

ARMENIAN ARCHAEOLOGY

Past experiences and new achievements

edited by

Aram Kosyan, Pavel Avetisyan, Arsen Bobokhyan,
and Yervand Grekyan

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Editorial

The current volume of 'Aramazd: Armenian Journal of Near Eastern Studies' is dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the Republic of Armenia and summarises the studies conducted in Armenia in the field of archaeology (1991-2016).

The choice for focusing on this comparatively short period is conditioned by fundamental political, social and economic transformations which influenced the Armenian science after 1991. The disintegration of the USSR had a considerable impact on the functioning of the National Academy of Sciences, universities and different institutions. The abrupt decrease in subsidising the science was resulted in the loss of active scholarly personnel (emigration, de-specialisation, etc.). Nevertheless, the institutions listed above had succeeded to keep the majority of scientific potential intact. Moreover, due to the normal generational change quite a substantial number of young and skillful specialists replaced older ones, many of the latter's still active. Thus, today is apparent the fusion of older traditions with newer ones.

The process of the formation of new archaeological and historical schools in Armenia proceeds well mostly thanks to the integration of Armenian scientific institutions and individual specialists with their international counterparts and colleagues. The results of this cooperation appear to be beyond any expectation. This regards first of all archaeology. The functioning of joint expeditions in different archaeological sites (Armenian-American, Armenian-German, Armenian-Italian, Armenian-Belgian, Armenian-French, Armenian-Polish, Armenian-Israeli, etc.), international projects and regular participation in international conferences in Armenia and abroad helped Armenian archaeologists and historians to actively contact with specialists of their fields. It is worth to mention the role of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography and Yerevan State university in the preservation of traditions of Armenian archaeological school.

As to the good traditions established during the second half of the 20th century in the field of Assyriology (including Assyriology proper, Hurritology, Urartology, Hittitology), despite some difficulties, the recovery is apparent. Currently Armenian Assyriologists, centered at the Institute of Oriental Studies, deal mostly with two fields – Urartian and Hittite studies.

It is impossible to bypass the role of 'Aramazd: Armenian Journal of Near Eastern Studies' in the further development and advance of Armenian archaeology and ancient history. Since its foundation in 2006 the journal serves as a bridge for the cooperation between the scholars within and outside Armenia, an Armenian voice in the international scientific arena.

Contributions included in this volume cover a significant time span, from Lower Palaeolithic to the Middle Ages. The articles mostly are of Summarising character

(‘Study of the Stone Age in the Republic of Armenia’, ‘Neolithic and Chalcolithic in Armenia’, ‘Project ArAGATS’, ‘The Vayots Dzor Project’, ‘Comprendre l’évolution de l’Arménie entre la fin de la période ourartéenne et le début de celle Achéménide : Une collaboration entre les équipes française et arménienne. Beniamin et Erebuni (1999-2019)’, ‘The Achievements of Medieval Archaeology in the Past Fifty Years’, ‘Ervandashat: résumé d’une étude archéologique de 2005-2014’, ‘Excavations at Metsamor in seasons 2013-2018’), etc., which summarise the archaeological surveys conducted by joint international expeditions and partly by Armenian archaeologists.

The volume introduces also the bio-bibliography of several outstanding representatives of Armenian archaeologists of the past whose activities enhanced the establishment and development of Armenian archaeological school.

The editorial board of AJNES expresses its gratitude to all participants who did not fail to submit their contribution in completing this volume.

Aram Kosyan
Editor-in-Chief

17 April 2019

Foreword:

The present and the perspectives of Armenian archaeology

About 150 years have passed since the first attempts of archaeological research in Armenia. During this period of Armenian archaeology much time had gone to the formation of theoretical and practical grounds and today we can say with confidence that a unique archaeological school had come into existence, which has established firm contacts with various similar centers throughout the world.

The last two and a half decades should be considered as important stage in the development of Armenian archaeology. The main features of this phase are:

1. Creation and development of a new paradigm, methods, field research programmes and directions, as a result of generation change.
2. Large number of international joint projects and expansion of the scope of field research.
3. An unprecedented amount of data obtained from radiometric, archaeometric and biometric analyzes.

In particular, the projects undertaken by the Institute, as well as the cooperation of the Institute with many international scientific centers, are considered a significant new stage in the integration of Armenian archaeology into the wider scope of contemporary South Caucasian and Near Eastern studies. The main result of this joint work is the creation of an important scientific network contributing to the reconstruction of historical processes in this vast area, encompassing Armenia and the South Caucasus on the whole.

Based on the recent findings and their analysis, our understanding of the early stages of habitat change, the earliest agricultural and pastoralistic societies, the chronology and processes of the first state-formations have significantly changed. A new periodizational and chronological scheme of the Neolithic period, Copper and Bronze Ages have been put into circulation, composed of new data and approaches.

Specifically, the main purpose of the investigation of the Palaeolithic archaeological sites was to record the presence of both early human and human (*homo sapiens sapiens*) beings in the region and to discover what kind of conditions existed for human life, specifically when and which eco-shelters were used by human beings in Armenia for subsistence.

The planned fieldwork has expanded not only the geography of the investigated Palaeolithic sites in Armenia, but also their chronological scope and nature. The fieldwork (surveys and systematic excavations) included the basins of Debed and

Dzoraget, the valleys of Aghstev and Getik rivers, the Akhuryan river gorge and the Shirak valley, the Hrazdan and Kotayk gorges, the valleys of Metsamor river, the Qasakh gorge, the Aparan valley, the north-eastern part of Ararat valley, the southern slopes of Mount Aragats, the Arpa river gorge, the Vorotan river gorge and valley. The results of these investigations, the first pre-Cheulian and Acheulean open-air sites with undamaged stratigraphic contexts were discovered that gave substantiated evidence of the earliest habitation in the territory of the Republic of Armenia.

The earliest human societies inhabiting the territory of Armenia organized their activities in the coastal parts of the lower Pleistocene palaeolakes (Aghavnatun-1, Nurnus, Aparan concavity and open-air sites of the Tashir Plateau), along riverbanks, on the surfaces of upper terraces or in the nearby caves (Haghtanak-1, 3, Ayrum-2, Areni-1, Nor-Geghi-1), as well as in the immediate vicinity of raw materials (Mushakan-1, Metsavan-1 and the open-air sites of Hatis mountain). The newly discovered Nor-Geghi-1 open-air site in the middle stream of the Hrazdan River is of great importance with its stone industry complex. Here for the first time Lower Palaeolithic Acheulean stone making industry has been identified. The site, being the first stratified one of the late Middle Pleistocene Period in the territory of the Republic of Armenia, as a result of its reliable context for the dating, depicts the period of the transition from the Lower Palaeolithic Acheulean tradition to the Middle Palaeolithic Mousterian in the territory of Armenia. Significant progress has also been made in the study of Middle Palaeolithic and the Upper Palaeolithic traditions.

Fundamental data has been obtained in the field of study of early agricultural-pastoralistic societies. The stratigraphic and radiocarbon data obtained during the excavations at Arastashen, Aknashen (Ararat Valley), Godedzor (Angeghakot, Vorotan gorge), the Areni-1 cave provided insights into the issues of chronology and periodization of the Neolithic and Copper Age periods. During the excavations at Aratashen, Aknashen and Masis Blur cultural layers dated to the end of the 7th and the first half of the 6th millennium BC were revealed. These represent the earliest Neolithic settlements in the region of the upper Araxes River.

Since 2007, excavations at Areni-1 cave opened new perspectives for the study of the Copper Age. Radiocarbon dates, obtained from different laboratories allow us to date the upper horizons of Areni cave to the last quarter of the 5th and the first quarter of the 4th millennium BC. This newly discovered site (upper layers) is probably one of the earliest manifestations of the late Chalcolithic in the region. Very interesting data for the final phase of the chalcolithic period was recorded during the excavations at Nerkin Godedzor.

During the mentioned years, a new system of periodicization and chronology of the Bronze and Iron Ages was developed, having a thoroughly updated source database. Through extensive study, biometric and archaeometric analyzes of existing materials, new data have been obtained to identify the patterns and features of public developments of the mentioned periods. The chronological frameworks of the 'archaeological cultures' of the Bronze and Iron Ages, their spatial distribution, and the intertwining of social, multicultural phenomena and dynamics of development

observed in the context of the transformation of archaeological cultures have been clarified.

Also the database of the archaeological investigation of the Van Kingdom was essentially increased. Particularly the significant results were recorded in Yeghegis valley. Recent data indicates that in addition to the Ararat Valley, the Kotayk Plateau and the Sevan coastal zone, we also have a dense network of castles built throughout the Kingdom of Van along the entire length of the road from Yeghegnadzor to Sevan. Among these was excavated the Getap Fortress. The structures and materials found during the excavations have significantly supplemented the investigation of the final stage of the Urartian period.

Excavations and studies of unearthed materials are in progress in the recently discovered Solak-1, Urartian castle-fortress in the Kotayk region. Significant results have been obtained during the excavations of the Lori Berd necropolis. During the continuous excavations the well-known 'Royal tombs' were re-dated from the end of the 3rd millennium BC to the Achaemenid period. The presence of such high-ranked persons under the Urartian, Median and Achaemenid rule indicates on the extremely interesting social and political developments in the northern regions of Armenia. The unearthed materials are unique evidence for the understanding of the process of the crossing of Urartian, Scythian, Achaemenid and 'local' cultures.

Summarizing the main results of the investigation during the last 25 years, we should state that the archaeological expeditions of the Institute has covered more than 70 sites which essentially updated the source database for the study of the earliest and ancient, as well as Medieval periods of the history of Armenia.

Pavel Avetisyan

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Yerevan, 10 December 2019