oversaw the relocation of significant elements from the Cathedral, including the Holy Table, the stone marking Christ's descent,



Fig. 2, Locations of the Property's components
(credit: Google maps)



Fig. 3, Paul the Apostle and Saint Thecla, Etchmiadzin Cathedral, early 5th c., northern façade (photo: Hrair Hawk Khatcherian)

the baptistery, stage stones, and other important stones, as well as the Right Hand of St. Gregory the Illuminator, a revered relic of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The stones transported from the Cathedral of Etchmiadzin were later incorporated into the walls of the church at the Holy Saviour Monastery in the newly established Armenian city of New Julfa.

The damage from the 17th-century destruction was soon addressed; the Cathedral was restored, and a beautifully decorated bell tower was added in front of the western entrance between 1653 and 1658. It is important to note that throughout its history, the Cathedral underwent continuous renovation. The Armenian Catholicos dedicated significant effort and resources to ensure the Cathedral was consistently well-maintained and secure. The

17th to 19th centuries, in particular, mark a period of significant revival for the Cathedral. During this time, extensive construction work was carried out not only within the Cathedral but also in the surrounding areas.

The architectural-artistic analysis of the Cathedral clearly shows that its structure, despite the many renovations it has undergone over time, has preserved architectural details in some parts, which chronologically refer to the early medieval period of the Cathedral. Some parts of the northern and western walls, small corner gables, cornices, as well as three sculptures have been preserved from the structure of that period. One of them is the famous relief of St Paul and Thecla dating back to the 4th-5th centuries (Fig. 3). The slab with the sculpture “Paul the Apostle and Thecla” (dimensions 0.47 x 0.65) is located on the east side of the northern wall. It is divided by a column into two equal-arched planes. St Thecla is standing facing the viewer, her left hand is lowered, and her right hand is on her chest. The Apostle Paul is sitting in a chair, half-facing toward St Thecla. In the depths are written their names in Greek letters.

The sculpture of the Etchmiadzin Cathedral shows a scene described in Thecla’s life, when the saint, being already saved from persecution and baptized, presents herself to her teacher, Paul the Apostle. The fact of baptism is important here because the sculpture is located on the northern facade of the Cathedral, in the part where the baptistery is placed inside, so the location of the slab in that part of the Cathedral is not accidental.

Apart from the architecture, the Cathedral is also distinguished from other Armenian churches by its interior illustrations (Fig. 4). In 1720 by the order of the Catholicos Astvatsatur I Hamadantsi (1715-1725), the dome, the Senior Tabernacle, the naves and arches of the Cathedral were decorated with multi-colored and gilded ornaments by the famous poet and artist Naghash Hovnatan (1661-1722). In 1786 those works were continued by Hovnatan Hovnatanyan (1730-1801) during the Catholicos Ghukas I Karnetsi (1780-1799).

The Cathedral is experiencing a real rise and revival even today. After more than ten years of restoration and conservation work, its re-consecration is planned for 2024. The Armenian people all over the world are waiting for that day with great enthusiasm.



*Fig. 4, Decorated detail from the Cathedral
(photo: Ashkhen Papoyan)*

SAINT GAYANE MONASTERY

The St. Gayane Monastery (Fig. 5) is situated in the southeastern part of the St. Etchmiadzin Cathedral. According to the 5th-century historian Agatangeghos, the shrine of St. Gayane was originally built by Gregory the Illuminator on the exact site where Mother Gayane



Fig. 5, St Gayane Church (photo: Khachik Harutyunyan)

and her two nuns were martyred. This account refers to the early 4th century. Information about the early period of the shrine is sparse, but it is believed that the monastery's congregation was likely established in the 6th century.

Records from the 7th century provide further details about the shrine. According to the 10th-century historian Hovhannes Draskhanakertsi, Catholicos Ezr I Parazhnakertsi (630–641) undertook a major reconstruction of the previously dilapidated and modest

building in 630 AD, using hewn stones and limestones. During this reconstruction, the underground part of the sanctuary was preserved, and the altar of the newly built church was placed directly over the original tombstone.

After the reconstruction by Catholicos Ezr, there are no further mentions of St. Gayane Monastery in written sources until the 17th century.



*Fig. 6, St Gayane's tomb under the main altar
(photo: Khachik Harutyunyan)*

Arakel Davrizhetsi, an Armenian historian and church figure active around 1590 to the 1670s, detailed the challenges and poor conditions of the Holy See during the early 17th century in his “History.” He lamented that, during this period, St. Gayane Monastery had fallen into a state of disrepair. Unable to accept the monastery’s deteriorated condition,

Catholicos Philipos I Aghbaketsi (1633–1655) undertook its restoration in 1651. Philipos I extensively renovated both the monastery and its church, including the construction of a new cross for the dome. He also repaired the lower chapel of the senior tabernacle.

According to Davrizhetsi, during the renovations of St. Gayane Monastery in 1652, a monk named Hovhannes, who oversaw the restoration work, discovered the relics of St. Virgin Gayane and her two companions in three coffin .

Following Catholicos Philipos I, Catholicos Yeghiazar I Aintaptsi (1682–1691) undertook additional renovations of the monastery. The details of these works are recorded in an inscription on the left side of the church’s main entrance. According to this inscription, Catholicos Yeghiazar, recognizing the monastery’s neglected state, established new halls and cells nearby and constructed a triple-arched narthex on the southern and northern ends of the church. The narthex featured liturgical tables at both ends, with altars dedicated to the apostles Peter on the right and Paul on the left. These tables were topped with small bell towers.

Additionally, notable renovations were carried out by Abbot Vahan Bastamyants (1842–1881) during the tenure of Catholicos Gevorg IV (1864–1882). In 1872, Reverend Vahan, a distinguished scholar and expert in church law, oversaw extensive repairs. He constructed an arched door on the western side of the church, built the abbot’s multi-room residence, and created accommodations for members of the congregation. A school for children and a printing house were also established as part of these renovations.

On either side of the road leading to the main entrance of St. Gayane Monastery, there are two fountains. The first on the left, was constructed in the 1980s based on a design by architect Rafael Israelyan. The second, on the right, was built in 1984 to commemorate the people of Karin (modern Erzurum, Turkey) who were martyred during the Armenian Genocide. This fountain was designed by architect Artsrun Galikyan and sculptor Edik Hakobjanyan.

In the late Middle Ages, St. Gayane Monastery served as a burial site for several Catholicoses. On the north side, the following Catholicoses are interred: Hakob V Shamakhetsi (1759–1763), Yeghiazar I Aintaptsi (1682–1691), Ghazar I Jahketsi (1737–1751), Mattheos I Constantinople (1858–1865), Davit V (1801–1807), and Khoren I Muradbekyan (1932–1938). On the south side, in front of the western door, the graves of Simeon I Yerevantsi (1763–1780), Abraham

II Mshetsi (1730–1734), Minas I Aknetsi (1751–1753), St. Etchmiadzin’s first prosecutor Tovma Ghorghanyan, Catholicos Hovsep Arghutyan, and vicar Archbishop Barsegh can be found.

Not far from the western side of the church, arched gates with residential rooms were built in the 80s of the 19th century.

Belonging to the domed basilica type, this church extends from west to east and features a senior altar at the eastern end, flanked by two sacristies on either side. The interior is organized into three naves, divided by arches placed in two rows along the center of the church. The gables support part of the weight of the vaults covering the central and side naves and primarily bear the weight of the dome, which rises above the square formed by four gables.

Inside the dome, the middle nave intersects with the transept. This intersection of internal spatial forms is reflected in the church’s exterior, where the longitudinal and transverse gable roofs intersect at the vaulted ceiling. A slender, octagonal drum rises from the square created by this intersection, culminating in the dome’s edge. The church has three entrances: the main entrance on the western side opens into a vaulted hall added slightly later, while the other two entrances, located on the north and south facades, are directly opposite each other.

The vaulted tomb of St. Gayane is situated beneath the senior altar of the quadrilateral domed basilica church (Fig. 6). Access to the tomb is through an entrance in the southwest vestry. During renovations, a black granite tombstone from Nor Nakhichevan, made in 1910, was placed here. This tombstone features an eight-lined inscription.

The monastery is a notable example of Armenian architecture, skillfully combining the three-aisled basilica layout with a central-domed design.

SAINT HRIPSIME CHURCH

Saint Hripsime Church (Fig. 7) is located at the entrance to the city of Vagharshapat. The church’s foundation and name are closely associated with



Fig. 7, St Hripsime Church (photo: Nanar Kalantaryan)

Virgin Hripsime, an early Christian missionary in Armenia, and are integral to the history of Armenia's adoption of Christianity.

According to the tradition recorded by the 5th-century historian Agathangelos, the Roman emperor Diocletian (284–305) sought to marry and ordered painters to bring him portraits of the most beautiful women in his realm. Among the portraits was that of Hripsime, a virgin of royal descent, who lived in a convent led by a matron named Gayane. Diocletian was captivated by Hripsime's beauty and arranged for their marriage. Upon learning of this plan, Hripsime and her fellow virgins fled the convent by night and escaped beyond the empire's borders. They first traveled to Egypt, then to Jerusalem, and eventually arrived in Armenia, specifically in the region of Van, where they began preaching Christianity.

Furious at their flight Emperor Diocletian wrote letters to neighboring leaders, including the Armenian king Tiridates. In his letters, Diocletian instructed Tiridates to either return the virgins if they were found or to keep them if he preferred.

Upon discovering Hripsime, King Tiridates himself desired to marry her and sent lavish gifts to win her favor. However, Hripsime rejected the king's advances. In response, Tiridates attempted to force her into submission, but the steadfast virgin resisted.

Hripsime's defiance and bravery became widely known, and she fled the court to seek refuge with her fellow virgins. That very night, she was slain by the king's executioners. The following day, the other virgins were also martyred, their bodies left exposed as prey for wild animals. For nine days, their corpses lay untouched in the field, spared by divine intervention. Gregory the Illuminator, who had been released from Khor Virap prison, was guided by a vision to collect and bury the martyred virgins in a special coffin at the site of their martyrdom.

The martyrdom of the virgins is recorded to have occurred in October 301. In the early 4th century, Gregory the Illuminator established one of the earliest Christian chapels at the site of their martyrdom, with support from the converted King Tiridates the Great (287–330), his wife Ashkhen, and his sister Khosrovidukht.

According to the 5th-century historian Pavstos Buzand, the chapel of St. Hripsime, along with other sanctuaries in Vagharshapat, was destroyed in 380 during the invasion by Persian King Shapur II (309–379). In 395, Patriarch Sahak Parthev (348–439), Catholicos of All Armenians, undertook the reconstruction of the demolished chapel of St. Hripsime. This restoration is documented in historical records.



*Fig. 8, St Hripsime Church and the mud-brick wall surrounding the Church
(archive of "Scientific Research Center of Historical and Cultural Heritage")*

At the beginning of the 7th century, Catholicos Komitas I Aghtsetsi (615–628) dismantled the earlier chapel and built the present-day church over the relics of Saint Hripsime. The coffin of the Virgin Hripsime is preserved to this day in the ground-floor chapel beneath the church's altar, where it remains accessible for viewing. Historical accounts and two inscriptions confirm that Catholicos Komitas was responsible for the construction of the church.

The 10th-century historian Hovhannes Draskhanakertsi praised Catholicos Komitas and the church he built. However, mentions or evidence of the church in Armenian literature become scarce beyond the 10th century.

In the following centuries, particularly during the Seljuk and Mongol invasions, the monasteries and churches of the Ararat Valley, including Vagharshapat, fell into complete abandonment. References to the church reappear in records from the 17th century. Historian Arakel Davrizhetsi, writing in the same century, lamented the deplorable and dilapidated condition of the Hripsime Monastery.

In the 1650s, the church of Saint Hripsime experienced a revival with extensive repairs and beautification effort, marking a significant restoration of its former glory (Fig. 8).

SAINT SHOGHAKAT CHURCH

According to the 5th-century historian Agathangelos, Gregory the Illuminator, inspired by a vision, constructed St. Shoghakat Church (Fig. 9) on the site where Virgin Mariane, one of Hripsime's virgins, was martyred. In the vision, a moon-like glow descended as four pillars of light upon the locations of the virgins' martyrdoms. One of these locations was a winepress in a garden on the north side of the city, where Mariane, due to illness, had sought refuge and was unable to follow her companions.

Originally named the "Sick Virgin Church" and the Monastery of the Virgin Mariane, the church later became known as Shoghakat. This name is derived from Gregory's vision, which described a "beam of divine light" that arose at the site.

The history of St. Shoghakat Church dates back to the 4th century. Initially, Gregory the Illuminator built a chapel-church at the beginning of the 4th century on this site. Later, a stone chapel-church was constructed, featuring a domed hall with two pairs of gables. This structure bears the inscription: "This chapel was built in 603."

There are no further mentions of this church in written sources until the 17th century. Information about the church appears in a Lectionary copied in Vagharshapat at the beginning of the 18th century, as well as in the travel notes of the historian and



*Fig. 9, St Shoghakat Church
(photo: Khachik Harutyunyan)*

archaeologist Archbishop Hovhannes Shahkhatunyants (1799–1849) and in the writings of the Armenologist and historian Father Ghevond Alishan (1820–1901).

According to information preserved in the mentioned Lectionary, during the reign of Catholicos Nahapet I Edesatsi (1691–1705), the old shrine was demolished, and in 1694, the current church was built with new architectural and spatial solutions. An inscription above the western door of the church indicates that it was constructed through the generosity of a wealthy prince named Aghamal from Nakhichevan.

During Catholicos Nahapet I Edesatsi's tenure, alongside the construction of the church, additional stone, wood, and soil rooms were built for the monks of the congregation. In the 17th century, a fence and towers were added to the monastery, and a khachkar (cross-stone) with a small inscription about the church's construction was placed near the outer wall of the northwestern entrance. Until the time of Catholicos Ghukas I Karnetsi (1780–1799), a scroll and a Gospel were placed in front of this khachkar for worship.

St. Shoghakat Church features a small vestibule along the width of the western façade, which is crowned with an eight-pillar rotunda of the belfry.

During renovations in the vestibule, two graves were discovered on its southern and northern sides, but without corresponding inscriptions. Archbishop Hovhannes Shahkhatunyants, Father Ghevond Alishan, and the theologian and Armenologist Archbishop Maghakia Ormanyan suggest that the northern grave is that of Catholicos Nahapet I Edesatsi, and the southern one is that of Father Abraham IV Kretatsi (1734–1737). Following the order of His Holiness Patriarch Vazgen I, marble slabs were placed on the graves of these Catholicoi.

St. Shoghakat Church, regardless of its specific historical uses, stands as a remarkable example of Armenian medieval architectural thought. It has played a crucial role in the spiritual, cultural, scientific, and educational activities organized in Armenia, especially during the Soviet era.

As a prominent architectural and spiritual landmark of the Armenian Middle Ages, St. Shoghakat Church remains a favored site for both Armenians and foreign tourists. It is an essential component of many tourist routes in Armenia that focus on historical, cultural, religious, and architectural significance.



Fig. 10, Zvartnots Cathedral (photo: Nanar Kalantaryan)



Fig. 11, Zvartnots archaeological site with the Cathedral in the center (photo: Nanar Kalantaryan)

ZVARTNOTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

Researchers and visitors have long been captivated by the Zvartnots Church, which is the central structure of the Saint Grigor (Gregory the Illuminator) church complex in Vagharshapat (Fig. 10).

While there is no precise information in written sources or lithographic inscriptions about the exact dates of the Zvartnots Church's construction, experts generally agree that it was built between 643 and 652. Historical accounts and a Greek inscription found on the site indicate that the church was constructed under the patronage of Catholicos Nerses III of Tayk (641–661). The inscription reads: "Nerses built it; remember."

According to the 7th-century historiographer Sebeos, Catholicos Nerses constructed the Church of St. Gregory in honor of the heavenly angels and the multitude of divine forces that appeared to St. Gregory during his vision. The name "Zvartnots" is mentioned exclusively in Sebeos's "History," as he was a contemporary and eyewitness to the church's construction.

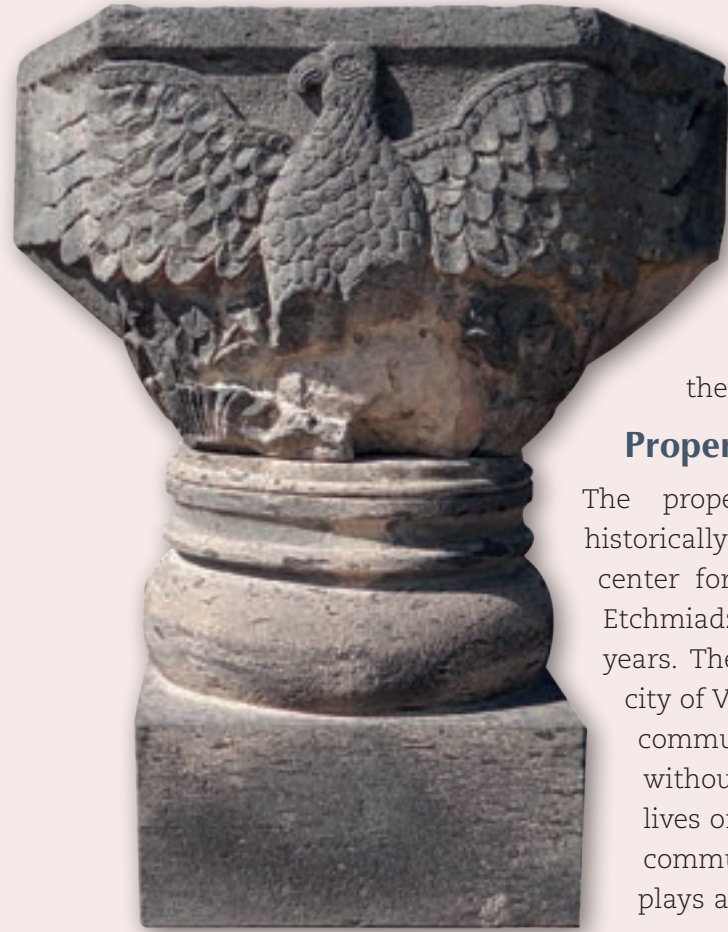
In addition to Sebeos, the church is also referenced by other chroniclers, including Hovhannes of Draskhanakert (late 9th to early 10th century), Stepanos Asoghik (10th–11th century), Samuel of Ani (12th century), Kirakos of Gandzak (13th century), Mkhitar of Ayrivank (13th century), and Vardan the Historian (13th century). All of these historians spoke admiringly of the church.

After the church was completed in 652, Catholicos Nerses III also undertook the construction of the Catholicos Palace, along with various secular structures, landscaping, and the planting and irrigation of gardens, which were completed by 662. These efforts resulted in the final architectural appearance of the St. Gregory Church complex (Zvartnots).

Historical records indicate that the Church of St. Gregory was destroyed by an earthquake in the 930s. Following its destruction, the church fell into obscurity and was gradually buried under a thick layer of soil. Over time, the ruins became artificial hills due to neglect and were used as a quarry for hewn stones by the local population.

Archaeological excavations at this site began at the end of the 19th century and into

the early 20th century, uncovering not only the remains of the once-renowned church but also earlier cultural layers. Artifacts from the earliest layer date back to the 1st millennium BC, specifically the 5th-4th centuries BC. Subsequent layers revealed high relief sculptures, three large pillar bases with burnt surfaces, and the ruins of a single-nave temple from the 4th-5th centuries AD (Fig. 11).



Among the notable discoveries was a stela with a cuneiform inscription from the Urartian (Van) Kingdom period, documenting the creation of essential infrastructure for water supply in the area. Additionally, a significant find was a phallic statue from the 5th-4th centuries BC, associated with fertility and symbolizing rebirth and the continuity of lineage.

All these significant features and valuable artifacts from the ancient site are displayed in the on-site museum.

Property as a Living Heritage

The property, comprising several components both historically and currently, has long been the spiritual center for the Armenian people, with the Cathedral of Etchmiadzin being its core, boasting a history of over 1,700 years. The churches and monasteries that make up the city of Vagharshapat and its surroundings are integral to community life, making it difficult to imagine the area without them. The property is deeply embedded in the lives of the community and all Armenians. In turn, the community, including local authorities and residents, plays a crucial role in its upkeep and operation. The St.

Hripsime Church, St. Shoghakat Church, St. Gayane Monastery, and the Cathedral are visited almost daily. These sites host liturgies, weddings, baptisms, funerals, and other church ceremonies for community members and visitors alike (Fig. 12).

The Cathedral's beautiful park and open spaces are especially cherished by local residents, who enjoy spending their evenings walking there. The only component of the property considered a state reserve is the Zvartnots archaeological site, which features the unique St. Grigor Church. Although the church is in a dilapidated state and no religious ceremonies are held there, it is viewed as an integral part of the property along with its other components. The Zvartnots site remains a favorite destination for both locals and tourists, consistently attracting a steady stream of visitors.



*Fig. 12, Baptism ceremony in St. Hripsime Church
(photo: Khachik Harutyunyan)*

Medieval Scriptoria of the Property



Fig. 13, Missal copied in Etchmiadzin, 1681 AD, Matenadaran, ms. 444, 3r

Under the auspices of St. Etchmiadzin, the art of writing flourished notably from the beginning of the 17th century. Hundreds of manuscripts from this period have survived, highlighting the Mother See’s role as a prominent center of literary and scholarly activity (Fig. 13).

After the invention of the Armenian alphabet in 405, a church assembly held in Vagharshapat in 426 decided to translate the Bible into Armenian, along with essential texts for organizing church rituals, monastic life, and education. During this period, the first Armenian scriptorium in Vagharshapat was established. Significant y, Ghazar Parpetsi, the trustee of the Vagharshapat monastery (440/443–beginning of the 6th century), founded the first Armenian writing center-library, as documented by Ghazar Parpetsi himself in his History of the Armenians. Historical information about the early scriptorium, the library, and its manuscripts in Vagharshapat is limited. It wasn’t until 1441, when the patriarchal throne was relocated from Sis (the capital of Cilician Armenia) to Vagharshapat, that new monks gathered around the monastery, reviving Etchmiadzin as a cultural and scholarly hub. This revival is evidenced by numerous manuscripts that were written or copied there.

The Epigraphic Heritage of the Property

The various components of the property are adorned with regular inscriptions and graffiti found on walls, pillars, tombstones, and other surfaces, which are crucial for studying the history of each component. These inscriptions date from the 7th to the 20th centuries, with earlier writings also preserved. The epigraphic heritage is particularly rich in inscriptions from the 17th and 18th centuries, corresponding with the renovation of the Cathedral and other churches (Fig. 14). These inscriptions provide valuable information about the property, and the spiritual and secular figures associated with them. They detail events from different periods, construction and repair efforts by Armenian patriarchs, builders, and stonemasons, as well as donations received. This wealth of information enhances our understanding of this spiritual and religious center, which has played a pivotal role in the life of the Armenian people.



Fig. 14, Inscription on the inner part of the bell tower, St Hripsime Church, 1790 AD (photo: Khachik Harutyunyan)



Fig. 15, Unique examples of the khachkars from the destroyed medieval cemetery of Jugha, 1602 and 1603 AD (photo: Khachik Harutyunyan)

Khachkars (cross-stones)

The property features dozens of khachkars, some of which were created on-site, while others were brought from various locations in historical Armenia. According to the state list of monuments of the Republic of Armenia, there are 38 khachkars on the Cathedral's grounds alone, with the oldest dating back to the 9th century. These khachkars, celebrated as prime examples of Armenian artistic heritage, are displayed in various parts of the Cathedral. Notably, seven of these khachkars were brought from the historical Goghtn province of Armenia, now part of Jugha in Nakhichevan. These khachkars are particularly significant as they are among the few that survived the destruction of the Jugha Armenian cemetery by Azerbaijani authorities between 1998 and 2006 (Fig. 15).

Experts have noted that the destruction of the thousands of monuments in the Jugha cemetery represents a profound loss for both Armenian and world cultural heritage. Additionally, the art of creating khachkars was inscribed on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2010.

Beyond the Cathedral, other churches on the property also feature khachkars. According to the state list, there are 10 khachkars at St. Hripsime Church, spanning the years 1195 to 1692, and 23 khachkars at St. Gayane Church, dating from the 10th to the 17th centuries. Khachkars can also be found at St. Shoghakat Church.





Fig. 16, Fresco on the western entrance to the St Gayane church, 17th century (photo: Ashkhen Papoyan)

The Frescoes of the Property

Among the property's components, frescoes are present in St. Hripsime Church, St. Gayane Monastery, and the Cathedral. These murals exhibit a variety of iconographic themes and are an integral part of the property's history (Fig. 4, 16).

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GEGHARD MONASTERY AND UPPER AZAT VALLEY

Khachik Harutyunyan

The monastery is situated on the slope of the Goght tributary, in the upper part of the Azat River, within the administrative area of Geghard village in the Kotayk region of the Republic of Armenia. Positioned at an altitude of 1,950 meters above sea level, Geghard is approximately 30 km from Yerevan and 85 km from the regional center, Hrazdan. The monastery complex is located 2.5 km southeast of the village, outside the settlement itself.

The Geghard Monastery complex and the upper Azat River valley feature several churches, caves, and tombs, most of which are rock-cut (Fig. 1). The medieval buildings are set in a picturesque landscape at the entrance to the Azat River valley. The monastery is enclosed by high cliffs to the north and surrounded by a defensive wall on the other sides. This remarkable architectural complex seems to harmoniously blend with its stunning natural surroundings.

According to medieval Armenian sources, following Armenia's adoption of Christianity in 301, a tradition emerged to build monasteries on former pagan sacred sites. The foundation and early prosperity of the monastery are traditionally attributed to the first Armenian Patriarch, Grigory the Illuminator (302-325). Over the centuries, natural caves were utilized by the monks. Consequently, the monastery was known as Ayrivank ("Monastery

*Fig. 1, Monastery of Geghard and
rock-cut structures
(photo: Nanar Kalantaryan)*



of the Rock”) from its founding until the 13th century. From that time onward, it increasingly adopted the name Geghard, referring to the holy Geghard (the Holy Lance) kept at the monastery.

According to the Bible, the Roman soldier Longinus pierced Christ’s side with a lance (Geghard in Armenian), which became one of Christianity’s most treasured relics. Armenian tradition holds that the Holy Lance was brought to Armenia by the apostle Thaddeus in 33 AD. It remained in Ayrivank from the mid-13th century until 1760, when it was transferred to the Holy Etchmiadzin (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2, His Holiness Garegin II, Catholicos of all Armenians, holds Saint Geghard in his hand and benedict the believers (photo: www.orer.eu)

The monastery was also called “Seven Churches”, “Forty Tabernacles” by the faithful people.

Over the centuries the monastery was captured and destroyed several times by Arab, Seljuk and Mongol invaders. As a result, structures built at different times before the 12th century were destroyed once and for all.

The main architectural ensemble of the Geghard Monastery was developed during the 12th and 13th centuries. Throughout the first half of the 13th century, the monastery was under the patronage of the Zakaryan noble family. During their

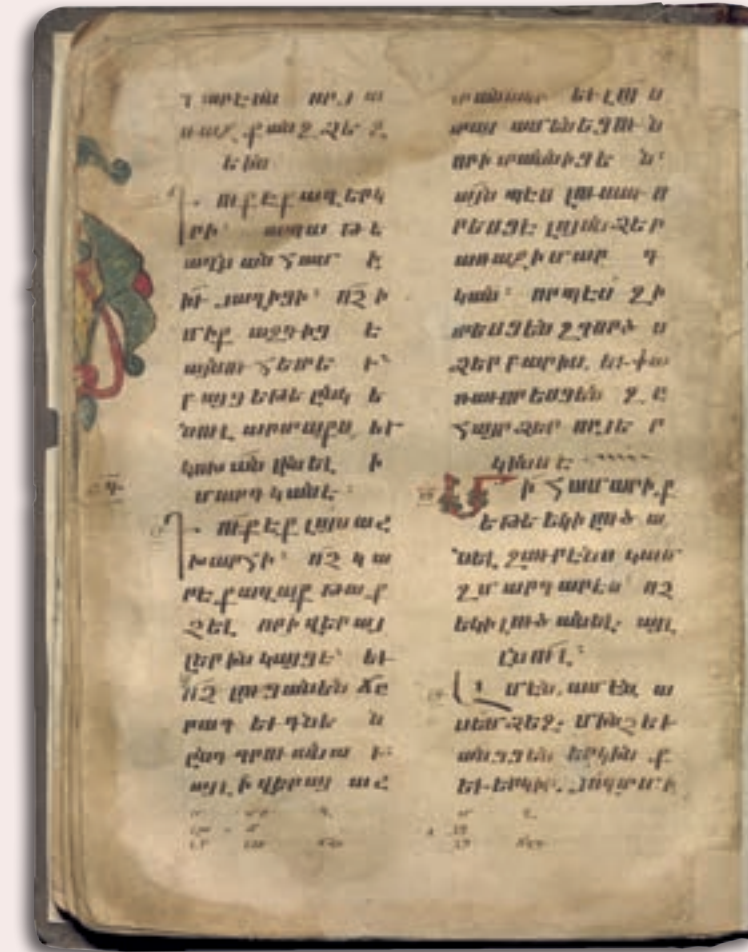


Fig. 3, Gospel, Matenadaran, ms. 4509, 1217 AD, 18v

rule, one of the significant structures of the monastery complex, the Saint Astvatsatsin (Kathoghike) Church, was constructed, along with its renowned narthex, which is located to the west of the church.

In the 1240s, the monastery came under the control of the Proshyan princely family. Prince Prosh acquired it from the Zakaryans to establish it as a family cemetery.

With the Proshyans’ acquisition, a new era began in the history of the monastery’s development. During their rule, Geghard Monastery reached its zenith, becoming a major religious, educational, and cultural center. The Ayrivank school, an integral part of the Armenian medieval educational system, was revived, and the monastery’s scriptorium flourished producing numerous manuscripts throughout the Middle Ages.

The earliest surviving manuscript from the monastery’s scriptorium dates back to 1190. It was copied by a scribe named Philipos, who also mentioned his sons Aghbayrik and Gorgios, bookbinders,

along with other family members. This manuscript is notable for its exquisite bolorgir script.

Chronologically, the next manuscript known to us from the same scriptorium is a Gospel copied in 1217 (Fig. 3). This manuscript is considered one of the most valuable examples of writing and miniature painting in Armenia. The scribe of the manuscript was Abel, a member of the monastery congregation,



Fig. 4, Garni Temple, 1st century AD

and the miniaturist was Sargis. The Gospel is also notable for its interesting colophon, in which not only Geghard is mentioned, but also the royal country house Garni, which is not far from the Geghard, and is famous for its Hellenistic temple. Even today, Garni and Geghard are considered the most famous monuments in Armenia (Fig. 4).

In the 15th century, the cultural life of the monastery experienced a revival under the leadership of Abbot Simeon Ayrivanetsi. In addition to his educational endeavors, Simeon Ayrivanetsi was actively involved in manuscript production and copying. Although it is difficult to determine the exact number of manuscripts he produced, three notable works have survived: a Bible, a Collection of Sermons, and a Lectionary. These manuscripts are now preserved in the Matenadaran in Yerevan and are regarded as exemplary achievements of Armenian literary art.

However, the art of manuscript writing gradually declined in the monastery. By the 16th and 17th centuries, no manuscripts from that period have survived, and only one manuscript from the 18th century, copied in 1707, remains.

Geghard Monastery stands out as a distinctive example of Armenian Church architecture, renowned for its unique integration of masonry and rock-cut structures. The complex is carved from a massive monolithic rock, showcasing the skillful organization of construction at various heights, precise orientation within the rock mass, and meticulous carving techniques that effectively “conquered” the inner space to achieve volume and expansiveness.

Central to the architect Galdzag’s work is the Kathoghike Church and its adjacent narthex. This core structure serves as the focal point around which the architectural environment

Fig. 5, Interior of the narthex





Fig. 6, Rock-cut shrines east of the Katoghike Church (photo: Nanar Kalantaryan)

was developed, characterized by an exceptional unity and harmony of forms (Fig. 5).

The allure and uniqueness of the Geghard Monastery complex are largely attributed to the numerous large and small caves carved into the rugged rock formations of the upper Azat Valley. There are more than a dozen such caves in the area. While some are well-preserved and widely recognized, others remain largely unexplored and underappreciated. These caves have served as sanctuaries and places of worship since pre-Christian times and later became residences and hermitages for monks during the Christian era (Fig. 6).

Another remarkable aspect of the sacred site is its stunning natural landscape, characterized by towering rocks, a lively and plentiful river, and vegetation growing between the ravines. The Geghard church complex is seamlessly integrated into this



Fig. 7-8, Khachkars carved or embedded into the rock, close to the monastery (photos: Nanar Kalantaryan)

picturesque setting. It is fitting that the monastery has been referred to as Ayrvank, meaning “monastery in a cave,” for centuries.

In addition to the rock-hewn structures within the monastery, khachkars (cross-stones) were erected and carved into the rocks at various times. These khachkars, renowned for their unique artistic compositions and sculptural execution, are especially notable for their craftsmanship. Most of these khachkars were created during the 11th to 13th centuries.

The Geghard Monastery and its rock-cut caves serve as a rich repository of these distinctive khachkars. Dozens have been created and preserved here, with the oldest dating back to the 10th and 11th centuries. These khachkars were erected or carved for various purposes, primarily as small monuments commemorating significant events or notable individuals (Fig 7-8).

The Geghard Monastery complex is distinguished by its exceptional architectural artistry and unique relief ornaments carved both inside and outside the church structures. These ornaments, created at various times, are of significant artistic value and originality. Their distinctive designs are so renowned and influential that they have been incorporated into various fields of applied and decorative art (Fig. 9).



On June 4, 1679, the Geghard Monastery was severely damaged by the Garni earthquake, which also affected many churches in Armenia. The earthquake caused debris to fall from the rocks, covering and damaging the monastery's structures. However, the situation was not permanent. In 1696, Abbot Davit undertook the restoration of the monastery, clearing away the rubble, repairing the damaged buildings, and constructing a new defensive wall with towers, as well as additional residential and economic buildings.

In 1708, the Abbot of the monastery, Reverend Daniel, built the arched gate on the western side of the monastery. With these constructions made at the end of the 17th till the beginning of the 18th century, the architectural image of the monastery complex gets a finished look

The monastery of Geghard with its remarkable rock-cut churches, tombs, khachkars, and other tangible and intangible attributes is still preserved in its natural setting. The authenticity of the group is high, not least because the property has been in continuous use as a monastery for many centuries.

At the same time, the Geghard Monastery is one of the most visited monuments in Armenia, receiving



Fig. 9, Exterior of the southern portal of the Kathoghike Church (photo: Khachik Harutyunyan)



Fig 10, Tourists at the entrance to the monastery (photo: Khachik Harutyunyan)

thousands of tourists and pilgrims every year. Moreover, it is also one of the most beloved sanctuaries of the Armenian people, where marriages are often performed. Everything is organized so that, on the one hand, the religious ceremonies of the church are not disturbed, and on the other hand, people have the opportunity to see and admire this unique example of Armenian church architecture (Fig. 10).

In 2000, the Geghard monastery complex was included in the “World Heritage List” under criterion “ii” as an exceptionally well-preserved and complete example of medieval Armenian monastic architecture and decorative art, with many innovative features that had a profound impact on the subsequent development of the region. The monastery complex is also listed under the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict

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ARMENIAN
PROPERTIES ON THE
TENTATIVE LIST



MONASTERY OF NORAVANK

Karen Matevosyan

Among the medieval Armenian monasteries, Noravank is renowned for its history, architecture, and cultural heritage. Since the early 13th century, the monastery has served as the seat of the Syunik metropolitans and as the mausoleum of the powerful Orbelian princely house. Its prestigious status contributed to the construction of magnificent sculpted churches. Noravank was also known for its scriptorium, further enriching its cultural legacy.

The Syunik region, renowned for its historical monasteries, boasts three churches named “Noravank.” Historical records indicate that all three were constructed in the 10th century on the sites of earlier shrines. One of these, Bgheno Noravank, is located near the Vorotan River, east of the prominent Tatev Monastery. The second, situated in Vayots Dzor province, is the famous Noravank, adjacent to the ancient shrine-chapel of St. Pokas. By the late 13th century, it had become the episcopal church of the Syunik region, sometimes referred to as “Amaghu” Noravank due to its proximity to the village of the same name. The third Noravank, also in Vayots Dzor province but at a higher elevation, is often referred to as Upper Noravank by historians and has recently been identified with Shativank according to new research.

The most renowned among these is Noravank, the episcopal church complex that harmonizes with the picturesque surrounding nature, to which this brief overview is dedicated (Fig. 1). As mentioned earlier, it served as the mausoleum of the Orbelian princely dynasty and as the residence of the metropolitans of Syunik from the late 13th century to the first half of the 14th century. This monastery occupies a significant place in the history of Armenian architecture from the 13th and 14th centuries, celebrated for its construction art, intricate sculptures, and exceptional khachkars. Moreover, it stands out as one of the few locations where two architects, Siranes and Momik, worked.



Fig. 1. Noravank from the west: the first from the north (from the left) - vaulted church St. Gregory, attached to it St. Stepanos domed church, the vestibule on the opposite side. On the left side - separately St. Astvatsatsin Church constructed by Burtel (photo: Hrayr Hawk Khatcherian, 1999)



*Fig. 2. Noravank from the northern side
(photo: Rev. Sahak Martirosyan, 2011)*

The primary source for the history of the monastery's founding is the work "History of the Province of Sisakan" by Syunik Metropolitan Stepanos Orbelian (died 1303), written in Noravank in 1297. The 64th chapter of this work is dedicated to the founding and early history of Noravank, mentioning the previously existing St. Karapet Church and the chapel with a miraculous spring named after Patriarch Pokas and located in the same gorge nearby. In 1105, Bishop Hovhannes of Kapan, the son of Syunik Prince Hasan, settled here. Through his diligent efforts, the monastery's reputation grew, and it was endowed with estates.

Stepanos Orbelian also provides a detailed account of the construction of the monastery's main church, Saint Stepanos Nakhavka (Protomartyr), at the beginning of the 13th century. This initiative was led by Bishop Sargis I, with the support of Prince Elikum Orbelian. According to Orbelian, in 1216, Bishop Sargis laid the foundation of a beautiful church in Noravank named after Stepanos Nakhavka, which featured eight altars inside.



Fig. 3. Smbat Orbelian at the time of hunting, a sculpture on the northern wall of the vestibule (photo: Rev. Sahak Martirosyan, 2011)

This domed church is cross-shaped internally with two-story sacristies in the four corners, containing liturgical tables and small altars, forming the eight altars mentioned by the historian (Fig. 2).

Stepanos Orbelian also documents the construction of the vestibule in front of the Saint Stepanos Church in Noravank that was financed by Prince Smbat Orbelian during the reign of Bishop Sargis II in 1261. On the northern wall of this rectangular building with a central stalactite dome supported by pillars, a sculpture depicting a lion hunt by a trout riding has been preserved (Fig. 3). Several factors, including the decorative elements and the typeface of the lithographs of the time on the vestibule's construction, suggest the fact that its architect was Siranes.

Siranes's name first appears in 1270 at the Arates Monastery of Vayots Dzor, where he constructed a narthex with the assistance of Master Gregorik and under the patronage of the Orbelian princes. In 1275, Siranes built the St. Gregory church-tomb in Noravank, also known as Smbat's tomb. Construction of the shrine was organized by Tarsayich Orbelian, the brother and heir of the late Smbat. This tomb-church, characterized by its pitched roof (vaulted), is unique in Armenian church architecture because burials are generally not conducted within Armenian churches. However, in this instance, the floor is entirely covered with princely tombstones, notably including the lion sculpture tombstone of Elikum Orbelian, who died in battle in 1300 (Fig. 4).

Thus, the main group of monuments in Noravank, arranged from north to south, includes the following structures: St. Gregory's one-nave church-tomb (1275), St. Stepanos Nakhavka



Fig. 4. Tombstone of Elikum Orbelian erected in 1300 in St. Gregory Church (photo: Arsen Harutyunyan, 2018)

main Church (1216-1221) a cross-domed construction with hewn stones, in front of which is located the narthex (1261); and the ancient St. Karapet church built with rough stones of which the lower wall sections have been preserved flanking Saint Stepanos from the south (Fig. 5).

It is noteworthy to mention that the prominence of Noravank is largely attributed to its being a focal point for both secular and spiritual authorities in Syunik. Thanks to the patronage of the Orbelian princes, the monastery was not only adorned with magnificent churches but also endowed with church sanctuaries, sacred crosses (most notably the “Main Holy Sign”), as well as with estates, and various forms of wealth.

At the beginning of the 13th century, the power of the Orbelians in Syunik was bolstered by the sons of Liparit, namely Elikum (who acknowledged the supremacy of the Mongol conquerors and participated in their campaigns), his son Smbat (ruled from 1253 to 1273), and his brother Tarsayich, who died in 1290, also played significant roles. Smbat notably traveled to Karakorum, the capital of the Mongol Empire, to the Mangu Khan, twice in 1251 and 1256, to secure a privileged status for the Syunik government. Tarsayich, equal to his brother in military and diplomatic achievements, further expanded their power. Tarsayich was succeeded by his son Elikum II, who ruled for ten years until 1300, and thereafter, Burtel the Great (1300-1348) had a long and prosperous reign.

These princes left a lasting construction legacy at Noravank, where they and their family members were interred after their deaths. During this period Noravank also served as the seat of the ancient Episcopal See of Syunik. This See, starting with Stepanos Orbelian, the son of Prince Tarsayich, passed to representatives of this dynasty. Noravank becoming an episcopal center was due to the complications of the fall of the Syunik kingdom during the period of Seljuk rule (11th-12th centuries) and the weakening of the episcopal seat of Tatev.



Fig. 5. The churches of Noravank from the southeast, with rough stones in the foreground St. Karapet Church, then St. Stepanos domed church and St. Gregory the one-nave Church (photo: Rev. Sahak Martirosyan, 2016)

The first bishop to preside over Noravank was Stepanos III Faikhr el Mseh, who forged a familial alliance with the Orbelians through the marriage of his niece to Elikum Orbelian. This connection marked the beginning of the Orbelians’ association with Noravank. Bishops Sargis I and Sargis II, who followed Stepanos III, further contributed to the monastery’s prosperity.

The turning point for the Syunik bishopric occurred during the tenure of Stepanos Orbelian. He unified the chairs of Noravank and Tatev under his metropolitan authority. Stepanos studied at the University of Gladzor from 1282 to 1284 and received episcopal ordination from Catholicos Konstantin II Katuketsi (1286-1289) in 1286, establishing himself as the metropolitan of the Syunik See. One of his significant achievements was securing the supreme Mongolian authority’s approval through his father, Tarsayich, which endowed him with dual ecclesiastical and secular power over part of the Syunyats monasteries. This authority was subsequently transferred to his clan members, including his uncle Ivane’s grandson, Hovhannes Orbel (1300-1324), and another relative, Stepanos Tarsayich (1314-1331), who both chaired in Noravank.



Fig. 6. The opening page of the Gospel of Hovhannes, artist Momik, Noravank, 1292 (Matenadaran, ms. 2848, 247r)



Fig. 7. Ascension and Transfiguration, artist Momik, Noravank, 1302 (Matenadaran, ms. 6792, 11v-12r)

Stepanos Orbelian was not only a prominent ecclesiastical figure but also a prolific chronicler, theologian, historian, and poet. During his residence in Noravank, he authored the comprehensive history of Syunik, demonstrating a scholarly approach to history and sources. In addition to his historical works, Stepanos Orbelian was a patron of culture and the arts. It is likely that during his studies at Gladzor University, he became acquainted with the multi-talented artist Momik, whose name is closely associated with Noravank.

Momik, a distinguished painter and miniature artist, succeeded Siranes as an architect in Noravank. Interestingly, in various manuscripts, he is referred to by titles such as “scribe,” “secretary,” “line and picture stamper,” “painter,” and in lithographs as *vardpet* “master” (architect). Momik constructed churches and created sculptural khachkars (cross-stones), and he also wrote and illustrated manuscripts commissioned by the princes, princesses, and metropolitans of the Orbelian dynasty.

Momik’s name first appears in Noravank in 1292, when he illustrated a Gospel (Matenadaran, manuscript 2848) with eulogizing verses dedicated to Stepanos Orbelian (Fig. 6). In 1302, on behalf of Stepanos Orbelian, Momik illustrated another Gospel (Matenadaran, ms. 6792) with high-art miniatures, for which the scribe was Hovhannes Orbel (Fig. 7).

In 1303, Stepanos Orbelian passed away and was buried in the courtyard of Noravank.

Hovhannes Orbel, the metropolitan who succeeded him, commissioned Momik to create a carved khachkar in memory of Stepanos Orbelian in 1304, which was placed in the vestibule of Noravank (now located in St. Etchmiadzin) (Fig. 8).

In 1308, Tamta Khatun, the wife of Prince Orbelian in Elikum, commissioned Momik to create another magnificent khachkar in Noravank, in which he referred to himself as “master,” here meaning as architect (Fig. 9). In 1321, under the instructions of Hovhannes Orbel, Momik constructed and adorned with sculptures the Church of St. Astvatsatsin in Areni, near Noravank.

Hence now let’s consider what was Momik’s architectural contributions to Noravank, his principal place of residence. Two significant works are attributed to him in the professional literature: the reconstruction of the western facade of the vestibule of the St. Stepanos Church in 1261, which includes appropriate sculptures, and the construction of the two-story church-tomb of St. Astvatsatsin.

In the history of Armenian art, the two valuable sculptures on the west facade of the vestibule of St. Stepanos Church in Noravank hold a special place. One of these sculptures, located on the entrance stone, depicts “The Mother of God with the Child.” The second sculpture, situated above it on the arched stone crowning the window, presents the image



Fig. 8. Khachkar made by Momik in 1304 in memory of Stepanos Orbelian (on the left) (photo: Dimitri Yermakov, 1910)



Fig. 9. Khachkar of Momik, 1308, now kept at Holy Etchmiadzin (photo: Hrayr Hawk Khatcherian, 1998)



Fig. 10. Sculptures of the western facade of the Noravank vestibule (photo: Hrayr Hawk Khatcherian, 1998)

of God the Father holding Adam's head, symbolizing the creation of man (Fig. 10).

The "Mary the Virgin with the Child" sculpture at Noravank bears resemblance to the iconography by Momik on the entrance stone of the Areni Church, dated 1321. In this depiction, Mary the Virgin is seated on a fringed carpet with the baby Jesus in her arms, who appears to have turned and moved forward slightly. The sculpture adorning the entrance facade of Noravank's vestibule shares the same theme, supplemented with two additional human figures and other details. Nonetheless, the positions of the Mother of God and the Child are remarkably similar, and the fringed carpet serving as the throne, along with its ornaments, are repeated.

At the center of the sculpture crowning the window above the vestibule entrance is a prominent image of God the Father, a unique feature in Armenian medieval sculpture. God the Father is depicted blessing with his raised right hand while holding Adam's head in his left hand. The Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, touches Adam's lips with its beak. Below the right hand of God the Father is a carving of the Crucifixion with the Mother of God and John (the beloved disciple) on either side of Christ. Both sculptures in the vestibule are accompanied by inscriptions that describe their contents and identify the characters depicted.

Experts suggest that the eastern front of the vestibule was rebuilt in the 1320s, as indicated by certain construction details, and that these sculptures by Momik were added at that time.

On the southern side of the Noravank complex stands a two-story church-mausoleum, crowned with a slender rotunda, constructed by Prince Burtel. This structure is often referred to as the Church of Mary the Virgin. While two-story structures of this type were established in



Fig. 11. Khachkar erected close to the southern wall of St. Astvatsatsin church built by Burtel (photo: Rev. Sahak Martirosyan, 2016)

Armenia earlier (e.g., Goshavank, Yeghvard, Kaptavank), the dimensional and spatial solution of the Church of Mary the Virgin represented a novelty in Armenian architecture. The church is endowed with extraordinary artistic appeal and expressiveness, particularly evident in the magnificent decoration of the western facade. The stairs leading from the ground to the second floor, forming a unique pyramidal frame for the entrance to the first floor (mausoleum), combined with sculpted stones and other decorative details, create a distinctive architectural image.

In determining the year of construction of the church, the khachkar at the northwestern corner of the structure is significant that was dedicated by Burtel in 1318 in memory of his brother



Fig. 12. The sculptures of Mary the Virgin at the entrance and the record on the cornice built in 1339 (photo: by Hrayr Hawk Khatcherian, 1998)

Bughta who was killed in the war. The plinth of the Bughta khachkar is adapted to the lower step-shaped arrangement of the church wall, indicating that it was placed that way from the beginning. On the southern side of the church, another high-art khachkar is similarly positioned, suggesting that they were originally placed next to the wall of the church-tomb (Fig. 11). Based on the erection of the Bughta khachkar in 1318, it can be inferred that the construction of the church commenced at that time. However, its completion was considerably later, in 1339, as recorded by Prince Burtel.

Although the sculptor's name is not mentioned in the inscriptions on the two lateral khachkars of the church, judging by the style, as well as the location and time of preparation, they can be attributed to Momik.

The Church of St. Astvatsatsin, also known as the church-mausoleum, stands out for its rich sculptural decoration. The western facade is magnificently adorned with ornaments and figurative sculptures on the keystones of the entrances to both the first and second floor. On the headstone of the first floor leading to the mausoleum, Mary the Virgin and the Child are depicted on a throne, flanked by the angels Gabriel and Michael in a position of intercession (Fig. 12). On the second floor of the building, above the entrance to the church, there is a sculpture of Christ blessing with his right hand and holding the Gospel



Fig. 13. St. Astvatsatsin church from the west (photo: Tigran Apikyan, 2021)



Fig. 14. The eastern facade of St. Astvatsatsin church (photo: Rev. Sahak Martirosyan, 2016)

in his left (bust), accompanied by the apostles Paul and Peter. The names of these figures are inscribed next to them in all the sculptures.

The western facade of St. Astvatsatsin Church and the western facade of the vestibule of St. Stepanos Church in Noravank are designed according to the same principles. The upper parts of the entrances and windows feature similar sculptural decoration, creating a unified facade for the architectural ensemble. This coherence once again confirms that they were crafted by the same architect, Momik (see Fig. 1). Notably, in constructing the Church of St. Astvatsatsin, the architect did not merely adapt to the existing landscape; he created the necessary environment for the construction. To achieve this, an artificial fill of soil was made around the perimeter of the church, especially on the southern and western sides, resulting in a substantial platform on which the church was founded, with a large square in front of it (Fig. 13).

In Noravank, there was a sculpture group of the patrons on the columns of the front side of the rotunda, which was significantly damaged by the collapse of the dome. The interior of the mausoleum on the first floor of the church also features sculptural decoration, with symbols of the four evangelists carved on the ceiling.

Without delving into other details of the sculptural decoration of St. Astvatsatsin church,



Fig. 15. The “Clawed Eagle” sculpture on the eastern facade of the church (photo: Rev. Sahak Martirosyan, 2016)

it is important to note that it is entirely in harmony with the purpose of the mausoleum, serving the idea of saving the souls of those buried there. In this context, the monumental decoration of the eastern facade of the church-mausoleum should be considered, which is a large composition of three successive crosses arranged vertically culminating in an eagle sculpture (“clawed eagle”) above, (Fig. 14).

In the decoration of the eastern facade of the Noravank church-mausoleum, the salvific significance of the eagle sculpture is depicted with remarkable clarity. This is exemplified by details such as the eagle’s position, with its eyes directed upwards the sky, guiding its “prey”—presumably the redeemed soul of the deceased—towards the heavenly kingdom (Fig. 15).

Noravank possesses an extensive architectural and sculptural heritage and was also a significant center of literary culture. The walls of the monastery’s churches and other structures, along with numerous khachkars, feature many inscriptions, some calligraphic or combined with various ornaments. This tradition, originating from Siranes, continued and developed during Momik’s time. The academic edition of Noravank’s inscriptions was compiled by Sedrak Barkhudaryan, presenting 136 inscriptions. This collection was

later expanded by Suren Saghunyan and Michael Stone. The latest edition of Noravank inscriptions includes 233 inscriptions (Karen Matevosyan, 2017).

Manuscripts were also produced at Noravank. Besides the Gospels of 1292 and 1302 mentioned earlier, Momik began copying a Gospel in 1307 at the behest of Metropolitan Hovhannes-Orbel, though he left it unfinished due to loss of sight (USA, Yale University Library, Arm. 3). His sight was later restored, as he recounted in a memoir added to the manuscript in 1331. Another manuscript (Mashtots-ritual book) was copied in Noravank in 1451 (Matenadaran, ms. 6950). References also exist regarding the maintenance of other registers and church artifacts at Noravank. The colophons of manuscripts related to Noravank extend to the last quarter of the 15th century, with the latest inscription dating to 1701.

The monastery complex of Noravank reached the 20th century with its main structures in a semi-ruined state. Significant restoration works were carried out during the Soviet years, particularly on the churches of St. Stepanos and St. Gregory. The restoration efforts culminated in the restoration of the St. Astvatsatsin Church constructed by Burtel between 1996 and 1998, under the direction of restoration architect Hrachya Gasparyan.

Today, Noravank is one of the most well-preserved monastic complexes in the Republic of Armenia in terms of church restoration. It is a popular destination and has a vow day celebrated on the second Sunday after Easter.

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THE EARLY CHRISTIAN AND MEDIEVAL SITE OF YERERUYK

Patrick Donabédian

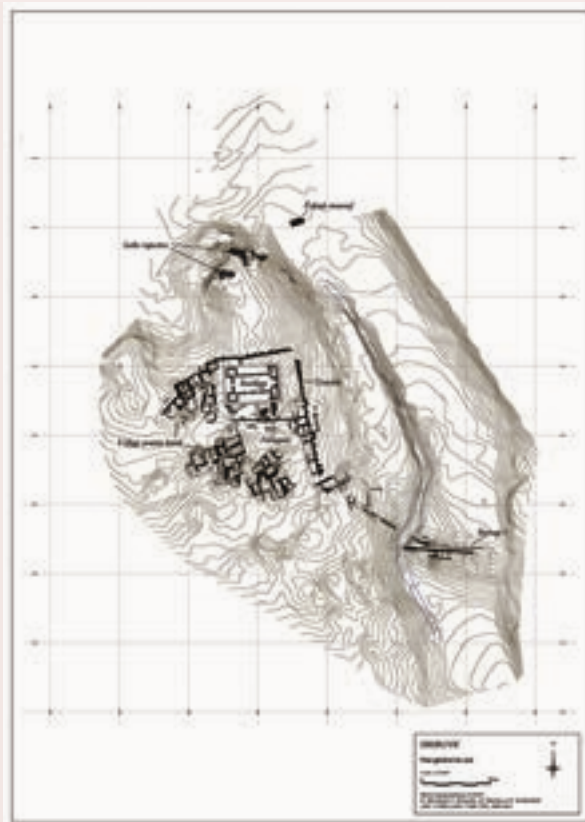


Fig. 1. Yereruyk. General plan of the site (drawings by G. Marchand, L. Schneider, D. Martinez, F. Krähenbühl, LA3M, 2009-2013), (photo: Patrick Donabédian).

A large complex located in the heart of historical Armenia

The early Christian and medieval site of Yereruyk is located at the northwestern edge of the Republic of Armenia, in the Shirak province, approximately 45 km southwest of the regional capital, Gyumri. Its geographical coordinates are 40°26'24"N latitude and 43°36'33"E longitude. The site covers an area of around four hectares and includes the remains of several structures: an early Christian basilica, a small vaulted building possibly serving as a mausoleum, the remnants of a potential rampart or enclosure, two underground halls, and the ruins of a village, which, although appearing modern, likely have late-antique and medieval origins. To the southeast, there are also the remnants of a series of parallel walls, which at one time may have formed a dam (Fig. 1). In addition to these building remains, numerous fragments of sculpted stones are collected to the north of the church.

Although the ensemble is situated in the heart of historical Armenia, historical sources provide little



Fig. 2. Yereruyk, basilica. General view from the southwest (LA3M, 2012), (photo: Patrick Donabédian).

information regarding the dates and circumstances of its construction. Until the end of the 8th century, the Shirak province was under the control of the Kamsarakan princes, one of the prominent dynasties in Armenia at the time. It is likely that these princes were responsible for building Yereruyk, as well as the nearby Church of St. Sergius of Tekor (now destroyed, located in the eastern part of present-day Turkey), which was erected in the 480s. By the end of the 8th century, around 783, the province came under the control of the Bagratids, the future royal dynasty.

The second biggest basilica in early Christian Armenia

Built from ochre volcanic tuff, the church at Yereruyk, despite its ruined condition, remains one of the most impressive examples of Armenian sacred architecture from its likely period of construction: the 4th to 6th centuries (Fig. 2). It is designed according to the basilical plan, characterized by its elongated form with three naves and an apse covered by a conch at the eastern end of the central nave, lacking a dome. Approximately ten such basilicas are known from early Christian Armenia (see Fig. 3).

Among these, the Yereruyk basilica was the second largest, after the Cathedral of Dvin, which was 53 meters long. The Yereruyk basilica measures over 40 meters in length and

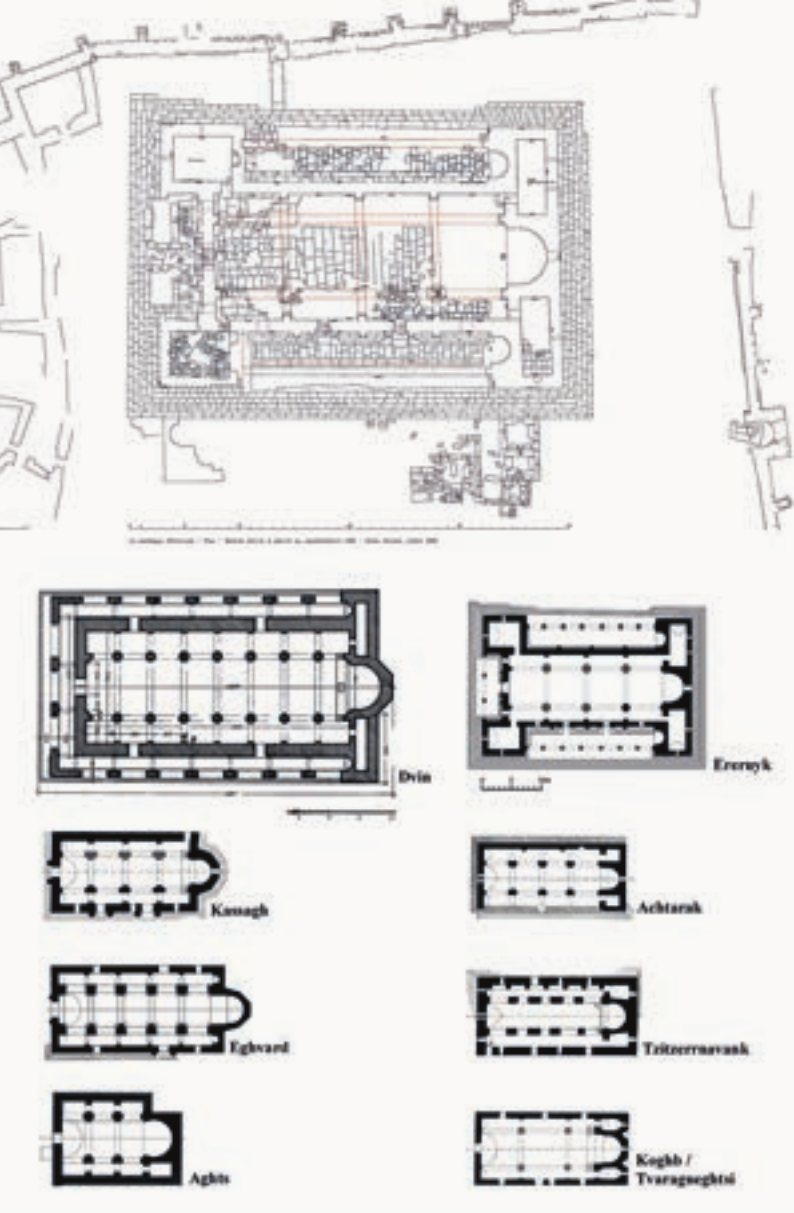


Fig. 3. Yereruyk, basilica. Plan of its current state (Heike Hansen, LA3M, 2016). Plans of three-nave basilicas of early Christian Armenia (K. Ghafadaryan, P. Cuneo), including Yereruyk (schematic plan by Fabien Krähenbühl, LA3M, 2013), (photo: Patrick Donabédian).

nearly 30 meters in width at the level of the surrounding steps. Initially, it likely featured a two-slope roof over the central nave and two pent-roofs over the lateral naves (north and south) and the lateral galleries (Fig. 4).

The construction has retained a significant portion of its perimeter walls, which exhibit a clear homogeneity of design despite evident signs of repairs and variations in the color and treatment of the stones. This overall uniformity suggests that the building was constructed during a single major campaign, followed by several restorations and partial modification. The core technical, compositional, and decorative features of the basilica align it with Armenian and Syrian structures from the late 5th and 6th centuries, leading to the hypothesis that the initial major construction phase likely occurred in the 6th century. Regardless, it must be dated before the end of the 6th century, as this period marks a significant shift in Armenian architecture towards the use of domes on cruciform or radiant layouts and a new, distinct decorative style not present in Yereruyk.

An inscription carved inside the church, likely from a 10th-century restoration, indicates that the church was dedicated to two saints highly venerated in Armenia: John the Baptist and Stephen the Protomartyr. This notable dual dedication was probably associated with the church's memorial function, and possibly the

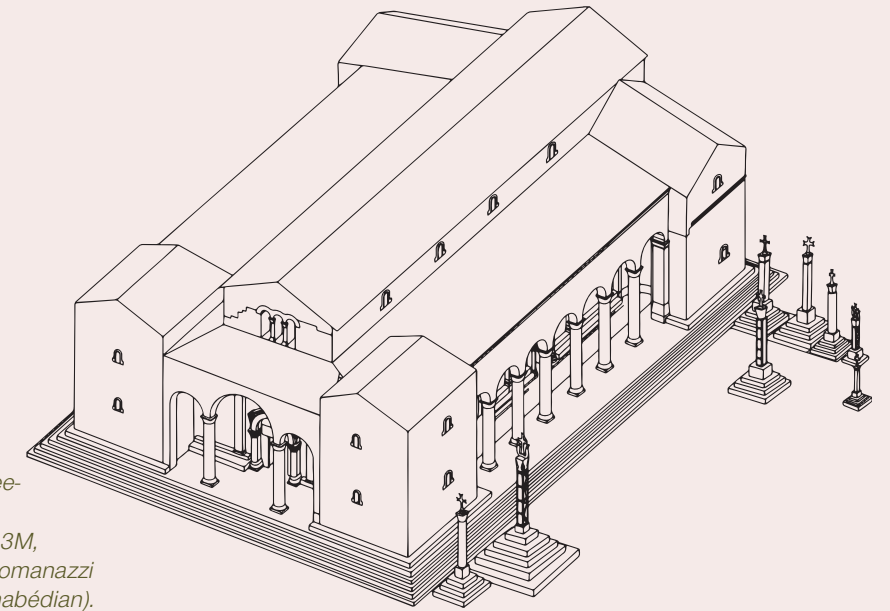


Fig. 4. Yereruyk, basilica. Attempt of three-dimensional restitution. Designed by P. Donabédian, executed by D. Ollivier (LA3M, 2013), based on an axonometry by H. Romanazzi (Politecnico di Bari), (photo: Patrick Donabédian).

presence of relics of these saints. The church features a crepidoma, or stepped platform, with five or six steps surrounding the building. Such platforms are typical of significant memorial churches, such as the Cathedral of Etchmiadzin (in its late 5th-century state), St. Sergius of Tekor (late 5th century), and Zvartnots Cathedral (mid-7th century). It should be noted, however, that recent excavations at Yereruyk have revealed that the stepped bands surrounding the basilica are merely an imitation of a crepidoma. In reality, the church is situated directly on a naturally elevated part of the rock, without any constructed platform beneath it, and with light, flexible paraseismic foundations. The purpose of these stepped bands was to create the illusion of a high crepidoma, thereby enhancing the perceived memorial significance of the sanctuary.

A narrow relationship with early Christian Syria

The Yereruyk basilica is notable for several features that reveal a strong connection with early Christian Syria. Two such features, likely borrowed from Syrian architecture, are particularly exceptional in the Armenian context: a) the north, west, and south façades were initially bordered by galleries, widely open to the outside with a row of slender columns supporting an arcade; b) the west façade of the basilica was framed by two angular, two-story chambers in the form of towers.



Fig. 5. Yereruyk, basilica. East end of south façade. Greek inscription (Psalm 92/93:5) (LA3M, 2013), (photo: Patrick Donabédian).

These elements were unusual in Armenia. In particular, the colonnade-arcade, which was less suited to the region's seismic conditions, likely collapsed early on, leaving only fragments of the columns.

Like several early Christian Armenian churches, the basilica of Yereruyk included sacristies, known as pastophoria during that period, on either side of its apse. These sacristies were not oblong but barlong (laterally stretched), a form also found in Syria and Asia Minor. They had a notable originality. Each sacristy had two levels, with superimposed vaults; the upper vault was unusually inclined, lower towards the exterior and higher towards the nave. This unique feature is particularly significant for the history of Armenian and early Christian architecture and is largely preserved in the northeastern pastophorion. The roof of this chamber, likely a two-pent structure covered with tiles, would have mirrored the same incline.

Another connection between the Yereruyk basilica and Syrian architecture is evident in its sculpted decor. This includes the horizontal strips along the south and east façades and the moldings that frame the windows, extending vertically before folding into small horizontal wings. (On the southern façade, one must imagine the windows without their later walled portions.)

Additionally, the Syrian-Armenian relationship is apparent in the Greek inscription carved on the eastern extremity of the southern façade (Fig. 5). This inscription closely resembles an epitaph from the Deir Sem'an church, a Syrian monument from the late



Fig. 6. Yereruyk, basilica. Portals: a) west façade, b) west part of south façade, c) east part of south façade (LA3M, 2013), (photos: Patrick Donabédian).

5th century, both in content and in the form of its frame. Greek texts are extremely rare in Armenian epigraphy, and the inscription's text, Psalm 92/93:5 ("Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever"), was traditionally read during the consecration of churches throughout the Christian East in the early centuries. These factors suggest that Syrian craftsmen involved in the basilica's construction may have inscribed this text as part of its consecration ritual.

A relatively abundant sculpted decoration

In addition to the bands on the façades and window frames, which feature rows of denticles, and various other ornamental elements such as the bases and capitals of engaged pillars, the portals play a significant role in the sculpted decoration of the basilica (Fig. 6). Their overall structure, characterized by a gable supported by two half-columns, is



Fig. 7. Yereruyk, general plan of the central part of the site (drawn up by G. Marchand and L. Schneider, LA3M, 2010), (photo: Patrick Donabédian).

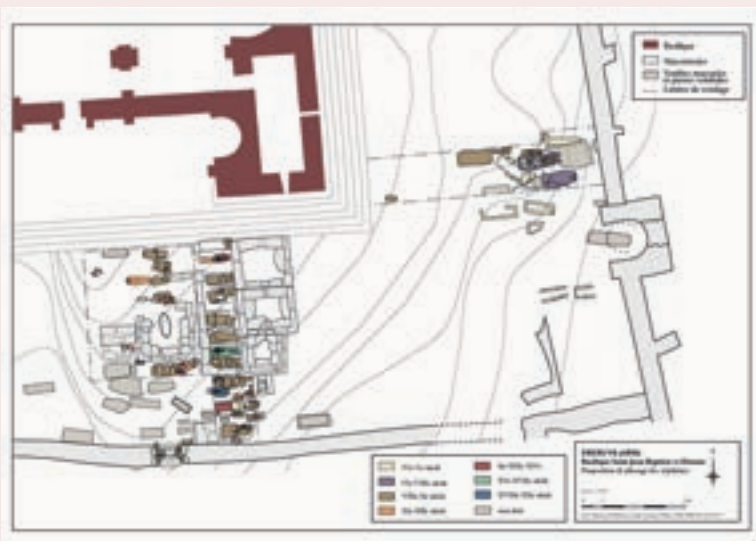


Fig. 8. Yereruyk, funerary zone south-east of the basilica. Plan (drawn up by G. Marchand, D. Martinez, F. Krähenbühl, S. Dorso, LA3M, 2011-2013). Attempt of burials phasing by D. Martinez (LA3M, 2015), (photo: Patrick Donabédian).

inspired by classical Roman models. However, it diverges from these models primarily due to the prominent role of the arch that surmounts the door. The concentric horseshoe-shaped bands of the arch create such a dynamic force that it appears to “push” upward against the gable, which would typically cover the portal directly, thus positioning the arch prominently in the composition.

The primary spiritual and symbolic message of the portals is conveyed through the decoration of the lintels above the doors. The central motif on these lintels is the cross pattée, characterized by arms that widen at the ends, placed within a medallion. This symbol serves as a principal protection for the entrance to the sacred space. Following the early Christian Armenian tradition, the cross in the medallion is part of a tripartite composition. It is flanked by lateral elements, typically two medallions each containing a rosette or daisy, and/or quadrupeds that symbolize the deer yearning for water, reflecting the soul’s longing for God (Psalm 41/42:2). In Yereruyk, the deer is replaced by a local big-horned mouflon or ibex (or possibly a ram, in reference to Abraham’s sacrifice) and one or two trees—palm trees (symbolizing Jerusalem) or olive trees—are superficially engraved on the stone. Additionally, the stylized spiny acanthus leaves carved on the engaged capitals supporting the upper part of the portals are indicative of the adaptations made to classical Roman heritage in early Christian Armenia.

Memories of life and death near the basilica of Yereruyk

The ruins of buildings with irregular plans, including rooms with chimneys and holes for cattle ties, indicate the presence of a village to the west and south of the basilica (Fig. 7). These structures are largely from the 19th century and were still inhabited at the beginning of the 20th century, when the Russian-Georgian scholar Nicolas Marr visited the site. However, several clues—such as medieval ceramic tesserae, a house with a covered courtyard and a room featuring wall seats reminiscent of medieval houses in Ani, and epigraphic evidence referring to the “town-village” of Yereruyk—confirm the medieval, and likely late-antique, origins of this settlement.

Excavations carried out by the Armenian-French archaeological mission from Aix-Marseille University (2009-2016) in the memorial-funerary area southeast of the basilica confirmed this. The excavations uncovered a part of a cemetery containing 72 tombs, and 27 samples of human bones were dated through radiocarbon analysis. The cemetery was in use from the early Christian period—likely before the construction of the basilica—through to almost the present day (Fig. 8).

A significant part of the tombs, dating from the 8th century onwards, appear to have been situated “in front of” (to the west of) a group of commemorative(?) monuments erected near the eastern end of the basilica, on its southern side. These monuments are likely from the 6th to 8th centuries. Currently, only the square stepped pedestals remain. There are six pedestals at the southeastern end, with traces of two additional pedestals at the southwestern end of the same area. Each pedestal would have originally supported a cubic base with a four-sided stela (or, less likely, a column) crowned by a capital and a cross (Fig. 4). Preserved bases and stela fragments are now gathered on the rock platform to the north of the basilica. Vertical cruciferous monuments are well-documented in Armenia and Georgia during the pre-Arab period, particularly in the 6th and 7th centuries. However, no other early Christian site in the region features such a concentration of these monuments near a single shrine, highlighting the exceptional significance of the Yereruyk basilica.

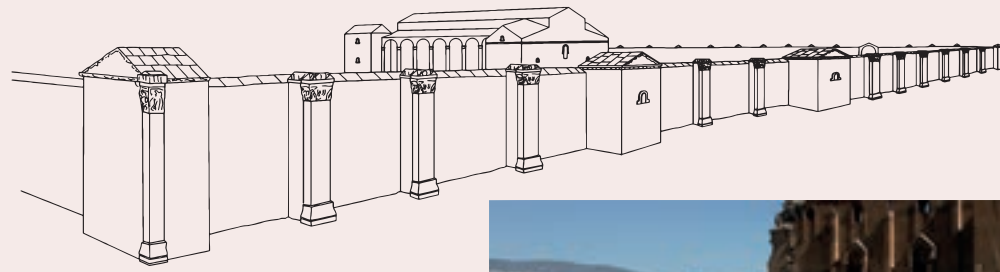


Fig. 9. Yereruyk, eastern "rampart". Schematic restitution (designed by A. Hartmann-Virnich, executed by D. Ollivier, LA3M, 2014, 2018). General view from south-east (LA3M, 2014), (photo: Patrick Donabédian).



While studying the cemetery, archaeologists encountered an unexpected shift in its usage. Until the 10th century, the cemetery served a diverse population, likely composed of parishioners. However, from the 11th century onward, it became predominantly the resting place for very young infants. One hypothesis proposed to explain this phenomenon is that the restoration of the church's original dedication to Saints John the Baptist and Stephen the Protomartyr—indicated by a 10th-century inscription—and the potential installation of relics of these saints in the basilica, might have led to a special dispensation allowing the burial of unbaptized infants.

The ruins of an incomplete “rampart” around the basilica

Walls were constructed to the north, east, and south of the ecclesiastical zone, though only portions of the first course(s) have been preserved (Fig. 7). These walls likely formed a type of “false rampart”, as current evidence suggests there was no corresponding wall to the west—unless it has been entirely disrupted by later additions such as stables and houses. Furthermore, the relatively thin construction of the walls does not support the idea of a genuine defensive structure. The presence of projecting buttresses and two inward-opening exedras on the eastern “enclosure” further suggests that this “false



Fig. 10. Yereruyk, vaulted building (« mausoleum ») northeast of the basilica. Internal view towards east. External view from north-west (LA3M, 2012, 2015), (photos: Patrick Donabédian).

rampart” served a symbolic purpose. It likely functioned to delineate the sacred space of the ecclesiastical complex and emphasize its significance, particularly when viewed from the east, where one of the main entrances to the complex was probably located (Fig. 7, 9).

The southern wall separated the cemetery from the residential area to the south. Although it is now highly eroded and irregular, it turned out to be one of the oldest elements of this zone. Excavations of tombs and stratigraphic analysis date the oldest part of this wall to the 3rd-5th centuries, clearly predating the construction of the basilica. A threshold was discovered in front of the fifth pedestal south of the basilica (Fig. 8), providing a passage from the cemetery to the residential area further to the south.

The northern and eastern walls are considerably more regular, especially the long eastern wall. The southern end of this wall may have been connected to the upper part of the “dam” (see below). The technical features of these walls and some decorative elements on their buttresses show a clear affinity with the basilica. However, the slight difference in orientation compared to the basilica—despite the lack of topographical or physical justification—suggests that these walls may have been constructed before the church. This provides additional evidence that the site was occupied prior to the basilica's construction.



Fig. 11. Yereruyk, « dam ». North side of the northernmost wall (and a portion of the intermediate wall). Views from the northwest and northeast (LA3M, 2015), (photos: Patrick Donabédian).

The vaulted building northeast of the basilica: a mausoleum?

A rectangular building, carefully vaulted and oriented but lacking an apse, is partially buried in a small valley to the northeast of the basilica. It is relatively well preserved, though its vault is severely damaged and its roof covering has been removed (see Fig. 10). It was initially interpreted as a cistern, but this hypothesis is challenged by the absence of water-repellent plaster inside the structure. Additionally, its orientation and the rectangular shape of its eastern part suggest it may have been a mausoleum. These characteristics are consistent with those found in many Armenian mausoleums.

Dating this building is challenging. Some of its technical and metrological characteristics suggest a chronological proximity to the basilica. However, the steep incline of the two-pent roof (clearly visible despite the missing covering) and the vertical arrangement of the cladding blocks on the upper parts of the west and east façades suggest a medieval date. This leads to the hypothesis that the building underwent two main phases: an early Christian phase followed by a medieval phase.

A group of parallel walls further southeast: dam or viaduct?

The remains of a large complex featuring three parallel walls are prominently visible about 150-200 meters southeast of the ecclesiastical area, across the small valley

(Fig. 11). These walls likely once spanned the valley, and 19th-century accounts suggest that they functioned as a dam, according to a testimony collected by Nicolas Marr during his 1907 mission. However, the presence of rows of steps and buttresses on the northern face (facing upstream) of some of the walls is intriguing and indicates that the dam may have served additional purposes. This substantial structure might also have functioned as a viaduct, particularly in a relatively late period, connecting to the eastern “rampart” of the ecclesiastical complex and potentially aligning with the remains of a road barely visible at the southeastern end of the site.

Surveys conducted by the Armenian-French archaeological mission indicate that the construction likely began in the antique or late antique period from the south, with the intention of creating a water retention dam. This conclusion is supported by the discovery of antique ceramic shards at the northern base (upstream) of the first southern wall. The subsequent presence of a second wall further north, built with superior construction techniques and metrology that resemble those of the basilica, suggests a construction date approaching the 6th century. Additionally, an early 13th-century inscription from Ani, the largest town in the region, emphasizes the value and fertility of the land at Yereruyk, implying that it was made possible by the existence of a water retention dam.

The successive addition of two parallel walls to the north of the original wall, along with the infilling between them, created a substantial wall mass approximately ten meters wide. This construction, combined with the dam’s function, leads to the hypothesis that the structure served as an imposing viaduct crossing the stream and directing towards the basilica. Notably, the two northern walls, with their meticulously finished and detailed northern faces, likely also served an aesthetic purpose during dry periods (which constituted the majority of the year), enhancing the visual perspective towards the basilica. This hypothesis is supported by the angle at which the third wall intersects the small stream, likely following a repair: it turns sharply to the northwest, aligning with the southeastern end of the eastern “rampart.”



Fig. 12. Yereruyk, fragment of a four-sided stela (c. 7th century), part of a vertical cross-topped monument (46 x 42,5 x 127 cm): a) « left » side; b) « front » (main ?) side; c) « right » side; d) « back » side (LA3M, 2009), (photos: Patrick Donabédian).

The dating of this set of walls remains uncertain. As mentioned earlier, a late antique origin is a plausible hypothesis for the first southern wall. The intermediate wall may be attributed to the early Christian period. Lastly, the third phase of construction, which includes the addition of the third wall, along with its subsequent repair and reorientation towards the ecclesiastical complex, is likely to date to the Middle Ages.

Two underground rooms

Beneath the rock platform north of the basilica are two underground spaces, which extend roughly from west to east and run parallel to each other. These spaces appear to be either rock-cut rooms or, more likely, slightly modified natural caverns. Due to their orientation, they have been tentatively identified as early Christian chapels. However, there is no definitive evidence to confirm this interpretation.



Fig. 13. Yereruyk, medieval tombstones, and three cubic bases of four-sided stelae (LA3M, 2015), (photo: Patrick Donabédian).

Fragments of sculpted stones

More than two hundred sculpted or molded stone fragments are present on the site, primarily collected on the rock platform north of the basilica. Many of these fragments belong to the basilica, including pieces of columns, bases and capitals from its galleries. Others are from smaller elements related to the memorial sphere, such as stelae. One notable fragment is a stela with four sides covered in eroded images of saints and angels (Fig. 12). Additionally, there are dozens of tombstones typical of medieval Armenia, characterized by a “gable roof” shape set on a parallelepiped base (Fig. 13). These tombstones marked burials that were a few dozen centimeters below the ground surface. The size of each stone roughly matched the size of the tomb and the age of the deceased. Flatter stones, resembling sarcophagus lids, appear to be the oldest, while those from the later Middle Ages are higher with a steeper inclination of the “gable roof.”

A site rich in mystery and tantalizing prospects

Building on 20th-century Armenological studies, knowledge of the enigmatic site of Yereruyk has significantly advanced in recent years, notably through the work of the Armenian-French archaeological mission. Despite these advancements, several questions remain unresolved. We now have a clearer understanding of the basilica's history, including its development stages and its connections with Syria. More or less reliable data provide plausible dates for this significant sanctuary and, by extension, for the relative dating of various components of the complex, some directly related to the basilica and others distinct from it. Additionally, the archaeological research conducted in the cemetery has yielded valuable insights into funerary practices in medieval Armenia.

However, many aspects still need clarification particularly regarding the functions and dating of several elements within this extensive complex and its history over the centuries. For example, the stratum predating the basilica's construction remains largely speculative and requires further investigation. Additionally, the scale of the Yereruyk complex raises questions about its overall nature and the functions of such a large assemblage of remains. While one might naturally consider a monastic ensemble similar to those in early Christian Syria, given the connection to Syrian monuments, the architectural characteristics of Yereruyk's various components do not strongly support a monastic hypothesis. Moreover, there are no known archaeological or architectural traces of cenobitic monasticism in Armenia before the 9th-10th centuries. Nevertheless, the basilica's size, its dual dedication to highly venerated saints whose relics were likely housed on site, and the presence of a Greek inscription akin to those found in Syria are all distinctive features that merit further exploration.

This supports the hypothesis of Yereruyk being a significant pilgrimage site, frequented by local devotees and potentially by Syrians as well.

The Armenian authorities' decision to undertake extensive consolidation and partial restoration of the Yereruyk basilica and site in 2024 is highly promising. This initiative is expected to stimulate further scientific research and positively impact the preservation

and valorization of the extensive lapidary collection on site, as well as the 20th-century architectural heritage of the nearby Anipemza village. Additionally, the potential inclusion of Yereruyk on UNESCO's World Heritage List, following Ani's inclusion in 2016, could facilitate the development of a cross-border network dedicated to the rediscovery and study of the region's medieval and modern heritage.

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THE MONASTERY OF TATEV AND THE HOMONYMOUS HERMITAGES

Arsen Harutyunyan

The monastery of Tatev is one of the famous spiritual and cultural centers of medieval Armenia, which is located in the south of Armenia, in the province of Syunik, not far from homonymous village (Fig. 1). According to tradition, the monastery is said to have derived its name from the name of Saint Eustace (Eustathius - in origin Greek: *Ευσταθιος* - stable, balanced), a disciple of the Apostle Thaddeus, who is said to have preached Christianity in Syunik during the period spanning the 60s through the 80s of the 1st century A.D. and was martyred by infidel. To this day, a dilapidated memorial sanctuary stands outside the ramparts of the monastery on its northeastern side, popularly attributed to Saint Eustace and bears a striking resemblance to the early medieval monuments at Odzun and Aghitu (Figs. 2, 3).

According to historiographer Stepanos Orbelyan, from the end of the 9th century onward, the monastic complex of Tatev was considerably expanded and came to gradually incorporate new structures. The construction of the main church began on the site of the early medieval church on the initiative of Bishop Hovhannes, Primate of Syunik, through substantial donations from the eminent princes of the province which herald the



*Fig. 1, The Monastery of Tatev from the southwest
(photo: Hrayr Hawk Khatcherian, 2024)*



Fig. 2, The partially dilapidated memorial sanctuary from the southwest (photo: A. Harutyunyan, 2021)



Fig. 3, The restoration of memorial sanctuary (authors: A. Badishyan and S. Ayvazyan)



Fig. 4, Relief portrait of ktitors with dragon-snake cornices of eastern niches of the church of the Holy Apostles (photo: A. Harutyunyan, 2021)



Fig. 5, The relief portrait of Yeghia/Yeghisha vardpet (architect), beginning of the 10th century (photo: A. Harutyunyan, 2021)

commencement of the construction of the main temple of the monastery in 895 A.D.: the eldest crown Prince Ashot, the son of Pilippe and his spouse Princess Shushan, Grigor Supan of Gegharkunik and Dzagik from Baghk. The construction of this cathedral church held pan-Armenian significance, as evidenced by fact that those present at its dedication service included King Smbat I Bagratuni, Prince Gagik Artsruni (later King Gagik I of Vaspurakan), Catholicos Hovhannes V Draskhanakertsi, Catholicos of Aghvank Simeon II as well as other dignitaries.

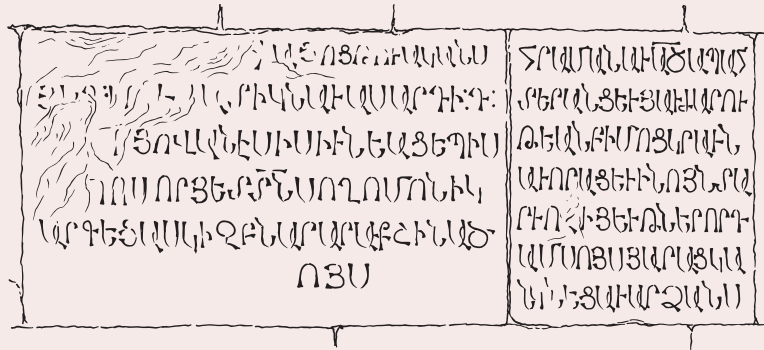
The architectural design of the church of the Holy Apostles of Tatev is based on a rectangular floor plan; the church itself is a domed hall with depository-altars at the four corners, (with tiled concealments on the upper level) and with one pair of pylons. The two eastern niches of church of the Holy Apostles and each of the northern, southern and western windows have cornices, which are adorned with dragon-snakes (with the exception of the southern window), and sculptured human-faced images: these are customarily considered representations of the ktitors (maecenas) and are assumed to relate to the aristocratic patrons of the edifice (Fig. 4). A notable instance of the latter is the obelisk, adorned with a relief portrait, on top of which rests an arched cornice displaying an inscription. This monument forms the beginning of the trompe of the conical squinch of the wall-niche. This obelisk is currently on display at the museum of the monastery of Tatev. It had previously been one of the ornamental elements of the eastern wall of the

church of the Holy Apostles. It is difficult to ascertain the time and circumstances of its exclusion from the renovation scheme of the church. The epigraph mentions the names of one master (vardpet) Yeghia (or Yeghishe/Yeghisha), i.e., the architect, the master stone mason, together with a relief portrait (Fig. 5). At Tatev, such an honorific has been applied to a single Yeghia in the early 10th century, who must have been, if not the architect of the church, at least the master sculptor.

It is renowned for its large-scale murals created at the request of Bishop Hakob Dvinetsi in 930 A.D. Unfortunately, the murals have been only partially preserved, but some of them were described by Stepanos Orbelyan. In addition to depictions of the apostles, prophets and the Birth of Christ, they also included the scene of the Last Judgement.

The Construction Stages according to Epigraphs

After the construction of the main church, the monastery was expanded to include other buildings, namely a refectory, scriptoria, storage facilities, concealments, monks' cells, etc., and was surrounded by highwalls. As documentation of his claim, Stepanos Orbelyan cites the epigraph of the construction of the church, which is currently partially erased. According to the epigraph, which is preserved on the western wall of the church, the founding of the church of the Holy Apostles at Tatev occurred in the year “ՅԽԴ” (344)



Figs. 6a, b, The building epigraphs of the church of the Holy Apostles and of the erection of the staff-column, 895 A.D. (photo and drawing: A. Harutyunyan, 2023)



Fig. 7, The swaying staff-column (photo: H. Khatcherian, 2024)

of the Armenian era, i.e., in 895 A.D., during the tenure of Bishop Hovhannes (Figs. 6a, b). The adjacent inscription has survived in considerably better condition and refers to the erection of the staff-column described by Stepanos Orbelyan. The “statue” referred to in the epigraph is the swaying staff-column, which was erected during the same year, 895 A.D., on the initiative of the resident monks (see Figs. 6a, b). It is an exemplar resembling the memorial column monuments erected later, during the 9th-10th centuries (the column of Vorotnavank as well), which were equipped with a swaying capacity in order to safeguard them from seismic activity, thus making it possible for the monument to survive for centuries (Fig. 7).

The inscription of the magnificent khachkar (cross-stone) dedicated to the memory of Bishop Hovhannes is also notable as testimonial to the construction of the church of the Holy Apostles. The khachkar is richly decorated, as is characteristic of the early stage of

khachkar art at Tatev, i.e., of the 9th-10th centuries. The most typical preserved exemplars of the type with the main cross located at the center of Garden of Eden among vines or date-fruit motifs are from the monastery of Tatev and have been dated at least to the 10th century (Figs. 8a, b).

One of the earliest narthexes in medieval Armenian architecture is the one constructed at Tatev, adjoining the western wall of the church of the Holy Apostles. It has also been called a “house of prayer”. It is a vaulted hall with double pitched roof, constructed immediately after the completion of the church of the Holy Apostles, i.e., at the beginning of the 10th century. Written sources and archival photographs testify that it was still standing at the beginning of the 1890’s, where after it was torn down and replaced by a three-story belfry with four columns, which, in turn, was subsequently destroyed by the earthquake of 1931.

After some time, the second narthex of the church of the Holy Apostles was built adjoining its southern wall. It had a rectangular floor plan, with arched entrances on its southern side. Fortunately, the epigraph recording the fact of its construction has survived. The building epigraph reports that another Bishop Hovhannes, with the support of Smbat II, the potentate of Syunik, constructed the arched narthex-hall of the church of the Holy Apostles. The next epigraphic reference is to the renovation of the narthex-hall, which took place in 1605 A.D.

In 1087 A.D., in the northeastern corner of the complex, the small domed church of the Holy Mother of God was built atop the old entrance adjoining the outer rampart and the vaulted sepulcher parallel to it (Fig. 9). Typically, churches constructed atop entrances are common in monastic architecture of Russian Orthodox confession. The analogue



Figs. 8a, b, The khachkar bearing the name of Bishop Hovhannes, beginning of the 10th century (photo and drawing: A. Harutyunyan, 2022)



Fig. 9, The Church of the Holy Mother of God above the gate, 1087 A.D. (photo: A. Harutyunyan, 2024)



Fig. 10, The church of St Gregory the Illuminator from the southwest, 1295 A.D. (photo: A. Harutyunyan, 2015)

in Armenia can be found in the design of the rampart-church-belfry of the church of the Holy Mother of God in Karbi village (the province of Aragatsotn RA).

During the second half of the 13th century the church of the Holy Apostles was renovated anew by the initiative of Bishop Hayrapet of Syunik. Gandzak earthquake of 1139 A.D. since, as mentioned above, renovation work had been carried out during the 1180s A.D., so that any construction activities undertaken in the 13th century would have been caused by other earthquakes around Gandzak, such as the ones which occurred in 1232 and 1235 A.D.

In the late 13th century, the monastery flourished during the tenure of Stepanos Orbelyan, whose initiative resulted in the construction, from the foundations up, of the church of

St Gregory the Illuminator, a single-nave, vaulted structure (Fig. 10). It was reconstructed through the efforts of Stepanos Orbelyan, in all likelihood by the architect Momik, as attested by the two cross-shaped windows at the center of the eastern altar, which are similar to the windows of another church built by Momik, the church of the Holy Mother of God at Areni. Stepanos Orbelyan's name has also been linked to the construction of the belfry which once existed at Tatev, and which had a pair of copper bells dated 1302 and 1304 A.D. and bore inscriptions which mention the historian.

According to one of the additions to the earliest extant manuscript of the history of Orbelyan (M6271), construction activity was also conducted during the 18th century, specifically in 1719 A.D., when the Church of the Holy Apostles was renovated yet again. According to one of the epigraphs of that church, it had also been renovated in 1705 A.D., on the initiative of Ter Mikael. In all likelihood, the dome of the church was repaired during the timeframe mentioned, since the style of the interlaced sculptured crosses of the cylindrical drum is clearly typical of the compositions of the 17th and 18th centuries, as known from the monastery of Yerits Mankants at Artsakh, the monastery of St Stepanos at Darashamb (Maghardavank) and other monuments of the same period.

A notable example of the construction activities carried out during the 18th century is the construction of the chapel-sepulcher by the abbot, Archbishop Hovakim Syunetsi, atop the tomb of St Grigor Tatevatsi, with material support from a group of residents of the village of Brnakot in 1787 A.D.

The Donations

About a dozen donative inscriptions have survived at the monastery of Tatev, mostly dating to the 13th and 14th centuries. Two of these epigraphs, which are quite damaged, are kept within the church of the Holy Apostles, on the northern and western sides of the southern pylon. One of them was copied by Stepanos Orbelyan and reproduced in the 66th chapter of his Book history, making access to it possible for future researchers. A comparison of this text with the legible portions of the epigraphs themselves reveals that the historian presented an expanded version of the original epigraph, whose text seems to have been more concise. The first distorted section of the epigraph, to which the anathema is attached, refers to the fact that Prince of Princes Tarsayitch Orbelyan had made substantial donations



Figs. 11a, b, The obelisk bearing the name of St Pandalion, beginning of the 10th century (photo: A. Harutyunyan, 2017)

to the monastic congregation of the church of the Holy Apostles at the monastery of Tatev. These included wholesale villages: Shnher (Shinuhayr), Khot, Tsur, Harzhis, Borti and Ketivan and their environs, field, and hills. In return, the Primate Bishops Hayrapet and Soghomon decreed that the liturgy be celebrated forty times; twenty times in memory of Tarsayitch and twenty times in memory of his brother Smbat.

Another donation certificate has been preserved in better condition, although scholars have considered it to be likewise illegible. The contributor is Bishop Abraham, who has come to the church of the Holy Apostles at Tatev as a pilgrim and has made a donation of a purchased vineyard with its environs, i.e., entirely. In return, the liturgies have been decreed, perhaps on the major feast days, which are fixed in the Armenian ecclesiastical calendar. On the upper part of the epigraph, remnants of inscribed letters are detectable, perhaps constituting the date of the epigraph. Dating can be independently established by recourse to the dates of the tenure of the Primate, Bishop Soghomon, mentioned in the inscription, which fell within the second half of the 13th century. Notable examples documenting donations to the monastery of Tatev can be found on the pilasters of the narthex-hall adjacent to the church of the Holy Apostles on its southern side.

Some Inscribed Monuments

Another notable distinctive item (according to its type) is the inscribed monument, also on display at the museum, which may appear at first sight to have been a fragment of a pedestal or fundament of a pilaster. According to the epigraph, it was erected in memory of St Pandalion, a physician from Nicomedia and a pan-Christian saint, whose hagiography has been incorporated, along with that of his master-teacher, the priest Yermolaos, into the “Menaion” (“Haysmavurk”) collections, most commonly under the name Pantaelimon, meaning “all-merciful” (Figs. 11a, b).

We may now turn our attention to some memorial khachkar inscriptions. It is important to realize, that there is a distinctive school of khachkar arts associated with the monastery of Tatev. The custom of decorating the walls of various buildings with khachkars was a tradition at this monastery both during the early period of khachkar production (9th-11th centuries) and during the late period (12th-14th centuries). Perhaps this is the reason why more than twenty khachkars, most of them inscribed, are encountered affixed to various walls in the courtyard, the museum adjacent to the rampart and other structures. Archival photographs reveal that the restrained and classical art of sculpture in medieval Armenian architecture found altogether fresh expression at Tatev and was used to accentuate the cornices and niches of windows, often the fan-shaped spires of domes, and on occasion to provide decorative ornamentation on frontal aspects through small-sized yet exquisitely sculptured khachkars. The earliest khachkars at Tatev are dated to the early 10th century and some of them are explicitly dated, e.g., 902, 907 A.D. (Figs. 12, 13).



Fig. 12, The khachkar of the monk Vasak, 902 A.D. (photo: A. Harutyunyan, 2022)



Fig. 13, The khachkar erected by a group of Christians, 907 A.D. (photo: A. Harutyunyan, 2022)



Fig. 14, Title page, scribe: Archimandrite Matteos, Tatev, 1282 A.D. (© P302, 1r, BnF)

The Scriptorium and Manuscript Heritage

According to Stepanos Orbelyan, the monastery of Tatev also had a scriptorium. It was built at the initial period of its flourishing at the beginning of the 10th century when, after the construction of the church of the Holy Apostles (906 A.D.), the monastery was surrounded with ramparts and equipped with other necessary structures such as a scriptorium, a refectory, a warehouse, etc. It is now difficult to ascertain the exact location of the scriptorium, but one may hazard the assumption that it was one of the structures

adjacent to the ramparts, as mentioned by the historian. That the scriptorium at Tatev was dynamically operative from the beginning is attested by another piece of evidence supplied by Stepanos Orbelyan, namely that when the forces of Atabek Shamsaddin Eldiguz attacked and occupied the fortress of Baghaberd in 1170 A.D., a large number of valuable religious artefacts, which had been temporarily moved there for storage from Tatev, were destroyed, including ten thousand manuscripts.

On the basis of the card catalogue of Matenadaran, published and unpublished catalogues of manuscripts, collections of colophons and other information dispersed through the periodical press, we have completed the list and catalogued the manuscripts copied at the monastery of Tatev and its hermitages, which now total approximately 140. They are housed at the Matenadaran, the collections of the Mekhitarist fathers in Venice and Vienna, at the library of the Brotherhood of St James in Jerusalem, at the monastery of Bzoummar, at the National Library of France, at the library of the All-Savior's monastery in New Julfa, at the National Library in Berlin, and at a number of university libraries across the United States.



The chronological boundaries of the surviving and known manuscripts from Tatev are the 13th and 19th centuries. The earliest among them is a Miscellany, P302 [43] of the National Library of France (BnF) (Fig. 14). According to its colophon, the manuscript was copied in 1282 A.D. by the scribe Archimandrite Matteos at the most illustrious monastery of the land of Sisakan, the monastery with the appellation Tatev. A next renaissance of manuscript at Tatev occurred at the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th centuries. This phenomenon was associated with the enthusiastic activities of two celebrated representatives of medieval Armenian religious culture, the theologian-archimandrites Hovhan Vorotnetsi and his disciple Grigor Tatevatsi.



Fig. 15, Semi-canon table with colophon, illuminator: Friar Hovhannes, Harants Great Hermitage of Tatev, 1624 A.D. (M4522, 2r)

The Harants and the Great (Mets) Hermitages of Tatev

Manuscript at Tatev surged yet again during the first half of the 17th century, a phenomenon directly linked to the rebirth of the asceticism of the anchorite hermitages in this period. It is surely not accidental, that many of

the manuscripts copied or illuminated at this time were written or illuminated not far from Tatev, at the hermitages of Harants, and since 1660s at the Great (Mets) Hermitage of Tatev. One of the leaders of the anchorite movement of asceticism in Syunik in the 17th century was Movses Tatevatsi (who later became Catholicos of All Armenians - 1629-1633 A.D.). After a fateful meeting in Jerusalem with some pilgrims, Bishop Sargis Arenetsi from the monastery of Saghmosavank, Priest Kirakos Pontatsi of Trabizon, and some others, he and a group of clergymen founded the Great Hermitage of Syunik at the end of the first decade of the 17th century. There they established a monastic school, where the eminent personalities of the time assumed teaching roles: archimandrites Poghos Mokatsi, Nerses Mokatsi, Aristakes Shambetsi, Davit Shamkoretsi and others, who would go on to establish new hermitages and schools in various parts of the country.

The newly established hermitage of Syunik also became a writing center; around two dozen manuscripts have come down to us from there: M1714, M1831, M2135, M3753, M3872, M4145, M6697, M7364, M11171, J1728, J2000, J2348, W168, etc. Chronologically, they cover the years 1617-1720 A.D., so the hermitage was a writing center for more than a century. Some of the famous scribes and illuminators of the time worked there: the scribes Ghukas, Grigor, Stepanos, Minas, Priest Melkiset and illuminators Monk Hovhannes, Mesrop Khizantsi, Hakob Shorotetsi, etc. As for their subject-matter, the manuscripts are for the most part liturgical: Gospel, Ritual ("Mashtots"), Lectionary ("Tchashots"), Synaxarion ("Haysmavurk"), Horologion ("Zhamagirk"), Psalter ("Saghmosaran"), and Calendar rubric ("Tonatsuyts"). There are also some miscellanies and homiletical collections, etc. (Fig. 15).

Another hermitage of Tatev was founded at the beginning of the



1660s after the earthquake of 1658 that destroyed Harants or former Mets Hermitage of Tatev (Fig. 16). The founder was Archimandrite Aristakes Tatevatsi who was buried next to the western wall of St. Astvatsatsin church, inside the narthex (gavit) built in 1743 by the patronage of Melik Yegan. The surrounding monastic cells were built at the end 1660s as well as in the 80s of the same century. In fact, from the day of foundation this hermitage had a large congregation, according to Zakaria Aguletsi - approximately 70 monks. More than 20 epigraphic inscriptions have been preserved on the walls of the complex, as well as on tombstones, providing reliable information about the foundation of the hermitage, construction and renovation works, fortification and about the activity of monastic monks.

The Miniatures and Colophons

The predominant subject-matter of the known manuscripts originating at the scribal school of Tatev might justify the presumption that these manuscripts would not be rich in miniatures. The reason for this is that they contain mostly dogmatic, philosophical, theological, homiletical and exegetical works, which are hardly conducive to rich illumination. In spite of this, however, the Tatev school of miniature painting has not escaped the notice of Armenian and non-Armenian art historians, even though its exemplars have been studied relatively rarely. Local illuminators who have left their mark on the Tatev school of miniature painting include master-teacher Grigor Tatevatsi, his disciple Khotsadegh, Abraham Boloraberdtsi, Naghash Hayrapet, Tuma Kafayetsi, Ghazar, Khachatur Yerevantsi, Hakob Shorotetsi and others. The educational career of the master-teachers of the studium generale



Fig. 16, General view of the Great Hermitage of Tatev (photo: A. Harutyunyan, 2018)



Fig. 17, *The Annunciation*, illuminator:
Grigor Tatevatsi, Tatev, 1378 A.D. (M7482, 248r)

of Tatev, Hovhan Vorotnetsi, Grigor Tatevatsi, Arakel Syunetsi and Matteos Jughayetsi has also been reflected in miniatures created by miniaturists working outside of Tatev proper. It should be noted that the Gospel copied at Yeghegis in 1297 A.D. (M7482), it was illustrated at Tatev in 1378 A.D. by Grigor Tatevatsi and his disciple Khotsadegh. This is the only known manuscript in which Grigor Tatevatsi appears as an illuminator (Fig. 17).

The characteristics of the extant manuscripts from the writing center of Tatev relating to their chronology, their subject-matter, and data on the scribes, illuminators, binders, commissioners of manuscripts are accessible to us through the colophons of those manuscripts. Without these colophons, our knowledge on this writing center would be indefinite and hypothetical; fortunately, as a rule, scribes included their names and the place and time of copying. Some scribes also included the names of other participants in the effort of manuscript, sometimes even the names of their blood relatives who were considered worthy of remembrance. Occasionally, scribes chose to provide information on the political and economic situation, on domestic difficulties, described natural disasters and their consequences (droughts, earthquakes, lightning, flood, locusts, famines, epidemics, etc.).

Generally speaking, the manuscripts from the monastery of Tatev and the homonymous hermitages have either original or late colophons; very few of them can be said to lack colophons. These colophons primarily elucidate the circumstances of writing, future repairs, illustration, sale or purchase, relocation of the manuscripts; simultaneously, they constitute credible primary sources for the study of the history of Tatev or some other writing center.

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THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OF THE CITY OF DVIN

Dvin Archaeological
Expedition

The ruins of Dvin, the medieval capital of Armenia, are located in the Ararat Marz (region), about 30 km south of Yerevan (Fig. 1). The city once covered an area of about 400 hectares and had an estimated population of between 100,000 and 150,000 people. The capital of Dvin is located in the Dvin-Vostan province of the Ayrarat region.

Originally, the city was located on a large, elevated hill called Dvin. At the top of this hill stood the citadel, which included the Upper and Lower Fortresses, fortified by strong walls and more than 40 semicircular towers. The citadel was surrounded by large neighborhoods, also protected by strong walls and gates, as described by the Arab historian and geographer Al-Muqaddasi. Until the 1960s, remnants of these walls were still visible in the areas of the modern villages of Verin Artashat, Hnaberd and Aygestan, which were part of the ancient city's territory.

History of the City

Dvin has been known as a settlement since the 3rd millennium BC. It was one of the most important religious centers in the province of Ayrarat. Excavations at the site have revealed the remains of ancient sanctuaries, fi e temples, clay tablets and sacred vessels decorated with symbolic images of pagan deities. In the 8th century BC, the settlement was attacked by the Urartians who had settled in the Ararat Valley.

During the Hellenistic period, Dvin was one of the northern suburbs of the capital Artashat (Artaxata) and served as an economic supplier. In the 1st century AD, during the eastern campaigns of the Roman general Gnaeus Domitius Corbulo, Dvin, together with Artashat,



*Fig. 1, Dvin's overall panorama
(photo: Dvin Archaeological Expedition)*

was conquered, burned and destroyed by the Romans. As a result, the city remained deserted until the 30s of the 4th century. The Armenian king Khosrov Kotak (332-339) of the Arsacid dynasty moved the court to Dvin and made it the capital. The foundation of the city by King Khosrov is noted by historical sources such as Pavstos Buzand and Movses Khorenatsi.

In 481, Sahak Bagratuni, who rebelled against the Sasanians, declared Dvin the capital of the Marzpanate of Armenia. In the 470s, under the leadership of Catholicos Gyut, the Catholicosate was transferred from Vagharshapat to Dvin. Several important church



*Fig. 2, The Upper Fortress of Citadel from the east
(photo: Dvin Archaeological Expedition)*

councils were held in Dvin (506, 555, 607, 645) to address controversial theological issues, respond to sectarian movements and dangerous ideologies, and resist various religious and ecclesiastical encroachments. These councils were crucial in making decisions that preserved the internal independence of the Armenian Church and its primary role among the Eastern Churches.

During those tumultuous times, the Catholicosate of Dvin not only survived but also fostered a flourishing spiritual and material culture. The city saw advancements in national literature, historiography, mathematics, and calendar science. Over time, Dvin evolved into a major socio-economic, commercial, and cultural hub.

In the early Christian period, Dvin saw the construction of several significant secular and religious buildings, along with the erection of numerous monuments. Notable among these are the 5th-century Catholicos Palace, St. Gregory Cathedral, the Arshakuni (Arsacid)

throne palace in the Upper Citadel, and various public and economic structures, including workshops, a caravanserai, and a market. According to Procopius of Caesarea, the market was a bustling hub of trade with foreign merchants. Excavations have uncovered Byzantine and Sassanian coins, as well as numerous clay seals, which attest to the city's extensive trade connections.

At the beginning of the 7th century, the Arabs arrived in the region. In 640, they first entered Ayrarat and captured Dvin, inflicting significant human and material losses. The repeated Arab invasions culminated at the end of the 7th century with the final conquest of Armenia and the establishment of the "Arminiya" Ostikanate (Emirate of Armenia), with its center in Dvin. The Arabs minted copper and silver coins bearing the inscription "Dabil" in Dvin, which documents the presence of a mint in the city.

The long and persistent struggle of the Armenian people against Arab domination culminated in the establishment of the Bagratuni (Bagratid) kingdom in the second half of the 9th century. However, the Bagratunis did not manage to fully conquer Dvin. Although the city passed from hand to hand multiple times, both Armenian and Arab chroniclers note that Dvin remained a significant city with a developed urban life during the 9th and 10th centuries.

The further development of Dvin was significantly impacted not only by foreign conquerors but also by severe earthquakes of 864 and 894. By the 1020s, the city was under the full control of the Arab Emirates. It was not until 1209 that joint Armenian-Georgian forces led by the Zakarians succeeded in capturing Dvin and incorporating it into the Shirak domains of the Zakarians. However, in 1225, Jalal al-Din, the son of Khwarazm Shah Muhammad, seized Dvin and turned it into ruins.

Decades later, the ruined city was attacked by the Mongols. By the first half of the 14th century, Dvin had been abandoned and fell into complete obscurity.

The Archaeological Study of the City

Armenian authors and European travelers began to describe the ancient site of Dvin and its surrounding settlements in their memoirs for the first time in the second half of the 17th century. Notable figures among them include English diplomat James Morier, Dubois de Montperre, archaeologist Robert Kerr-Porter, soldier Johnson, Mesrop Taghiadryan, and others.



*Fig. 3, Dvin and its surrounding
(satellite photo: Dvin Archaeological Expedition)*

The first to initiate regular archaeological studies at the ancient site was the renowned Orientalist Nikolai Marr, who conducted partial excavations in the city's citadel in 1898 and 1899. Following a decision by the Imperial Archaeological Commission, Khachik Reverend Dadyan conducted excavations in Dvin from 1907 to 1908. He uncovered significant structures, including St. Gregory's Cathedral, a single-nave basilica (internal part), which later became the focus of systematic excavations in the area. In the fall of 1908, Bagrat Khalatyan also undertook short-term excavations at the ancient site.

In 1936, taking into account the progress already made, the People's Committee of the USSR decided to organize an expedition from ArmFan (Armenian branch of Academy of Science of the USSR) to study Dvin, the medieval capital of Armenia. Excavations began in Dvin in 1937 under the leadership of Smbat Ter-Avetisyan. After a hiatus due to World War II, archaeological work resumed under Karo Ghafadaryan and later Aram Kalantaryan.

These long-term excavations yielded impressive results, uncovering spiritual and secular buildings, workshops, residential houses, and public baths, as well as various parts of the water supply and drainage network that served the city. Notably, excavations near the southern tower revealed a large early medieval water basin next to the walls, which supplied water to the citadel. Additionally, investigations in the Lower Fortress area uncovered an entire industrial district featuring typical buildings such as production structures, residential-economic complexes, and public-industrial facilities.

Since 2021, a joint Armenian-Italian expedition has been conducting archaeological work in Dvin, involving the Dvin expedition from the Institute of Archaeology of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia and the Department of Medieval Archaeology at the University of Florence. The expedition is co-led by Professors Hamlet Petrosyan and Michele Nucciotti. Annually, the team works at the excavation site known by the name "Shuka" (Market), conducts stratigraphic excavations of the Lower Fortress, and undertakes additional research in various areas of the city.

The structure of the city

Dvin exhibited an urban development profile typical of advanced cities of its time. The citadel was situated atop a hill (Fig. 2), while the city, Shahastan, spread out on the southern and eastern sides of the citadel. Beyond the main city walls, suburbs extended, some of which were also enclosed by separate walls. On the southwestern side of the citadel, a walled Central District emerged in the heart of the city.



*Fig. 4, The Central District from the east
(photo: Dvin Archaeological Expedition)*



Fig. 5, A winged cross of an early medieval monument (photo: History Museum of Armenia)

There is strong evidence to suggest that Dvin was, if not the first at least the second center of early Christian Armenia (Fig. 3), featuring the Catholicos palaces and the largest three-nave basilica in Armenia. Notably, Dvin may host the only square in Armenia where spiritual structures—including a church, chapel, tombs, and palaces—are located adjacent to one another, creating a distinct cultural landscape (Fig. 4). This square is comparable to the early Christian square in Tigranakert, Artsakh, where church structures and a cemetery coexist, enhancing our understanding of early Christian squares in Armenia (Fig. 5).

St. Gregory the Illuminator Katoghike Church

The Church is one of the unique monuments of the early Middle Ages. In its original form, it is a gigantic three-aisled hall, the largest of similar structures, 52.4 meters long, with seven pairs of columns and pilasters. The temple originally had a wooden roof. It was built in the 30s of the 4th century, after the founding of the city, and is the same age as the Tekor and Kasagh basilicas. The three-nave hall is lined with white sandstone, which is characteristic of the local ancient structures.

The Church has undergone numerous renovations throughout different eras. It was destroyed by the Persians during the revolt in 527. In the early 7th century, under the reign of Smbat Marzpan, the Katoghike Church underwent significant reconstruction. This renovation involved radical structural and compositional changes, transforming it into a domed basilica with a cross plan. The eastern side of the Church was considerably shortened, and a new senior tabernacle with side vaults was constructed. The original outer colonnade was removed, and side apses were added to the southern and northern walls, along with a large dome supported by four thick gables in place of the columns.

During this restoration, white sandstone was replaced with tuff, and the entire



Fig. 6, The "Market" of Dvin from the west (photo: Dvin Archaeological Expedition)

church was adorned with inscriptions, some of which were discovered during excavations. A remarkable mosaic image of Our Lady was placed in the eastern apse of the Church.

The last testimony about the Church is related to the earthquake of 894, during which it was destroyed and was never restored.

5th Century Catholicos Palace

The Catholicos Palace was likely constructed in the 470s during the tenure of Catholicos Gyut, following the relocation of his residence from Vagharshapat to Dvin. Unfortunately, the palace complex has not been fully preserved, making it difficult to ascertain its overall layout.

The main feature of the palace is a central, colonnaded ceremonial hall measuring 21.7 by 12.2 meters, surrounded by various later annexed rooms. This hall was connected to adjacent spaces via entrances—two on the north and east walls and one at the southwest corner of the west wall. The wooden roof was supported by three pairs of robust tufa



Fig. 7, Examples of plain pottery from Dvin
(photo: History Museum of Armenia)

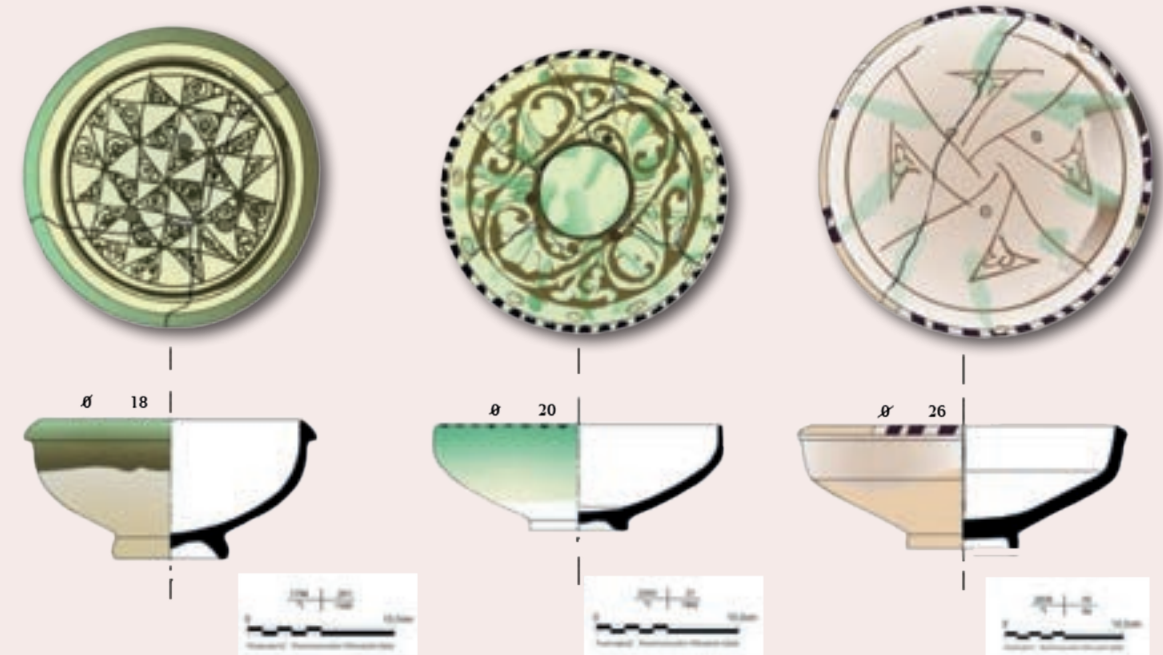


Fig. 8 Glazed clay bowls from Dvin
(photo: History Museum of Armenia)

columns, of which only the carved and sculpted bases remain. Next to the eastern wall of the hall, a stage measuring 2.8 meters wide and 0.2 meters high was likely intended for the Catholicos and high-ranking clergy.

The longitudinal walls of the hall extend eastward, creating two rooms separated by a wide stone partition, each communicating with the hall. These rooms may have held ceremonial significance. Adjacent to the hall on the western side is another chamber of similar width with a nearly square plan, resting on four comparable pillars, likely featuring a wooden millstone roof.

In the central part of this western hall, a stone urn and an urn filled with ashes were discovered, indicating that at one point in the mid-6th century, the structure served as a Zoroastrian temple. This association with Zoroastrianism led to its destruction by Armenian rebels, led by Vardan Mamikonyan (Red Vardan), in 572, as they sought to reclaim and purify the site.

7th Century Catholicos Palace

The palace is a valuable and unique example of early medieval Armenian monumental and secular architecture. It was constructed in the early 7th century during the reconstruction of the Katoghike Church. Historical accounts also support this timeframe; notably, Byzantine Emperor Constantine III visited Dvin in 652 and stayed in the Catholicos Palace during his celebrations.

The palace features an almost square layout (31.3 by 26.8 meters), with a central hall (26.5 by 11.5 meters) extending from east to west. The wooden “hazarashen” (it got its name from the “hazar” (thousand) pieces of wood used to build the roof) roof rests on the walls of the hall and is supported by four pairs of robust tufa pillars, of which the anchors and a palm-leaf sculptured capital remain in their place.

Over time, the interior composition of the palace underwent significant changes. Originally, the central hall and a corridor that crossed it formed an internal free cross, with four large rooms (approximately 70 square meters each) situated between the wings and connected to the hall. The palace had two ceremonial entrances aligned with the axes of the western and southern transepts. In the 40s of the 7th century, the corner rooms were divided by stone partitions, creating two equal-sized rooms that likely communicated with each other.

In 894, the palace was destroyed by an earthquake and subsequently abandoned. It is believed that in the early 10th century, the Arabs rebuilt the ruined structure, converting it into a mosque. They replaced the four central pillars of the hall with brick dome-bearing gables, integrating the pillars within the building's volume. To reduce the span of the arches, arched columns with smaller diameters were installed, and the floor and brick walls were significantly raised. The walls were adorned with plaster moldings featuring Arabic inscriptions from the Quran.

These modifications allowed the building to stand until the 20s and 30s of the 13th century, when it was destroyed by the Mongols during their conquest of the city.

The “Market” of Dvin

The “Market” is the conventional name for a large architectural complex located about 400 meters south of the Central District of the city, covering an area of two hectares. Excavations conducted here in 1949 were not completed. The central building features a large colonnade with adjacent rows of rectangular rooms, occupying approximately 3,000 to 3,500 square meters, of which a section measuring about 50 by 30 meters (1,500 square meters) is clearly visible today (Fig. 6). Professor Karo Ghafadaryan, who led the expedition at that time, identified it as a market and dated it to the 7th century.

Later, Aram Kalantaryan, the subsequent leader of the Dvin expedition, proposed that the structure, with its 36 columns, functioned as a caravanserai, although the architectural composition remains unclear. In 2021, archaeological research at the “Market” was resumed, with the goal of uncovering the true function of this partially explored structure and examining its architectural and archaeological characteristics.



Fig. 9, Imported glazed vessel, 9th century, Dvin Archaeological base (photo: History Museum of Armenia)



Fig. 9, Imported glazed vessel, 9th century, Dvin Archaeological base (photo: History Museum of Armenia)



Archaeological findings

The remarkable number and diversity of archaeological findings discovered in Dvin—such as pottery, forged products, weapons, tools, high-quality jewelry, and glassware—testify to the technical skills, innovative creativity, high aesthetic taste, and prolific activity of Dvin’s craftsmen. The main collection of objects unearthed in Dvin constitutes one of the largest collections in the History Museum of Armenia. Today, it holds fundamental importance for the museum’s permanent exhibition, particularly regarding the prehistoric, early medieval, and developed medieval periods.

Dvin’s workshops not only fulfilled the needs of the domestic market and the local elite but also garnered respect and demand in foreign markets. Pottery was the most common and popular craft in the medieval city (Fig. 7). The large quantity of plain and glazed pottery found in Dvin reflects the development of all branches of pottery culture throughout nearly the entire Middle Ages. Local products not only met the demands of the city and its region but were also exported through various routes of the Silk Road (Fig. 8, 9).

Dvin’s glass collections are among the most unique in the Middle East. The glass produced in Dvin competed favorably with renowned products from the largest and most popular centers in the Arab world. Armenian glassmakers were not only well-

versed in the latest innovations in the craft but also adept at employing complex technical techniques (Fig. 10).

The jewelry collection from Dvin is equally distinctive. Items such as breastplates, bracelets, earrings, and pendants showcase a variety of techniques, including casting, inlaying, beading, weaving, engraving, and enameling. These pieces captivate with their intricate designs and meticulous craftsmanship (Fig. 11).

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Fig. 11 Gold breastplate and cross
(photo: History Museum of Armenia)

THE VISHAPS AND THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF TIRINKATAR

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Introduction

In the high mountains of Armenia, unique archaeological monuments have been preserved to our days, which are traditionally called by the people “vishap” (Armenian for “dragon”). These are two to five meter high basalt stelae, which are unique among the stone stelae of the ancient world because of their unparalleled animal iconography and peculiar locations (Fig. 1). Vishaps are either sculpted in the form of a fish (the piscis type) or carved as if a bovine hide with head and extremities was draped over them (the vellus type). Sometimes both iconographies are combined (the hybrid type) (Fig. 2).

Currently ca. 150 examples of these monuments are known. As a rule, they are located in secluded, water-rich, high altitude meadows in the unforested mountains, ca. 1200-3200 m above sea level. Their highest concentration (ca. 120 examples) has been detected on Mt. Aragats, in the Geghama, Sevan, Vardenis and Syunik mountains of Armenia. The limits of their macro-regional distribution are the Lake Van region in the south, the Trialeti mountain range in the north, the Erzurum region in the west and the Sevan mountain range in the east.

The vellus vishaps are the most numerous ones and they are distributed more or less equally across the macro-region. Vishaps of the hybrida type are the rarest and they are so far confined to the south-west of the Geghama mountains in Armenia. Vishaps of the piscis type are currently lacking in the westernmost parts of the macro-region. Since the iconography of vishaps is unique, standardized and very specific, their large-

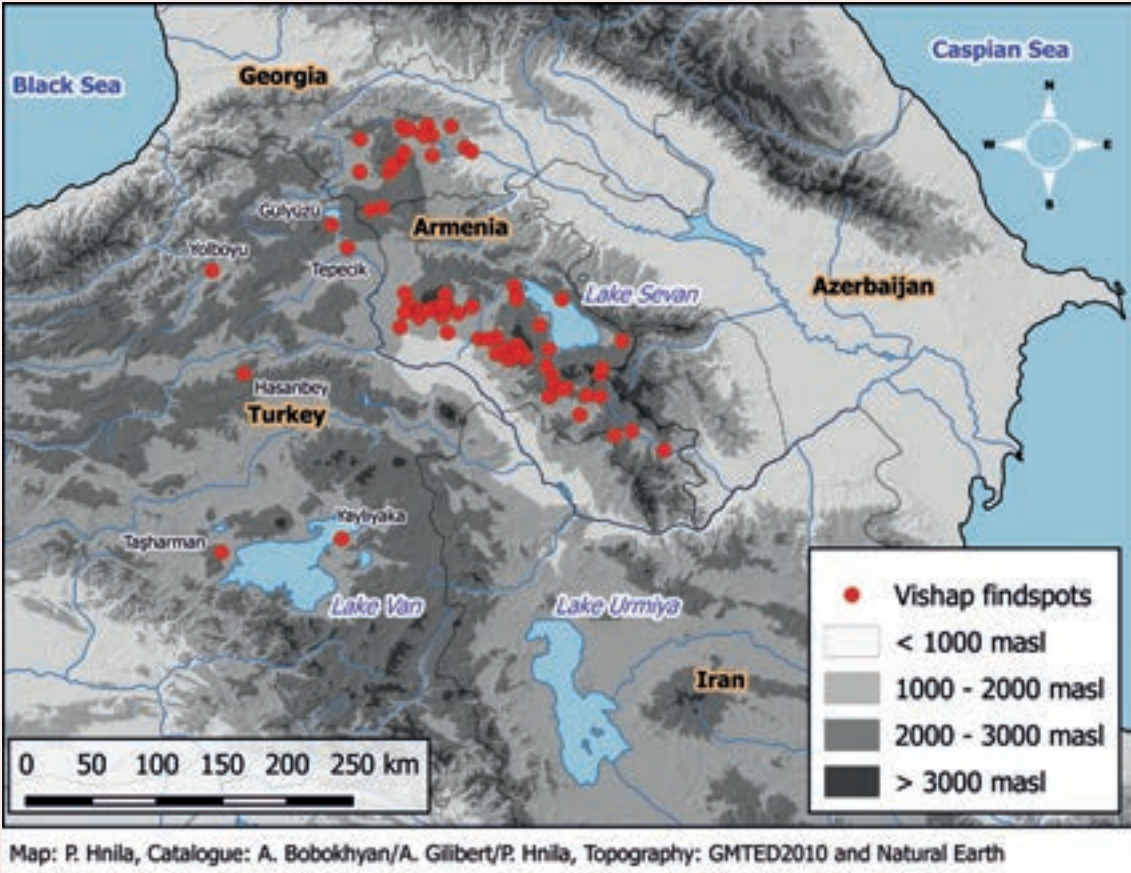


Fig. 1. Distribution of vishaps ('Vishap' project)

scale distribution pattern testifies to the existence of a symbolic and religious common background shared by social groups across the entire region at the time of their erection.

The most significant high altitude site with vishaps and related archaeological monuments is Tirinkatar (Armenian for “Height of the God Tir”). It is an over 370 ha vast archaeological site located on the southern slopes of Mt. Aragats, at an altitude of ca. 2700-3100 m above sea level (Fig. 3-5). Also known by local pastoralist communities as “Karmir Sar” (Armenian for “Red Hill”), it is a stunning summer pasture, rich in grass and water, with spectacular views both of the Mt. Aragats peak and Mt. Ararat.

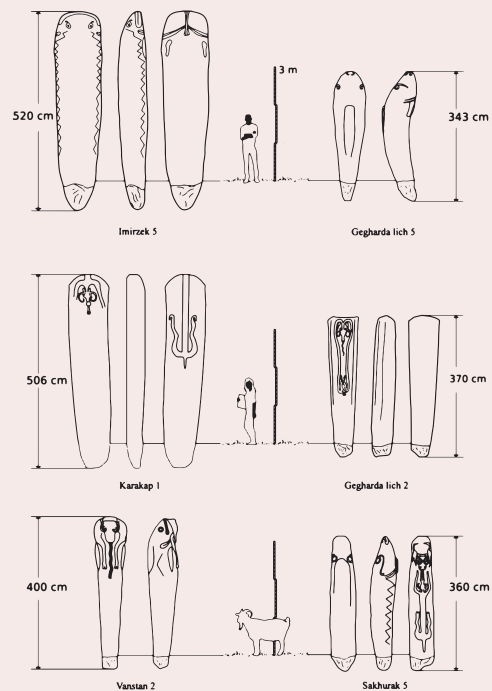


Fig. 2. Typology of vishaps
(‘Vishap’ project)

The archaeological site as such was unknown to the scientific community until recent years, although the surrounding area is mentioned already a century ago by Armenian archaeologists Ashkharbek Kalantar and Grigor Kapantsyan. In their studies of prehistoric water management systems on Mt. Aragats, they highlighted the importance of “Twelve canals” situated immediately east of Tirinkatar, within the gorge of the river Amberd to divert the river water to foothill villages and their summer pastures (Fig. 11). Neither of the two early authors appears to have been aware of the existence of the archaeological site itself, located just above the source of this canal system. In the foothill town of Ashtarak, however, Kapantsyan did hear and record stories about a certain “Maiden’s Sanctuary” which appears in those legends as a sacred place connected with the Armenian deity Ara. Kapantsyan was told that at the site there was “a stone throne with stone chairs,” and other stone images. Today we know that the “Maiden’s Sanctuary” is part of the wider archaeological site of Tirinkatar, first documented by the Armenian-Italian-German team in 2012.

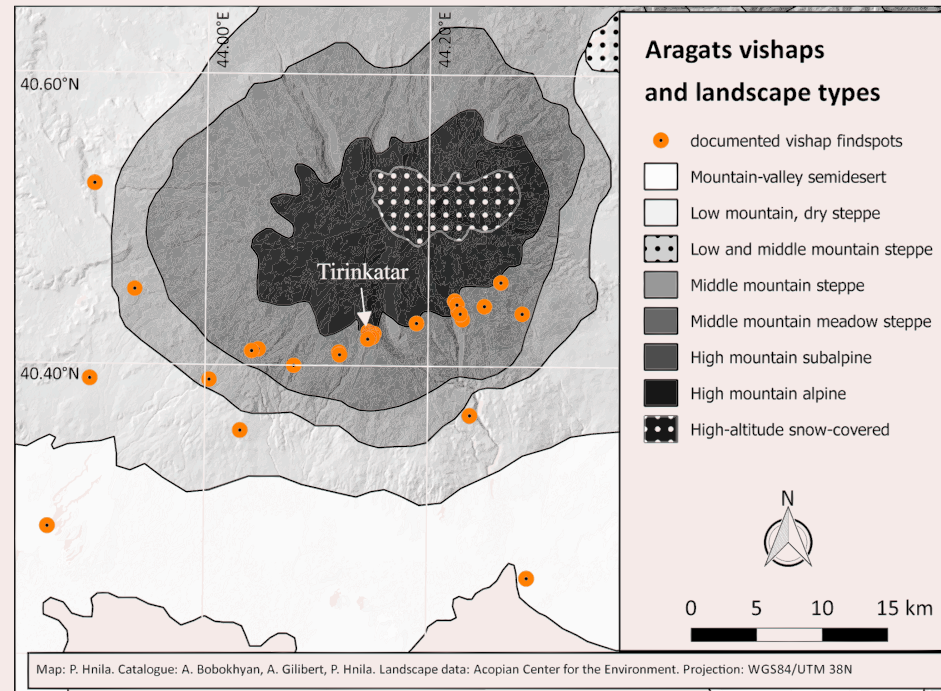


Fig. 3. Aragats vishaps and landscape types
(‘Vishap’ project)

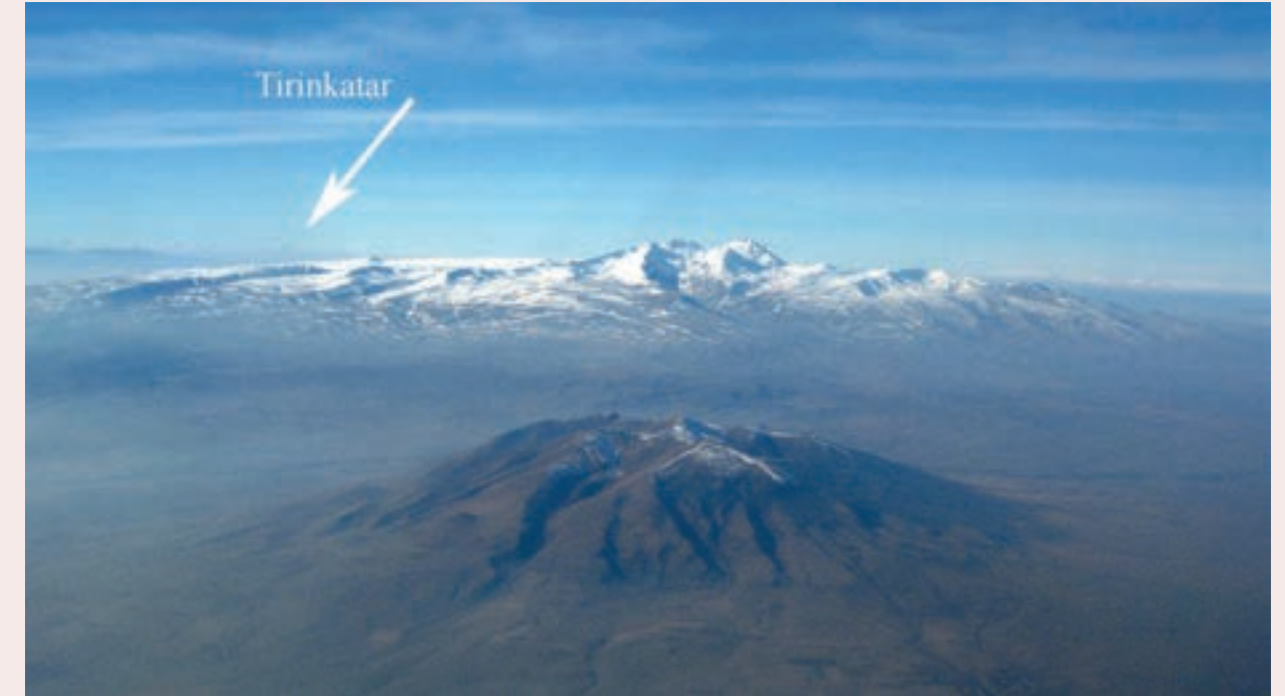


Fig. 4. Location of Tirinkatar (‘Vishap’ project)

Since that year, systematic surveys and excavations have been carried out in the site by the expedition directed by Arsen Bobokhyan (Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia), Pavol Hnila (Free University of Berlin) and Alessandra Gilibert (Ca’ Foscari University of Venice). Archaeological data collected from excavated contexts indicate that Tirinkatar was visited and used for campsite activities at least from the Neolithic period, i.e. from the end of the 6th millennium BC onwards. At least since the Chalcolithic period, around 4000 BC, the site was also used for cultic purposes, which were centred on a variety of megalithic monuments, including an extraordinary number of vishaps. During the 3rd to the end of the 2nd millennia BC, other archaeological features were added, including large aggregated cell structures, circular stone structures commonly termed “cromlechs”, circular structures with a stone filling and an inner stone chamber, commonly termed “giant’s houses”, as well as barrows and petroglyphs (Fig. 6-13). In addition to the archaeological monuments, there are also modern loci of religious activities and cult, such as the “Maiden’s Sanctuary”, fields of



*Fig. 5. Cultural landscape of Tirinkatar
(‘Vishap’ project)*

“dream stones” (tower-like structures constructed by dry stacking of stones and made by people of faith for the purpose of fulfilling their wishes) tombs, etc. (Fig. 14).

Justification of outstanding universal value

Vishaps are the earliest examples of figurative monumental art in the Caucasus region. They are elaborated on four sides and therefore can also be considered one of the earliest examples of monumental statues in the world. The uniqueness of these monuments is also revealed in their geographical location and iconography, which are very specific and do not have parallels in the ancient world. Vishaps also represent one of the earliest manifestations of organized and complex cult.

The site of Tirinkatar contains the largest accumulation of vishaps (12 statues), being one of the highest archaeological complexes known in the world. It is an exceptional manifestation of early seasonal settlement and domestication of a high mountainous area, as well as of an organized and constantly evolving cultural landscape, a living palimpsest and material

archive of millennia of collective spiritual practices. Similar high altitude archaeological sites in other parts of the world are known from the Andes and Himalayas and are dated back from the Late Bronze Age to the Medieval period (e.g. Machu Picchu, Tiwanaku, Chavin de Huantar), while Tirinkatar was used as early as the Neolithic period (6th millennium BC), gradually turning into a major cult center during the Chalcolithic period (end of 5th millennium BC) and into a pastoralist and funerary center during the Bronze Age (3rd and 2nd millennia BC).

The archaeological site clusters around the vishaps, together with other archaeological features as ritual platforms, giant’s houses, cromlechs, petroglyphs, etc., represent one of the earliest and unique cultic systems typical for the Armenian Highland (Fig. 8-13). The complex of Tirinkatar demonstrates how religious practice and so the management of collective memory influenced the formation of early identities and became one of the primary means for uniting communities and organizing the economy (irrigation, herding, seasonal migrations). It is not an accident, that the largest accumulation of vishaps ever found at a single site is documented just at Tirinkatar, indicating that the site was the main cult center of the corresponding society.

The outstanding universal value of the site further lies in the fact that it epitomizes one of the earliest monumental art, earliest cult places, and earliest remains of seasonal pastoralism in the high mountains – not only for the South Caucasus but far beyond. The exceptionally high density of archaeological features still preserved on the surface reveals continuity of human activities over millennia and thus the existence of a rich cultural landscape in the high mountains – a zone that archaeology has only recently discovered and that remains were globally underexplored.

Moreover, Tirinkatar is still a living place of pilgrimage and wonderful case for ethnoarchaeological investigation (for ethnographic units cf. Fig. 14). At the highest point of the site, on top of a red pumice hill, is situated the “Maiden’s Sanctuary”, built on a prehistoric megalithic structure and surrounded by memorial pillars and graves. It is regularly visited by pilgrims of different faiths, and stands out as a unique example of shared sacred site, where multiple religious communities have created a locus of encounter. There, both the Christian Armenians and Yazidis come to say prayers and perform archaic rituals and sacrifice, bringing people together through sharing space



Fig. 6. An example of a vellus vishap: Tirinkatar no. 8 ('Vishap' project)



for diverse devotional practices in mutual respect. Compellingly, these devotional practices sometimes also involve the vishaps and other prehistoric megalithic structures.

In addition to the rituals that are still being performed in the area, people are also engaged in seasonal animal husbandry, just like in prehistoric times. In this sense, Tirinkatar represents an outstanding and pristine environment that has preserved the cultural memory of thousands of years.

Criteria met

What are those criteria, which underline the importance of vishaps and the sacred landscape of Tirinkatar from the point of word archaeology?

Criterion (i): Vishaps are monumental stone stelae, which are exceptional among the statues of the ancient world because of their dating and specific iconography. They

represent masterpieces of early human creative imagination, performed with a high technical level and expressiveness. The creation of these monuments indicates the existence of a developed belief system and infrastructure, the ability to organize the work in large human groups, which jointly contributed to the revealing and expression of the creative genius of the corresponding society.

Criterion (ii): The Tirinkatar complex is a unique testimony of the settlement and domestication of high mountainous areas in the prehistoric period and of the gradual formation of an organized cultural landscape and monumental art. It demonstrates how religious practice influenced the shaping of early identities and became one of the primary means for uniting communities and organizing the economy (e.g. irrigation, herding), creating the prerequisites for the emergence of early complex societies in the region. The largest accumulation of monumental stelae called vishaps is documented just at Tirinkatar, indicating that the site was the main religious/cultic center of the corresponding society.

Criterion (iii): The vishaps of Tirinkatar and the archaeological monuments related to them represent an exceptional prehistoric cultural tradition with roots in early agricultural societies, which is documented only in modern Armenia, and partly in Southern Georgia and Eastern Turkey, regions which made up a common cultural zone in prehistory. That tradition occupied such a fundamental place in the life of the corresponding society, that it likely spread from the Aragats region throughout the highlands, forming a unified spiritual and cultural oikoumene. Although that cultural tradition no longer continues physically (archaeological data and radiocarbon chronology hint on Early Iron Age, ca. 1200-1000 BC as the end of the prehistoric cult), its physical remains survived and were variously interpreted and interacted with in Medieval times, with echoes that can still be traced among the local population.



Fig. 7. An example of a piscis vishap: Tirinkatar no. 6 ('Vishap' project)

Criterion (vi): As thousands of years ago, nowadays Tirinkatar is still a sacred place, where people make pilgrimages to say prayers and perform rituals, as well as celebrate folk festivals. People still have respect towards vishaps and giant’s houses, considering the latter as “saints’ graves”, next to and on top of which “dream stones” are often built and new shrines, such as the “Maiden’s Sanctuary” – the main holy place of the site. In the meantime they tell folk stories about vishaps and giants. From this point of view Tirinkatar is a unique site demonstrating the *longue durée* of human impact within the same sacred area.

Statements of authenticity and integrity

Authenticity. The authenticity of the outstanding universal value of the vishaps and the cultural landscape of Tirinkatar is confirmed by multidisciplinary and international archaeological study, as well as by rich archival and ethnographic data.

The frequentation of the site during the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods (from the end of the 6th to the end of the 5th millennia BC) is confirmed by archaeological excavations. Artefacts typical of that period were discovered in the context of vishaps, as well as 13 out of ca. 50 radiocarbon dates are available, which suggest the mentioned dating.

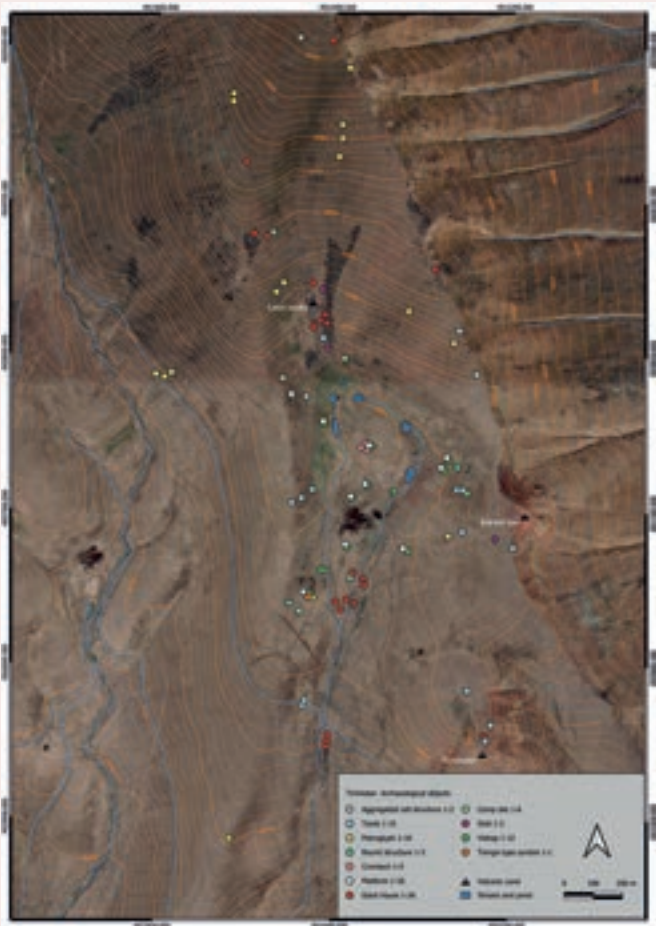


Fig. 8. Archaeological sites at Tirinkatar cultural landscape ('Vishap' project)



Fig. 9. Tirinkatar Giant Houses no. 5-8 ('Vishap' project)

The originality of the physical features of vishaps and their utilization during the prehistoric times are also confirmed by excavations and radiocarbon dates. Vishaps were unearthed in their original context, in situ, accompanied by dateable artefacts (e.g. pottery and obsidian) as well as organic remains (e.g. charcoal and bone), which suggest the final 5th millenium BC as the period of their construction, with reuse in the 3rd and during the 2nd millennia BC. To date, eight vishaps have been excavated and recorded in detailed and multidisciplinary studies (zooarchaeological, archaeobotanical, geological, chemical, etc.), also documented in databases, maps and drawings. The vishaps of Tirinkatar and the types of monuments associated with them were also observed in a broader cultural context



Fig. 10. Tirinkatar Tomb no. 7 ('Vishap' project)

and subjected to a comparative examination with similar monuments of the region and the world, to consider the issue of their dating, cultural affiliation and function in a wider context.

A large bibliographical and archival record also attests the authenticity of the site. Notes and descriptions about the vishaps and the surroundings of the site Tirinkatar have been preserved in the works of the 19th-20th centuries travelers and researchers. On the other hand, numerous local legends, fairy tales, songs, magical prayers and riddles reflect various aspects of the vishap worship. In addition to archival and folklore materials, dozens of scientific articles and volumes have been published, which discuss various aspects concerning the vishaps and the archaeological cluster of Tirinkatar.

The authenticity of the sacred nature of the site is not only evident in the exceptional



Fig. 11. Tirinkatar irrigation system no. 1, the so called '12 canals' ('Vishap' project)

density of symbolic prehistoric megalithic structures but is reflected also through the living tradition. Currently, Tirinkatar is a place of pilgrimage, where both Armenians and Yazidis come to say prayers and perform rituals in the environment shaped by archaeological monuments. Recent sanctuaries and monuments of cult significance such as "Maiden's Sanctuary" and the "dream stones" are constructed next to or directly on top of the ancient monuments (such as giant's houses).

Due to its high altitude location, the site is exceptionally well preserved, with minimal contemporary disturbances. No restoration works have been carried out. The original appearance of the landscape with its archaeological monuments has not been damaged or changed in recent times. Some of the vishaps have been secondarily reused for different purposes in prehistoric and in Medieval times, yet these ancient interactions express the multifaceted history of the site.

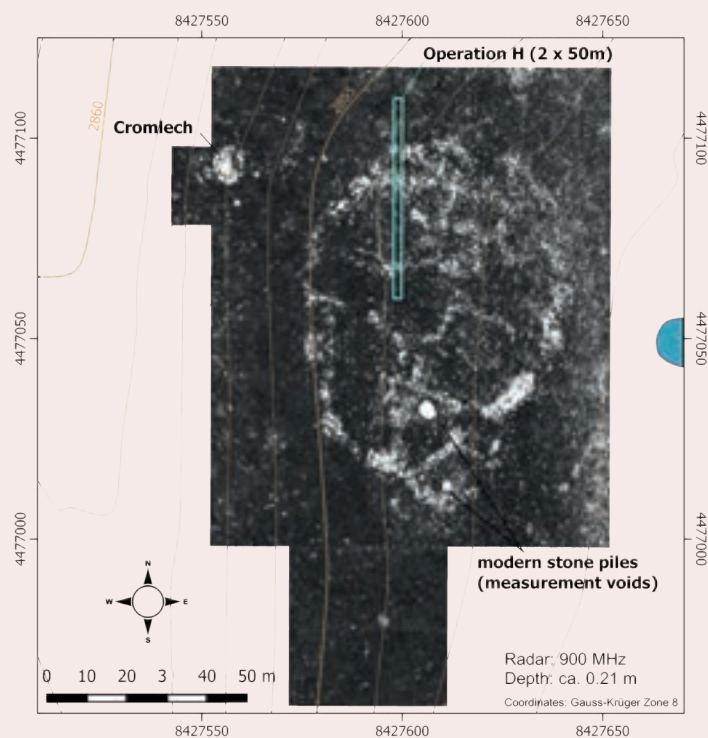


Fig. 12. Tirinkatar aggregated cell structure no. 1: green - excavated area ('Vishap' project)

Integrity. The cultural landscape of Tirinkatar contains all the elements that express its outstanding universal value. These include vishaps and ritual platforms associated with them, giant's houses, cromlechs, petroglyphs, prehistoric settlements and camp sites, barrows, as well as structures of modern period ("Maiden's Sanctuary", "dream stones", tombs, etc.), which reflect the permanence of corresponding perceptions and practices.

The archaeological cluster is large enough (ca. 370 ha) to fully express the functions and processes that represent its outstanding universal value. It does not suffer from unfavorable circumstances of the events in the area. Most of the monuments have a good degree of preservation.

The site is registered as a historical-cultural monument and is under the protection of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport of the Republic of Armenia, as well as of local authorities

Comparison with other similar properties. The vishaps and the archaeological complex of Tirinkatar in terms of geographical location, types of monuments, dating and interrelationships have no direct parallels among the properties included in the World Heritage List. This is especially true of vishaps, which are unique among the prehistoric stone stelae of the entire Eurasia due to their representations of animal imagery and their likely dedication to the cult of water.



Fig. 13. Tirinkatar rock-carving no. 13 ('Vishap' project)

However, there are properties that contain partial similarities with the site in terms of location and types of the monuments. Among these properties are the Bronze and Iron Age "deer stones" from Mongolia (Dossier: 1621 rev), which, similar to the vishaps, are monumental stone stelae endowed with zoomorphic and symbolic iconography, positioned on flat meadows and representing local points of sacred landscapes. The other such properties are the petroglyphs of Tanbaly, Kazakhstan (Dossier: 1145), Altai, Mongolia (Dossier: 1382) and Hail, Saudi Arabia (Dossier: 1472), which, similar to petroglyphs of Tirinkatar, depict anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures, various scenes of domestic and symbolic nature. From the point of view of megalithic architecture, the Bronze Age burials of Sammallahdenmäki, Finland (Dossier: 579 rev) and Bat, Al-Khutim and Al-Ayn, Oman (Dossier: 434) reflect some commonalities with burials and giant's houses of Tirinkatar.

In terms of location in the high-mountainous isolated areas the complex of Tirinkatar can be compared with the Historic Sanctuary of Machu Picchu (Dossier: 274), the city of Tiwanaku (Dossier: 567 rev), the archaeological site of Chavín (Dossier: 330), however these

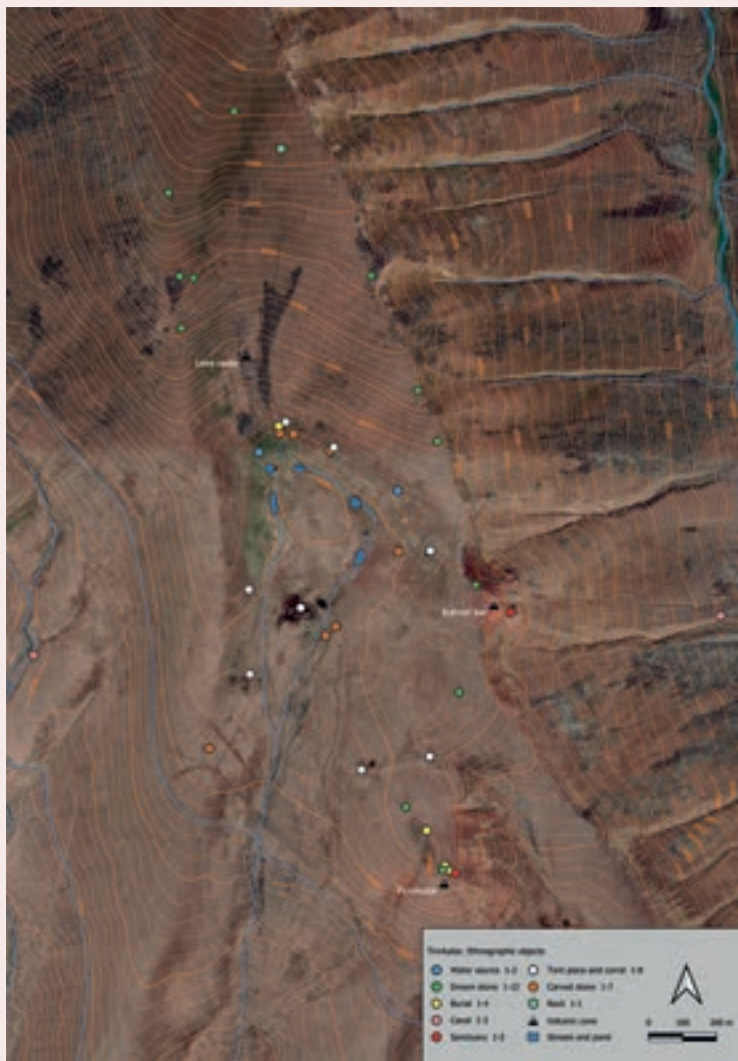


Fig. 14. Ethnographical objects of the Tirinkatar cultural landscape ('Vishap' project)

sites significantly differ from Tirinkatar in terms of their architecture, chronology and function.

In general, some of the types of monuments of the Tirinkatar cluster (such as camps, petroglyphs, burials, etc.) are known separately in different parts of the world, however as an interconnected cultural landscape, especially with vishaps as central monuments, they appear only in Tirinkatar. This indeed makes the site an exceptional

paradigm demonstrating the full process of organization of a prehistoric religious/cultic system as well as its social order and economy. Tirinkatar is a place where ancient and modern traditions meet to shape a real feeling of continuous sacred landscape.

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