Armenian funerary monuments and their sculptures

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The art of funerary monuments occupies a distinctive place within the rich medieval material culture created by the Armenian people, yet it remains insufficiently studied to this day. We lack the space and opportunity within a single article to fully explore the numerous issues relating to this field; hence, our article will primarily address the distinctive features and historical-cultural significance of Armenian tombstones dating from the 14th to 17th centuries.

The custom of burying the deceased dates back to the earliest periods of human society, originating with the first settlements and closely linked to beliefs about the afterlife and various other notions. Principal among these are simple public health requirements, ancestor worship, respect for the deceased family members, the upbringing of future generations in a spirit of honoring ancestors, and commemorating figures who provided special services to rulers or society at large.

The earliest known burials in Armenia date back to the Neolithic period, coinciding with the first settled communities. Over millennia, burial forms have varied greatly, including ordinary graves, cromlechs, dolmens, burial mounds (kurgans), stone circles, rock-cut tombs, jar burials, cremation burial urns, stone sarcophagi, and eventually, from the early centuries (both before and after the Common Era), also burials in vaulted stone tombs, among others.

The collective life of society was also reflected in burial practices: graves were familial, with burial chambers built large and spacious, used progressively until they were filled. Such tombs in Armenia have been found containing 2 to 40 skeletons. Public thought was at a lower stage of development, and people believed that the deceased required all the material objects and food they had in life even after death. For this reason, large quantities of vessels filled with food

and water, weapons, tools, jewelry, and other items were placed in graves alongside the deceased.

Frequently, burial mounds were raised above the tombs, surrounded by circles of upright stones, with a flat stone placed at the center.[1]

Over time, notable changes were introduced into burial forms, particularly in their content. Thus, with the establishment of private property and individual families, collective burials ceased. Each burial chamber now held only one deceased individual, while in general cemeteries each clan or family buried their deceased members in their own designated areas, thus maintaining clan and family graves within communal cemeteries.

The straightforward materialistic beliefs from communal society regarding the afterlife drastically changed with the advent of Christianity and its immaterial belief in the "soul," according to which the non-material soul requires no earthly possessions in the afterlife. Consequently, placing objects and weapons in graves was forbidden by Christianity. The external appearance of graves also changed, with tombstones of various shapes carved from processed stone placed atop the graves after burial. With the prohibition against placing items in graves, the underground part of the grave lost its previous significance and adopted a simpler form, shifting attention primarily to the above-ground funerary monument's design.

At first glance, one might assume that the study of ancient burial sites is particularly valuable because of the diverse artifacts found, which are important sources for understanding ancient societies. In contrast, Christian burials lacking these items might appear less historically and culturally valuable. However, this assumption is incorrect. While the content of ancient burials is indeed valuable for understanding societal life, lifestyle, material culture, and customs, studying medieval Armenian above-ground funerary monuments holds great cultural-historical significance for several reasons.

A. Most tombstones bear inscriptions containing the names and precise dates of those buried beneath. Often these belonged to individuals who played significant roles in political and

[1]Of course, there exist numerous variations both in form and in specific features that we have not addressed. We also do not discuss burial forms and characteristics of the slave-owning era, a subject that, incidentally, has not yet been adequately clarified.

cultural history. Verifying their death dates is historically significant. For instance, determining the precise date of death of Mkhitar Sparapet, the renowned comrade-in-arms of Davit Bek and leader of the liberation movement, has been debated in studies, yet the semi-literate, dialectical inscription on his tombstone preserved in Khndzoresk village in Goris region resolves all doubts:

"THIS IS THE TOMB FOR REST,
LAID DOWN IN BODY INTO THE GRAVE,
HE IS MKHITAR OF GREAT NAME,
WHO PERFORMED AUTHORITY,
HE WAS A LIVING DEMURAT (BRAVE SOUL),
WHO WAS FROM THIS LAND OF KANTSHOKHVER,
YEAR 1727."

There are inscriptions mentioning circumstances of death from wars or natural disasters, providing dates that help determine the timing of these tragedies, some previously unknown from other sources. For example, two tombstones in Vardenis village of Martuni region mention a catastrophic earthquake. One inscription notes the death of 11 family members, while the other specifies the exact date:

"THIS IS THE REST OF DEACON MAMIKON,
BROTHER OF MRIHON, WHO READ THE GOSPEL,
REMEMBER. IN THE YEAR 1322,
WHAT AN EARTHQUAKE TOOK US, OH MOTHER."

Another inscription mentions the reconstruction of the historical village Angeghakot in the Sisian region, providing the exact date, valuable for historical analyses and conclusions.

"HERE I, EKHAN, BAICS, YRSTAM, MIRZE, MY BROTHERS, TOGETHER BUILT THE TOMB OF OUR FATHER PIRNTAR IN THE 7TH YEAR AFTER HE BUILT THE VILLAGE. YEAR 1549 – AKOB (SCULPTOR)"

B. Due to tragic events in their history, Armenians have repeatedly been forced to leave their homeland in search of refuge in foreign lands. Numerous Armenian settlements have emerged abroad, whose establishment and subsequent histories naturally form part of our people's overall history. Many of these settlements have vanished without a trace, while written sources concerning the origins and daily lives of others are extremely rare. Nonetheless, archaeologists continue to discover medieval Armenian tombstones along the banks of the Volga, in Crimea, Bulgaria, Iran, and even as far away as Egypt. Armenian tombstones, identifiable by their characteristic forms, Armenian inscriptions, and dates, shed light on diverse chapters of our history.

C. Armenian tombstones, by their forms, methods of carving, and decorative sculptures, have been closely connected since the 5th century with our outstanding architectural monuments. Therefore, they are of great help in clarifying the history of Armenian architecture and related questions. It was precisely for this reason that our distinguished scholar T. Toramanyan dedicated special attention to funerary architecture.[2] Moreover, studying the sculptures found on funerary monuments holds particular significance, as these sculptures constitute a rich domain of the people's artistic creativity.

D. Burial forms and monuments placed on graves have continuously expressed peoples' beliefs and worldviews from ancient times to the present day. Armenian burial practices and the sculptures found on tombstones, both ornamental carvings and especially figurative representations; offer valuable material for studying the connections between early Christian and pagan beliefs, Armenian pagan traditions, and mythology. Such sculptures are especially abundant on early-period funerary monuments, and their study has already been the subject of two comprehensive works, aside from various intermediate observations and commentaries[3].

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[2] T. Toramanyan, Materials for the History of Armenian Architecture, Vol. 1, Yerevan, 1942

[3] G. Hovsepyan, Materials and Studies, Vol. 1; G. I. Araqelyan, Armenian Sculptures from the 4th–7th Centuries, Yerevan, 1949

The funerary monuments from the 10th to 13th centuries hold significant importance for studying Armenian sculpture and demonstrate the high level of its development. However, the abundant and diverse everyday-life scenes carved on 14th- to 17th-century tombstones have largely remained outside researchers' attention.

E. Most frequently, medieval Armenian masters – architects, ornamental sculptors, and others – are named on tombstones and other funerary monuments, especially khachkars. Thanks to these funerary monuments, the names of hundreds of previously unknown artists and other talented children of our nation have now been discovered, significantly contributing to the study of their creative heritage.

In this article, we aim to reveal the historical-cultural significance of the sculptures found on 14th- to 17th-century tombstones.

Early Christian funerary monuments in Armenia consisted of quadrangular pillars. Various scenes originating from the pagan period and later adopted Christian symbols were carved onto these monuments. Tombstones excavated in Ani, as well as monuments from Agarak, Ereruyk, and Khoshavank, first attracted the attention of N. Marr, T. Toramanyan, and Ya. Smirnov in 1909[4].

In the final period of carving quadrangular pillar tombstones, these were chronologically succeeded by rectangular gravestones topped with a pointed or roof-like shape, the best examples of which are found in Shirak[5], Aragatsotn and Nig provinces, Kotayk, and Syunik. However, these monuments were not decorated with sculptures, bearing only engraved inscriptions.

Widespread throughout nearly all Armenian provinces during the 9th–10th centuries were cradle-shaped undecorated tombstones, at the eastern edge of which, on a pedestal, stood a sculpted khachkar. As it has been clarified, khachkars were erected not only as markers of death but also as memorial monuments. From the 12th century onward, flat, cradle-shaped, and ram-shaped tombstones began appearing.

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[4] A. Araqelyan, Armenian Sculptures from the 4th–7th Centuries, p. 33

[5] Alishan, Shirak, 1881, page 31

Both khachkars and tombstones were adorned with sculptures.

Starting from the 14th century, the predominant form became monuments consisting of two stones – the khachkar and tombstone united into cradle-shaped or flat tombstones. These represent the most prominent funerary sculptures from the 14th to 17th centuries. Nevertheless, the diversity of funerary monuments continued.

The variety and artistry of tombstones did not escape the attention of the esteemed folklorist G. Srvandztyants. Although not aiming for comprehensive research, he limited himself to briefly noting their shapes: "…There are many villages in Armenia; among those I have seen, tombstones in the villages of Khnus Garashoran and Barerd Balakhor are neither erected khachkars nor vaulted capariches, but ram-shaped, lion-shaped, and horn-shaped enormous stones…". The tombstones in cemeteries located in Idi and Nariman villages of Tayk, in the Vekshi gorge, and Arisa village significantly differ from those of Jugha's cemetery. Tayk tombstones have sphinxes and heads of various animals—bulls, lions, women, men, eagles, bulls, and horses carved onto their facades. These resemble Jugha's sculpted tombstones only in the frontal arrangement. The tombstones of Jugha are notably unique, with many depicting men seated on horses holding crosses in their hands. Inscriptions mostly appear in relief, and the most common word found is "Khoja". Also found in Bagrevand and Tegh village are tombstones in the form of an oven, prominently protruding from the eastern side.

The tombstones from the 14th to 17th centuries under study spread widely not only within Armenian territories but also in Armenian communities abroad, due to forced migrations caused by political turmoil. Such tombstones have been discovered not only in historical Armenian lands but also in Derbend's vicinity, Poland, Moldova, Bulgaria, and in Smyrna, western Asia Minor. Thus, this archaeological material significantly aids in studying the history of the Armenian diaspora.

An epigraphic expedition of the Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences' Institute of History in Syunik, Ashtarak, and Kotayk regions, particularly Gegharkunik – exceptionally rich in funerary monuments – collected reliefs from over 450 tombstones. These have been categorized according to depicted scenes, initiating their thematic study. Scenes found on tombstones fall into the following groups: 1. agricultural and craft labor scenes and tools; 2. hunting scenes and

weaponry; 3. wedding scenes; 4. musicians and musical instruments; 5. burial and ceremonial scenes; 6. Costumes.

Among the reliefs depicted on tombstones, especially intriguing are examples featuring agricultural tools and scenes, which are portrayed quite realistically. In the Middle Ages, agriculture was the primary occupation of the population; thus, the depiction of agricultural scenes on funerary monuments is entirely understandable. In the cemetery of Kznut village (V. Karanlukh) in the Martuni region, there is a well-crafted flat tombstone whose engraved inscription announces that beneath lies a farmer. Agricultural scenes predominantly feature the plow and plowman; on certain monuments, above the relief image of the plow, appears a sheaf of wheat, symbolizing the outcome of agricultural labor.

The figure of the farmer, celebrated widely in Armenian literature and rich folklore, finds its representation in folk art, in this case specifically on tombstones. It is clear that those buried beneath such tombstones must have predominantly been farmers; otherwise, the widespread portrayal of the plowman would remain inexplicable. Frequently encountered on tombstones are two-ox plows and four-ox plows, sometimes complete with oxen and a plowman holding the plow handles, or just the plow without the farmer. Sculptures on tombstones clearly depict all parts of the plow, including the oxen with their harnesses, yokes, and chains. The literary descriptions of these scenes are similarly detailed; romantic imagery of the plowman and his tools is notably found in Gregory of Narek's poem “Saylik”:

“If the harness were silver, and the yoke gold,
The straps woven from silk,
Chains adorned with precious pearls.”[6]

A plowing scene is masterfully carved onto the cradle-shaped tombstone of Chanakhchi village in Artsakh, as well as on several tombstones from Vardenis village in the Martuni region. On the Chanakhchi tombstone, an ox-drawn plow is depicted: the plowman stands near the handles, holding a stick in his right hand, with his left hand extended toward the first ox

[6] Gregory of Narek, Matenagrutiunk, Venice, 1840

harnessed to the plow. Below the plow, a wide-necked jug with a handle is depicted. The scene is enclosed from above and the eastern side by a beautifully woven ornamental border.[7]

Among tombstones illustrating agricultural scenes, notably interesting is one preserved in the cemetery of the abandoned village site near Dzoragyugh in the Martuni region, depicting a horse-drawn plow. The local residents, confusing the horse with a donkey, refer to this place as "Donkey Plow." Another example of a horse-drawn plow scene is known from Vaghashen, dating to the 16th century (1540). Beneath its inscription, the tombstone depicts a seated figure with crossed hands on his chest, next to whom are tools associated with tailoring: a sewing basket, scissors, an awl, and a thimble. Additionally, there appears a lance-shaped ornament possibly symbolizing the sun, a decorative jug, and, separated by a relief line, a plow scene depicting two horses and a plowman holding the plow with his right hand, the left hand placed at his side. These two examples are noteworthy, demonstrating the use of horses by Armenian farmers in agricultural labor from early times, especially for plowing. Previously, it was commonly believed that the use of horses in agriculture became widespread in Armenia only following its union with Russia. The scene depicted on this tombstone contradicts that assumption.

On funerary monuments, a prominent place is also given to carvings depicting the work of craftsmen, among which we find scenes involving blacksmiths, carpenters, hat-makers, knife-makers, scrapers, anvil workers, and other artisans involved in the creation of various objects. Depicted tools include the plane, axe, saw, adze, hammer (mallet), rasp, hat-maker's mold, hat-maker's tools, tailor's scissors, pincers, stonemason's instruments, and more. For example, on a cradle-shaped tombstone measuring 1.80 m in length and 50 cm in height in the old cemetery of Kgnut (Verin Karanlukh) village in Martuni district, a Cupbearer is depicted in a feast scene: in one hand he holds a wine jug, in the other, a cup. His tools are also depicted: scissors, a scraper, and the mold for shaping a hat. On a nearby tombstone, scissors and a scraper appear again. In that scene, the deceased is shown seated at the center, cross-legged with hands folded across the chest, flanked on one side by a wine jar and a bowl, and on the other by a large pair of scissors and a scraper.

[7] Collection of materials for the description of localities and tribes of the Caucasus, Volume 19 (in Russian)

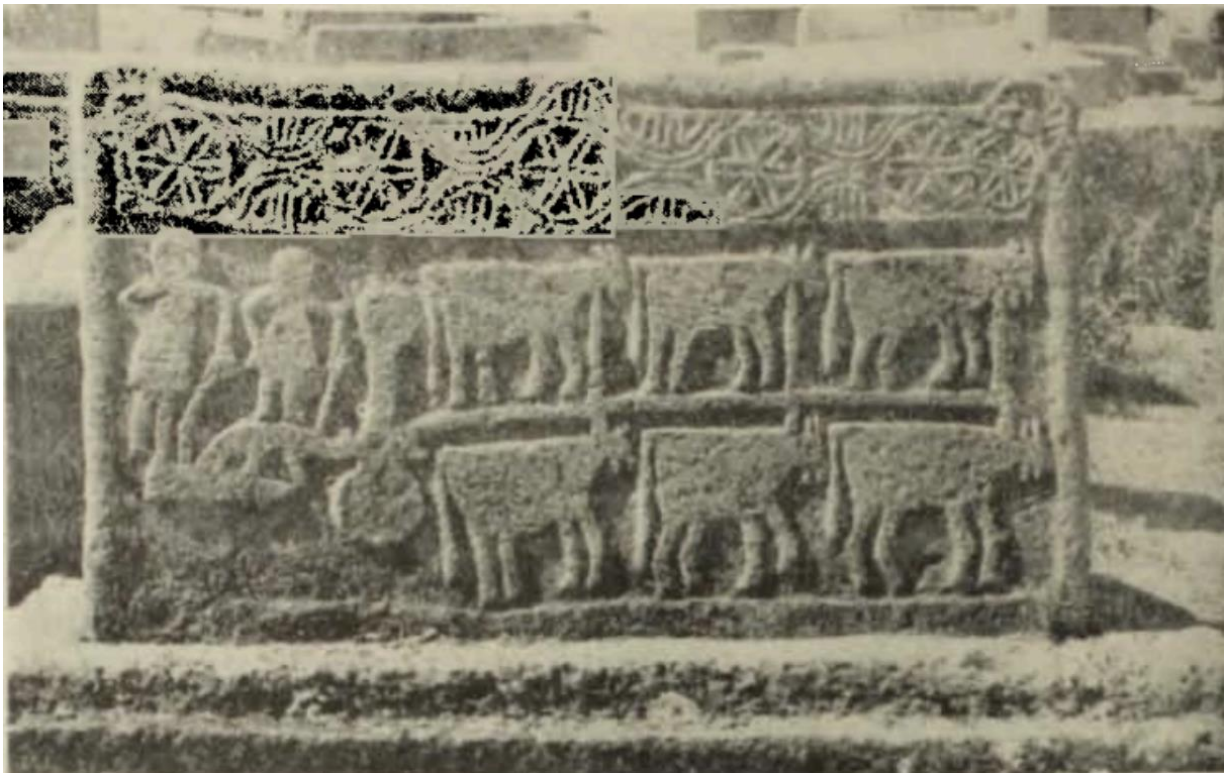

Figure 1: village Tegh, Goris

On the southern side of a small tombstone near the half-ruined church of Noradugh village (New Bayazet region), a stonemason's tool is depicted, alongside a jug and a man holding an ornament resembling a shield. Most of the vessels depicted on tombstones, based on their form and confirmed by references in contemporary literature, were made of metal and clay. Among these are large and small handled wine jugs, water pitchers, bowls, and other containers. A significant portion of these vessels appear in Wedding scenes, while in other cases they are found in Hunting or agricultural scenes. Often, a single tombstone may feature multiple types of vessels. The vessels depicted on funerary monuments provide a tangible representation of the everyday objects used by the people in a given historical period.

Armenian funerary monuments, particularly cradle-shaped tombstones, prominently feature hunting scenes. In one depiction, a mounted hunter holds a weapon in one hand and a falcon in the other; another portrays a horse with a falcon perched on its saddle. Historically, falcons and hawks were trained by hunters across various cultures to catch pheasants, partridges, wild ducks, and rabbits. Movses Khorenatsi references falcon hunting, while Ghazar Parpetsi describes: "...And many among the children of noblemen, with tutors and servants, hunting various birds with falcons, returned joyfully to the feast".[8]

Figure 2: village V. Karanlukh, Martuni

[8] Ghazar Parpetsi, History of Armenia, Tiflis, 1913, fragment A, p. 22

Figure 3: village Vardenik

Medieval poets also celebrated falconry. Khachatur Kecharetsi wrote: "Whatever the falcon captures from the partridge, it takes swiftly away." Tlkuranetsu wrote: "If I were not a hawk, falcon, I would fly and sit upon your wing." Bishop Hovhannes, in his poem "About Birds," writes:

"The Shahin falcon was beneficial;

It perched on the emir's arm,

Flying from mountain to mountain

Hunting for its master".[9]

European travelers also confirmed the use of falcons for hunting in 19th-century Armenia. Hunting scenes often included horn blowing, documented in both folklore and artwork.

[9] Literary Monuments, Beirut, 1919, pp. 97, 202, 276

For instance, the door carvings of Mush's Arakelots Church depict a hunter and a horn player, likely symbolizing a hunting scene.

Such hunting practices, involving animals being driven toward hunters, are illustrated in numerous Armenian architectural monuments, notably the Surb Khach of Aghtamar, where one relief depicts a man grabbing a fleeing rabbit's tail, and a mounted hunter shooting at a bear attacking his horse, accompanied by another hunter with his dog and falcon.

The tombstones from the 16th century often reproduce earlier hunting scenes but differ in artistic execution. For example, in the cemetery of Verin Aluchalu village in Martuni district, a tombstone (60 cm long, 35 cm high) depicts a hunter with a drawn bow and a dog chasing deer and gazelles. Dogs are confirmed as integral to hunting by images on decorated vessels from Ani. Another tombstone from Martuni region's Nerqin Getashen village portrays a mounted hunter holding a horse's reins with one hand and a rifle with the other, aiming at a running deer.

In "Martuni gomer," a tombstone displays floral decorations, a woman with hands on hips, adorned chest ornaments, a musician playing the saz, a bow and arrow nearby, and a falcon above a horse saddle. The falcon depiction with the horse suggests the deceased's association with hunting, the latter being considered honorable and courageous.

Figure 4: village Litshq, Martuni

Deer and gazelles often appear pursued by mounted hunters, occasionally in wedding scenes, hinting at their role as ceremonial feasts. Similar scenes appear on tombstones in Artsakh, particularly in Chanakhchi village, featuring weapons like bows, rifles, and spears (Fig. 5).

Figure 5: village Akunq, Basargechar

Hunting scenes from the 4th–14th centuries typically depicted feudal lords, showcasing bravery, skill, and entertainment. By the 15th–17th centuries, hunting imagery reflected broader societal subsistence activities.

Among the carvings depicted on tombstones, noteworthy are also weapons, closely associated with hunting. In many instances, the mere depiction of weapons alone implies a hunting scene. Among the weapons depicted are bows and arrows, rifles, curved swords, sabres; the armed horseman always carries a quiver filled with arrows, frequently referred to by our medieval chroniclers as "patkandaran." On tombstones, the rifle sometimes appears alongside the

bow and arrow. The sword and dagger also appear in wedding scenes, materially confirming the custom of holding a sword above the heads of newlyweds during the wedding ceremony.

Particularly striking among tombstone reliefs are scenes depicting weddings. Wedding scenes on tombstones portray the bride and groom, the cupbearer holding a wine jug and cup, the wedding musicians, dancers, and ultimately the wedding table laden with skewered meats. Let us describe some of these: on the southern side of a tombstone measuring 120 cm in length and 60 cm in height from the Verin Tsovinar village site in Martuni district is depicted a horse carrying a woman with hands placed on her hips; beside her is another horse bearing a man with a rifle on his shoulder, followed by another woman holding the Tree of Life in one hand and a jug in the other, with a cup beside it; above them is a kamancha player. In the Martuni Gomer village site, near a ruined church, on the northern side of a cradle-shaped tombstone is depicted a horseman; near the horse's neck is a crowned man with his left hand placed on his side and holding a jug in his right hand; then follows a table with bread and gata, and above the table are two dancers and a kamancha player. The Tree of Life ornament frequently appears in tombstone wedding scenes. Understanding these depicted scenes is aided by traditional wedding customs preserved among the people. Weddings from various regions in Armenia, rich with ceremonial imagery, especially those from Ani and the Akntsik region, have preserved the customs of henna, the bridal braiding ceremony, images of women with braided hair frequently appear on tombstones. Particularly notable is the Akntsik tradition of veiling, blessing bread (halavorhnek), seating the bride upon a horse to take her to church, organizing a ceremonial procession, conducting the wedding ritual, and performing the symbolic cutting of the bridal garment.

Figure 6: village Hacarat, N. Bayazet

Musician figures and musical instruments occupy considerable space among the reliefs depicted on tombstones. On tombstones, one can find various stringed, wind, and percussion instruments, horns, harps, lyres, tambourines, flutes, drums, and other musical instruments known from ancient times. Performers are often depicted alongside their instruments on tombstones, and notably, alongside male musicians, female musicians also frequently appear, a particularly intriguing phenomenon. Information preserved in Armenian literature shows that from ancient times, alongside male performers, there were female musicians, composers, singers, and dancers. The earliest record of an Armenian female dancer and singer is found in Khorenatsi's writings: "And one day, Bakur, the patriarch of the Siunid family, invited him to a feast, and during their joyful drinking, he saw a woman from the Tiridates family, who was exceedingly beautiful and sang while playing an instrument, and her name was Nazinik."[10]

[10] Movses Khorenatsi, History, Venice, 1865, p.141

We also find a noteworthy account of the female musician Sahakdukht in the writings of Stepanos Orbelian, who, describing the eighth-century author Stepanos Siunetsi, adds: "There was also a certain fragrant flower who from childhood adopted chastity and lived isolated in a cave in the valley of Garni, and endured upon herself unbearable hair of purity, whose name was Sahakdukht. She was extremely skilled in the musical art and taught literature from behind a curtain. She composed sharakans and sweet melodies, one of which was dedicated to the Holy Virgin Mary."[11]

No less renowned among female musicians was Khosrovidukht.[12]

Evidence regarding lyre playing is found in the writings of Shapuh Bagratuni: "...holding a cup in his hand, Deren took the lyre in hand and made him rejoice..." and "...pitched his tent beside the road, which was the avenue of the city, and there placed his table from morning and seated all—travelers, good and bad, and inhabitants of the city, every day, and many singers and minstrels would sound their voices until evening, so that no one had the opportunity to return home; this was his custom".[13]

We find an interesting reference about a female drummer in one of Narekatsi's works:

"Gently swaying here and there,
Casting her deadly gaze like a turbulent sea,
The young girl drummer danced and fluttered."

The tomb of musician Jeremiah, who died in 1258, has been preserved in Harich village of Artik region, once visited by the great Komitas, interpreter of Armenian songs. The epitaph of musician Jeremiah reads:

"This is the grave, resting place, and dwelling
Of Jeremiah the musician;
You who read this,
Remember him in your prayers. Year: 707 (1258)."

Between Aghts and Byurakan, on an almost flattened tombstone, barely legible letters read: "Here is buried the pitiable [name illegible, only letters …R…I.A remain], who sweetly

[11] Stepanos Orbelian, History of the Province of Sisakan, p.139
[12] Alishan, Hushik, Vol. II, p. 96
[13] "History of Shapuh Bagratuni," p. 42

sounded my lyre." From these last words, it can be concluded that this is the tomb of a musician.[14]

Among Armenian chroniclers, we find numerous names of musical instruments, many of which also appear on tombstones. References to the trumpet, pandir, lyre, tsuts, and vin are found in the writings of Khorenatsi, Buzand, Grigor Magistros, and others. The names harp, lyre, and violin appear in Narekatsi's writings; the twisted horn in Orbelian's; the double-piped flute (a flute with two tones) in Hovhannes Yerznkatsi; the saz in Konstantin Yerznkatsi, and other authors. Shapuh Bagratuni also mentions musical instruments: "When morning came, the usual trumpet-players, lyre-players, harp-players, and dancers would arrive and dance before him".[15]

An interesting reference about the ergyon (pipe organ) is found in Mambre the Translator: "Just as the skillful organist blows into the organ with one mouth, and the multitude of pipes collectively resounds, some high, some low, some even deeper, each in its order; although many in number, it speaks and sounds with one voice; it is one action".[16]

In addition to written records, bone flutes have been discovered during excavations at Garni and Dvin.[17] Images of numerous musical instruments are found in Armenian manuscripts.[18]

In Armenian literature, especially among poets, we find references to choirs and orchestras. In Grigor Aghtamartsi's poem "About the Rose and the Nightingale," we read: "Musical classes of singers." Scenes depicting entire orchestras, choirs, and dancers appear frequently on tombstones. Musicians depicted on tombstones are often gathered solemnly around tables, further confirming through these monuments that song and music were widely beloved among all layers of Armenian society. The musical instruments depicted on tombstones materially verify their accurate forms and historical continuity (Fig. 7).

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[14] Inscription read by E. Ter-Minasyan and G. Hovsepyan; see Ejmiatsin, 1938
[15] "History of Shapuh Bagratuni," Ejmiatsin, 1921, p. 42
[16] Mambre the Translator, Speeches, Venice, 1833, p. 42
[17] B. Arakelyan, Cities and Crafts in Armenia IX-XIII centuries, Yerevan, 1958, p. 324
[18] S. Lisitsian, Old Armenian Theatrical Performances and Dances, Yerevan, 1958

Figure 7: village Litshq, Martuni

Images of musical instruments appear on many tombstones. On a tombstone measuring 1 m 30 cm in length and 1 m in height near the church of Verin Kznut village in Martuni district, a kamancha, qanun, and pandir are depicted alongside other scenes. The same instruments appear on another tombstone in the same cemetery. A complete orchestra is depicted on a tombstone in Hatsarat village in the Nor Bayazet district. The double-piped flute is depicted frequently on numerous tombstones.

Tombstones often portray mounted spearmen thrusting spears into the mouths of dragons writhing beneath the horses' hooves. Scenes also show dragons trampled under the feet of deer and gazelles. Grigor Narekatsi writes: "...from your lofty seat, trample underfoot serpents and dragons, as oxen by nature tread upon snakes and kill them." In this article, we briefly mention this issue, leaving detailed examination for future research.

Dragon worship dates back to ancient times. Dragon-stone monuments (vishap-kar) have been studied, clarifying their significance. Works dedicated to these dragon-stones have also explained dragon-fighting scenes, motifs also depicted on tombstones. Notably, the dragon motif is not merely ornamental; many place names in Armenia, such as Odzun and Odzaberd, reflect this tradition. Over centuries, the symbolism has expanded, adding new meanings worthy of detailed investigation. Folklore provides abundant material for such studies. Apart from previously published dragon-stones, similar monuments exist in Tayk, Tortum, near Khakhu monastery, Zuhurat, and Srahavank, around 30 monuments engraved with images of oxen, buffalo, snakes, lizards, and other figures. These monuments are located at a place called Volokhli (Tsorak), and water flowing past these statues irrigates the fields of Khakhu villages.[19]

The dragon and dragon-fighting decorative motif, being very ancient, persisted through the medieval period as well. It appears on numerous medieval architectural monuments and khachkars, often given a Christian interpretation. The dragon is depicted in bold relief and realistically on the magnificent architectural monument of the Holy Cross of Aghtamar, on the walls and khanapar of Ani, on the monument at Imirzek, and elsewhere. We also find the relief carving of a dragon on a tombstone in the cemetery near Noraduz village in the New Bayazet region.

The carving of a fish also appears on tombstones. Particularly noteworthy is a tombstone preserved in Martuni region, depicting two fish on a plate. Monuments decorated with fish imagery are widely distributed across Armenian territories, especially on khachkars (Akunk village, Basargechar region). The most classical reliefs of fish are found on the magnificent monument known as Makaravank, rising from within the forested hill west of Achajur village in the Ijevan region.

Tombstones from the 14th to 17th centuries provide abundant material for the study of traditional attire (taraz). The varied garments preserved on them enable tracing the transformations in clothing. It is known that during the 16th century, under Safavid Persian and

[19]Atrpet, Tshorokh Basin, p. 177

Ottoman rule, Armenians were compelled to wear specific types of clothing; they were not free to dress as they wished.

From the perspective of studying Armenian clothing, the description by the Italian artist Cesare Vecellio, cited by Alishan from "Sisuan," is particularly valuable. In the Italian artist's work "Habiti Antichi et Moderni," we read:

"Women of Lower Armenia: Women of Lower Armenia wear a head covering with a multicolored veil, a beautifully crafted dress beneath which and over it, a white cotton cloak. They also have a cloth similar to monks' squares, longer at the back than at the front, with which they can see without being seen. Noblemen of Lower Armenia—men of this nation wear a thick, blue, bordered cloak. They have long hair and beards. Their garment is a monk's cowl or similar, but made from silk or cotton, often colored. They place around their neck a fine silk cloth, red and white or another color, whose middle part rests on the chest, with the ends hanging behind the shoulders. They wear iron-shod shoes…".[20]

It is known that at the end of the 16th century, in 1580, Sultan Murad III, as a manuscript from 1582 states, "imposed the yasa (law) on the Christian peoples, removing the turbans from their heads and placing caps instead."

Arakel Davrizhetsi wrote about Sultan Murad's yasa: "In the year RIT (1582), he was angered by the audacity of the Jews and removed the head coverings from Jews and all Christians. Afterwards, bribes were given here and there, and an order was issued permitting head coverings again after 18 days; later, in Constantinople and many other cities, they continued wearing caps".[21]

When studying Armenian attire of this period, one must not overlook the fact that a significant portion of the Armenian population had been displaced during these troubled times. Thus, when characterizing the attire of Armenians newly settled in various locations, it is

[20] Alishan, Sisuan, 1885, p. 296
[21] Arakel Davrizhetsi, History, p. 368

essential to clarify, as much as possible, from where these Armenian populations had been displaced.

On 14th–16th century tombstones, we find a wide variety of garments: pleated robes, cloaks, capes, woven (possibly silver) belts, cone-shaped hats, crown-like headpieces with fringes, and others. In many cases, the attire is rendered so clearly on the tombstones that one can distinguish not only clerical clothing from secular, but also identify the garments of the blacksmith, the tailor, the cupbearer, and the musician. Let us describe some of the most characteristic examples. On the southern side of a saddle-shaped tombstone at the top of the cemetery in Yeranos village, New Bayazet region, is depicted a rider wearing a fringed headdress; near the horse's muzzle is a man holding the horse's bridle with one hand and the jug's handle with the other, wearing a short cylindrical hat with vertical pleats clearly visible on it. On one of the tombstones near an ancient church in Lejan village of the Alaverdi region, a man is carved with a crown on his head. According to the local population, this is a wedding crown, which by very old custom was carved on the tombstones of young men who died shortly after their weddings. This custom, which survived in Lejan until the 20th century, is interesting in itself and worthy of attention. It should be noted that it is rather difficult to identify the deceased solely by the crown depicted on the tombstone, as it is often the case that three or four types of crowns and headgear appear on the same stone, suggesting the simultaneous use of varied hat forms. Of particular interest is the depiction of musician attire on a tombstone near the Church of Saint Gregory in Hatsarat village of New Bayazet. The cupbearer is shown in a pleated garment and a crown-like headdress with spikes; beside him, the person holding the Tree of Life with both hands wears a conical hat and a pleated robe. The saz player wears a crown resembling the cupbearer's headdress, a decorated spiked crown. The flute player has a plain crown on his head; the kamancha player wears a cap, while the santur player has a pointed conical hat. Of the two horn players, one wears a conical hat, the other wears a similar hat and a braided belt. The drummer is depicted without a hat. The musicians, as can be seen, had distinctive attire. Interestingly, the conical hats worn by musicians on the tombstone resemble those of the ancient gusan bards. The clothing depicted on tombstones shares many common features with earlier traditional attire, as seen in Armenian miniatures, architectural monuments, and other art forms. Thus, despite the influence of changing times, especially impactful on

clothing, the reliefs on tombstones show that traditional Armenian attire largely preserved its defining local characteristics, undergoing only certain inevitable changes.

Relief carvings on funerary monuments appear abundantly during two periods: first, in the early era, from the 4th to the 7th centuries, and then again from the 14th to the 17th centuries. However, these carvings, separated by nearly a full millennium, not only lack points of similarity but are also entirely opposed in both theme and content. The majority of scenes depicted on early-period monuments are tied to religious concepts, portraying scenes that reproduce evangelical, mythical, and miraculous narratives. In contrast, the carvings on 14th–17th century tombstones are not related to religious notions; they depict secular scenes specifically, not those of the feudal elite, but overwhelmingly the lives of the common people.

In historical Syunik, in the Sevan basin, and in the Kotayk and Ashtarak regions, among the tombstones we collected and studied, almost none of the carvings bear any connection to religious concepts. People who had endured centuries of catastrophe managed, even on tombstones evoking the somber idea of death, to express scenes from real life: the world-building labor of the peasant and the artisan, and festive eedding scenes filled with joy, lavish tables, and accompanied by musicians. These 14th–17th century monuments of folk art are among the clearest documents of genuine popular art and its realist, optimistic worldview.

As is known, the art of relief sculpture was only modestly developed among our people. The few known examples are mainly found on architectural monuments, depicting the secular or ecclesiastical feudal lords who commissioned them, with limited thematic range. They typically show either the builder holding a model of the monument, or mounted hunters. Tombstone carvings, however, differ even from these. They depict the everyday life and domestic world of the common people. Most importantly, each relief is like a broad canvas, featuring more than one person, always shown in action, posed appropriately and holding the tools suited to their work. Each carving presents a more or less complete representation of one aspect of daily life: the plowman, working with one to five yoked oxen, using a fully depicted plow; the craftsman in his workshop, engaged in his work with all necessary tools; the mounted hunter in open field, armed with the weaponry of the time, pursuing a deer or another animal. We also find full feast scenes, whether wedding or funerary, with a grand table at the center, loaded with food dishes and wine

jugs and pitchers, surrounded by seated men and women in diverse traditional clothing. musicians with their varied instruments are also present (sometimes even women), along with dancers or groups of dancers, and many similar scenes.

If in terms of artistic execution these carvings are relatively primitive, in terms of content and narrative structure they are invaluable sources for reconstructing not only the customs and values of the society of the time, but also, through them, penetrating deeper into earlier and darker periods to uncover the details of the popular worldview.

It is a well-known fact that in our written tradition the depiction of internal, everyday life is weakly expressed, and researchers exert enormous effort to reconstruct aspects of the people's domestic life and habits based on scattered fragments, words, and phrases. Ethnographers are mostly compelled to rely on 19th-century recordings, using retrospective comparisons and inferences to revive those brief references found in historical texts. Yet, in all such cases, both the ethnographic records and the historical accounts remain purely verbal descriptions of phenomena. By contrast, the carvings on tombstones are the material, visible, and tangible expressions of those phenomena. They provide highly valuable resources for the historian, the ethnographer, and the historian of art alike.