The Artistic Value of Tombstones of Noratus Cemetery

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A significant aspect of the historical, cultural, and spiritual heritage of the Armenian people finds its roots in the medieval period, with the art of gravestones holding a special place within this rich material culture. Among these, the monuments of the medieval cemetery of Noratus, adorned with sculptures, stand out as integral and essential components. These

tombstones serve as invaluable documentary evidence, offering profound insights into the lifestyle, beliefs, perceptions of the afterlife, and traditions of the people.

The late medieval sculptures found in Noratus are not only fascinating in terms of their craftsmanship and thematic richness but also serve as a chronicle of life itself which encapsulates various aspects of everyday life, including production, craftsmanship, occupations, and daily routines. Noratus Cemetery, second in size only to the historical cemetery of Jugha, holds immense significance in both Armenian history and culture. Through extensive fieldwork, a rich comparative material has been amassed, highlighting Noratus's distinction within the Gegharkunik region for its abundant tombstone and khachkar art. This distinction is evident in the diverse themes depicted, the abundance of sculptures, and the chronological range represented. The tombstones of Noratus are not just silent markers of the deceased but vibrant testimonies to the past, preserving the essence of medieval Armenian life and culture for future generations to discover and evaluate.

Introduction

A significant portion of the Armenian people's historical, cultural, and spiritual heritage dates back to the medieval period, and among this rich tangible culture, the art of funerary monuments holds a special place, though it has yet to receive comprehensive study. An integral and constituent part of medieval Armenian art is represented by the sculpted monuments of the medieval cemetery at Noratus. Noratus is primarily famous for its khachkar field, encompassing around 900 khachkars dating from the 9th to the 17th centuries. In addition to these notable khachkars, the tombstones, or tapanakars, also deserve scholarly attention and study.

The study of this topic is timely and justified, as these tombstones, having become documentary evidence, offer extensive insights into the people's everyday life, beliefs, perceptions of the afterlife, and traditions. These late-medieval carvings, interesting in terms of both execution and thematic content, chronicle daily life and vividly depict individual scenes related to production activities, crafts, occupations, and daily routines. Thus, these monuments serve as rich resources not only for art historians but also for ethnographers, cultural anthropologists, and archaeologists.

The research and documentation (even in photographic form) of the tombstone art in Gegharkunik Province are critically necessary due to Azerbaijani aggression. Recent events indicate that several villages in Gegharkunik are regularly targeted by Azerbaijani aggression. Furthermore, a component of Azerbaijan’s state policy involves the systematic destruction of medieval Armenian monuments of Christian origin, including monasteries, churches, chapels, and khachkar cemeteries.

Attempts to conduct iconographic and semantic analyses of medieval tombstone reliefs have been undertaken by S. Barkhudaryan, G. Karakhanyan, G. Levonyan, S. Saghumyan, A. Martirosyan, G. Sargsyan, and H. Petrosyan. Each of them has authored individual articles highlighting the development and unique characteristics of tombstone art.

In their article "Armenian Funerary Monuments and Their Reliefs," Barkhudaryan and Karakhanyan present the specific features of Armenian tombstones from the 14th to 17th centuries, revealing their historical and cultural significance [Barkhudaryan, Karakhanyan, 1959, 95-210]. Karakhanyan, in a separate article, addresses the study of secular reliefs of the medieval period, highlighting their everyday, mundane nature through various tombstone depictions and underscoring their importance for understanding the progression and patterns of sculptural art [Karakhanyan, 1975, 31-47].

S. Saghumyan provides insights into tombstone art by identifying the factors influencing its emergence, such as economic activities, prevailing socio-political conditions, lifestyles, occupations, and belief systems [Saghumyan, 1988, 50-61]. A. Martirosyan, in an individual article, examines the tombstone of Elikum at Noravank [Martirosyan, 1988, 154-159].

In his article "The Tombstones Speak," G. Sargsyan analyzes approximately a dozen tombstones, describing them in detail and exploring their semantic meanings [Sargsyan, 1963, 29-40]. Today, the most detailed studies of tombstone art are being conducted by H. Petrosyan. In separate articles, he discusses the causative, iconographic, and semantic aspects of late-medieval (15th-18th century) tombstone reliefs. He also examines the depiction of "child" and "scholar" figures in late-medieval sculpture, and conducts focused research on the tombstones of Vayots Dzor and Brnakot [Petrosyan, 2014, 301-308].

Among these studies, there has not been a dedicated examination and comprehensive description of the approximately one hundred tombstones located in the medieval cemetery of Noratus.

The choice of research methods for this study is dictated by the diversity and complexity of the existing issues. To examine Noratus tombstone art from the 15th to the 18th centuries, an integrated method of art-historical analysis has been employed, encompassing descriptive, historical, comparative, iconographic, stylistic, and source-based analyses.

Time and Environment of the Creation of Medieval Tombstones in Noratus

Noratus is one of Armenia's ancient settlements, known for its numerous monuments dating from the Bronze and Iron Ages. According to tradition, the patriarch Gegham conquered this region and established a settlement near the Heri village, on the banks of the Gavaraget River, naming it Noratuns. Sarkis Jalalyan, in his work *"Travels in Greater Armenia,"* describes Noratus as follows: *"It is a vast village located to the northeast of Lake Geghama (Lake Sevan), with wholesome air and sweet water. Surrounded by extensive fields, flower-covered fertile pastures, and traversed by the Gyogcha river filled with delicious fish. The inhabitants are Armenians; one hundred and eighty houses..."* [Jalalyants, 2016, 326].

In ancient and medieval written and epigraphic sources, the village is mentioned with over two dozen different phonetic and dialectal forms derived from the same root. Historian Hovhannes Draskhanakerttsi, in several passages of his *"History of Armenia,"* calls the settlement Noratunk or Noratuns [Draskhanakerttsi, 1996, 302]. Almost four centuries later, Stepanos Orbelian, meticulously documenting the history of Syunik, mentions the toponym as Noratuk. Catholicos Simeon Yerevantsi, in his work *"Jambr,"* alongside such place names as Bdni, Ghshlakh, and Buzkhana, also mentions Noratus and calls the Gregory the Illuminator church by the name Daputs, a monastery for nuns [Simeon Yerevantsi, 1873, 284]. Ghevond Alishan also mentions the forms Noratus and Noratuats, noting that at the time the village was known as Noratuz [Alishan, 1893, 45].

Mesrovb Smbatyants used the variant Noraduz, recorded several inscriptions, and described the village extensively [Smbatyants, 1895, 480-488]. The renowned ethnographer Yervand Lalayan also adopted the variant Noraduz in his work *"Gegharkunik or the province of New Bayazet,"* noting that Noratus belonged administratively to the rural community of Aghzibir. It is located northeast of the city of Nor Bayazet, about 3 km away, on a picturesque plain, which in ancient times was called Noradus or Noratuats village. Lalayan mentions that its inhabitants migrated from Alashkert and Artsap [Lalayan, A.T., 12].

The variant *Noraduz* is etymologically interpreted as *duz*, meaning flat or plain. Linguist Hrach Martirosyan explains the toponym as meaning *newly presented* or *newly granted*, and considers that the original form is *Noratus*, from which the variants *Noratvots* and *Noratuk* are derived. According to him, the final *-s* is not part of the root, but rather the accusative plural suffix *-s* [Martirosyan, 2014, p. 241]. Hovhannes Karagyozyan, on the other hand, connects it to the root *nar*, which means fire, and suggests that through popular etymology, it later turned into *nor* (meaning *new*) [Karagyozyan, 1998, p. 12].

From the 4th to the 9th centuries, Noratus was part of the Principality of Syunik, experiencing relatively peaceful conditions. In the late 910s, Noratus, as part of Gegharkunik, became part of the Bagratuni kingdom. According to an inscription from a khachkar dating to 996 AD, Kharip of Noratus acknowledged King Gagik, and around the year 1000, the royal agent Herakgh Hovnuni donated cultivated lands to St. Gregory (Daputs) Monastery on the order of the same King Gagik Shahanshah [Barkhudaryan, 1973, 18]. This indicates the village's new legal-administrative status, continuing thereafter as royal estate property.

The prosperity of Noratus continued under Zakaryan rule. After the liberation from Seljuk Turks, coastal lands passed into the jurisdiction of Ivane Zakaryan. Noratus regained its status as the administrative and spiritual center of the Tsmak province; a role it retained intermittently over nine centuries, from the 9th to the 18th centuries. Life thrived in Noratus from the 13th century onwards, as religious and secular leaders erected ornate khachkars commemorating their relatives, leaving significant historical records for subsequent generations.

In the early 1330s, Noratus once again came under the jurisdiction of the princely house of Syunik. Evidence of this is an inscription at the Daputs Monastery, located at the southern edge of the village. Although traditionally dated to the 13th century, architectural and epigraphic analyses indicate construction earlier than the 10th century.

Apart from the churches of St. Astvatsatsin and Daputs, numerous monuments are scattered throughout the village. Among these, the oldest khachkar in the village center dates from 1211 and commemorates the building of a bridge.

Beginning in the mid-9th century, with the revival of Armenian statehood under the Bagratunis, Noratus grew significantly in prominence. Prince Sahak of the Syunik dynasty, inheriting Geghama after his father Vasak's death, was succeeded by his son Vasak Gaburn, who married Princess Mariam, daughter of Ashot Bagratuni. Mariam is credited with constructing 40 churches in Gegharkunik, including the monasteries of Sevan, Shoghaga, and Vanevank. Noratus reached economic, political, and spiritual-cultural prosperity under Sahak, son of Vasak and Mariam, who made Noratus his official residence.

St. Astvatsatsin Church and Its Surrounding Tombstones

At the end of the 9th century, Prince Sahak built the St. Astvatsatsin (Holy Mother of God) Church, turning it into an episcopal seat. The domed hall of the church was entirely constructed with large hewn stones, and the surrounding area was enclosed by a walled courtyard. Scattered across this courtyard are numerous khachkars and tombstones (Fig. 2). According to our calculations, there are approximately 57 decorated tombstones here, excluding flat ones. S. Barkhudaryan recorded only five tombstone inscriptions from this area (Fig. 3). Here's the complete and accurate translation of your text:

For nearly eight centuries, Noratus served as the administrative, commercial, economic, cultural, and spiritual center of the Gegharkunik region. Prince Sahak likely passed away in the mid-910s, and according to Stepanos Orbelian, he was buried in Noratus. Orbelian mentions that Sahak, upon returning to his ancestral estate in Gegharkunik, lived briefly, passed away, and was buried near the entrance of the large church he had built [Orbelian, 1986, 188]. Today, by the western wall of the church, to the left of the entrance, one can still see a large quadrilateral-shaped tombstone with simple ornamentation characteristic of that period.

Hovhannes Shahkhatunyants recounts a legend: when Lezgi invaders captured Gegharkunik, they gathered the villagers inside and atop the St. Astvatsatsin Church, and then set the building on fire with its inhabitants inside [Shahkhatunyants, 2014, 366]. Whether Prince Sahak's tombstone was damaged during this incident remains unclear. Prior to recent renovations of St. Astvatsatsin Church (2017-2019), it was apparent that the tombstone had been displaced from its original position. After restoration works, it was secured on the newly paved ground (Fig. 4).

Suren Saghumyan notes a khachkar at the northern slope of Sevan Island, depicting a full-height figure raising his left hand, inscribed with letters typical of the 10th century, reading: "SAHAK, SERVANT OF GOD."[1] Although the inscription indicates a cleric, the clothing details - a cup and trousers, suggest a secular prince. Saghumyan speculates that this khachkar was likely transported from Noratus and is connected to Prince Sahak [Manukyan, 2000, 35]. However, this khachkar has not been located despite our efforts to verify its existence according to Saghumyan's provided coordinates.

[1]To verify the accuracy of this information, we tried to find the khachkar mentioned by Saghumyan, using the coordinates he himself provided, but we did not find any khachkar. We believe that this khachkar, like other khachkars, was later moved to Echmiadzin, although we also asked the local clergy to find out more, but they did not have any information about this khachkar.

Shoghyol Chapel

The Shoghyol chapel is located atop a hill about 2 kilometers northeast of the village. Built of carefully polished stones, only the lower portions of the walls remain today. The western wall contains embedded khachkars, and around the courtyard are remnants of monastic cells (Fig. 5). During our latest survey, we documented more than 70 khachkars and several tombstones, although their quantity at this site is not large. We found only ten cradle-shaped tombstones, two of them without any reliefs.

Near the western entrance of the chapel, half-buried in the soil, is an interesting tombstone dated 1606, measuring 100x58 cm. Initially, only the head of one figure and the torso of another were visible. After cleaning, detailed reliefs became visible. The first figure, with expressive facial features and a pronounced mustache, holds a platter with the eternity symbol in one hand and a jug in the other. Nearby are an inkpot, pen-case, and an object resembling a book. The second figure, portrayed in an interesting posture, removing his hat with one hand and holding a plate with the other, stands upon a stepped platform. Next is the depiction of the deceased on horseback, wearing a two-pronged crown, holding the reins with one hand, and in the other, a circular object with decorative branches. After removing moss from the rider's face, detailed features such as a beard and square earrings became clearly visible (Fig. 6).

It is intriguing to observe male figures wearing earrings. Vardan Hatsuni, in his work *"Armenian Ancient Costume,"* states that during the Tatar period earrings were worn even by commoners. The lamenting Kerovbe refers to a "valiant deceased" by saying: *"They took the earrings (or the rings) from his ears."* And another Paul, also from the group of "valiant dead," repeats the same lament: *"And from his ears they took the beloved earrings."* In several regions

of Asia and India, this adornment was also common among males, as we can observe among Arabs and Kurds. According to Hatsuni, the custom of wearing earrings in our region is more likely due to external influence than a continuation of the Sasanian-era tradition. These earrings were valuable and were removed during burial [Hatsuni, 1923, p. 224]. We also find depictions of men wearing earrings in several examples of tombstone carvings. (Fig. 7)

The whole relief is framed by a triple-thread braid pattern on three sides. The inscription occupies the concave upper section in two rows, while the date (1606) is placed on the side, below a linear cross[2]. Only part of the inscription was readable: “HOLY CROSS INTERCESSOR FOR PANOS...” The tombstone's southern side contains cross motifs enclosed within four braided arches, largely remaining underground. A decorative band occupies a large area above the arches, an ornamentation typical for filling cornices and lateral sections of khachkars.

Another remarkable tombstone, displaced and inverted into the soil, was found east of the chapel. It depicts a tailor sitting cross-legged, holding scissors, with a pronounced beard and a vertically folded cap. Beside him is a knife-like object and a round-ended item with three projecting rods, likely tailor's needles. Another figure holds a platter, next to a book image. The relief likely continues underground. The other side features cross compositions in seven arches and a roughly inscribed text beginning with the canonical phrase “Holy Cross Intercede” *(Սուրբ խաչս բարեխոս)*. After cleaning, the inscription, documented earlier by Barkhudaryan[3], became

[2] Armenian letters Թ and Վ (meaning - year) are on the bottom of the cross, then comes ՌԾԵ (dates to 1606).

[3] ՍԲ. ԽԱՉ[Ս] ԲԱՐԷԽԱԻՍ ... Ի ՓՐԿՈՒԹԻ. ԹՎ. :ռկբ: (1613) կազմող էլ[ի]աս... Ս. Բարխուդարյանի «ԴՎՀ», Պր. 4 , № 184:
“Holy Cross [be] merciful... for salvation. Year ՌԿԲ (1613).” Composed (or built) by Elias... S. Barkhudaryan’s “Dictionary of Armenian Inscriptions”, Volume 4, inscription No. 184.

visible, confirming that the tombstone was originally positioned differently. According to the inscription, it dates from 1613, and the master was Elias, though the deceased's name is lost (Fig. 8).

Medieval Large Cemetery

Noratus is best known for its large cemetery, situated on a vast plateau at the village's southern edge, comprising old and new sections. The old part starts from the plateau's western side, with burials initially arranged systematically from north to south, and includes two chapels built in 1211 and 1714 (Fig. 9). The newer section, where burials still take place, extends eastward and contains older khachkars and fragments brought from the old section, repurposed as tombstones. The Noratus cemetery is the second-largest Armenian medieval cemetery after the historical Julfa cemetery.

The Volumetric Structures, Decorative Motifs, and Types of Reliefs on Tombstones

Barkhudaryan notes that from the 9th to 10th centuries, simple, undecorated cradle-shaped tombstones were common throughout nearly all provinces of Armenia. Starting from the 12th century, flat, cradle-shaped, and ram-shaped tombstones appear [Barkhudaryan, 1959, 198]. Cradle-shaped tombstones became widespread during the 12th and 13th centuries, likely evolving from the curved refinement of the pointed, ridge-shaped tombstones [Mirijanyan, Aghayan, 2020, 92]. It seems impossible to distinctly define the chronological boundaries of the emergence and distribution of flat and cradle-shaped tombstones.

Being the largest cemetery in Armenia, Noratus provides perhaps the most accurate representation of the evolution and refinement of tombstone art. Here, flat and cradle-shaped tombstones coexist side-by-side; sometimes even within a single burial plot, likely belonging to a

single family, we encounter both types. Flat tombstones are either fully covered with inscriptions devoid of imagery or bear only schematic linear images, although some stand out for their detailed rendering. Certain established rules and principles guided the decoration of tombstones, yet deviations from these general patterns are always noticeable. Flat tombstones usually lack depictions of daily life or thematic scenes; they typically feature either an image of the deceased and an inscription or solely an inscription covering the entire surface. When a staff is depicted on flat tombstones, it unquestionably belonged to a clerical figure (Fig. 10).

The northern side of cradle-shaped tombstones typically contains three to five arched niches, each adorned with a sculpted cross, while the southern side bears thematic relief scenes (Fig. 11, 12).

On frontal surfaces, there are depictions such as an eagle with outspread wings clutching a lamb, symbols of eternity, crosses (sometimes accompanied by birds), a jug, or occasionally animals (Fig. 13). Borders commonly include double-thread braid motifs, double-row wedge-shaped patterns, or twisted-rope motifs. Craftsmen employed decorative motifs judiciously and sparingly. Tombstones were primarily carved from solid basalt or tuff blocks and mounted upon two-step pedestals.

From the 15th century onwards, human and animal reliefs appear frequently on cradle-shaped tombstones. The primary "hero" of these reliefs is the deceased, represented in an idealized form within an idealized environment. Frequently, the deceased is depicted crowned with a three-petal royal diadem or portrayed simply as a farmer with a plow, a shepherd with a crook and pipe, a craftsman with tools, or a scholar with writing implements. The deceased figure often appears with crossed arms on the chest or holding a cross. The positioning of the feet

varies, pointing either northward or southward. Special attention should be given to mounted warriors, most often depicted armed and engaged in hunting scenes or spearing a dragon beneath their feet. Regardless of the thematic content, indispensable elements include vessels such as pitchers and cups, as well as tables laden with food. Many vessels bear symbols of eternity, highlighting their symbolic significance. Literary sources and the shapes of these vessels suggest they were made of clay or metal, vividly illustrating everyday objects and utensils prevalent during the period.

Noratus Cemetery, as the largest Armenian cemetery, contains virtually all common thematic subjects found across various Armenian regions. Dominant themes include farming scenes, feasts, and hunting episodes. Added to these are reliefs devoted to craftsmanship, wedding celebrations, and scholarly pursuits. Often, tombstone imagery cannot be limited to one theme but appears as a synthesis of several motifs. Additionally, numerous tombstones portray only the deceased without supplementary elements or scenes complemented only by crosses.

Interestingly, although the craftsmen were skilled khachkar (cross-stone) artists who produced outstanding pieces noted for their intricate carvings and sophisticated ornamentation, their work on tombstones did not reflect the same mastery. Often, cross motifs were executed with greater skill than human reliefs on the same tombstone. It seems these master craftsmen struggled with human depictions, which sometimes appear to have been created by less experienced apprentices. This discrepancy can be explained by the fact that canonical principles for representing sacred imagery had evolved and been standardized over centuries, while secular daily-life scenes were relatively novel, particularly during the 16th century, and hence less developed. Furthermore, the complexity and abundance of relief decoration depended significantly on payment, craftsmanship skills, and experience. The relentless passage of time

has also left its mark, covering the reliefs with moss or eroding their surfaces. Analysis of stylistic similarities in relief and cross motifs suggests that only two or three master craftsmen, along with their apprentices, worked here. Khachkar inscriptions provide essential information about these craftsmen. Among known artists are Kiram, Avanes, Hovhannes, Bab, Nerses, Mkrtich, and Melikset.

Tombstones of Julfa Armenians

According to inscriptions published in the 4th volume of the "Divan of Armenian Epigraphy" and our own studies, it became clear that Armenians from Julfa had settled in Noratus. Let us examine two tombstones belonging to the Julfa Armenian families. In the northeastern part of the cemetery, there is a tombstone whose lower relief section was entirely buried beneath the soil. After cleaning this section, intriguing images were uncovered, and the scene became complete. The southern side features a horseman shooting at a gazelle with a rifle. The master skillfully depicted the wounded animal, its front and rear legs folded, as if writhing in pain. The horseman's attire and weapons are meticulously detailed. This figure wears a two-pointed hat, has expressive facial features, and holds the rifle with both hands (albeit in a slightly unnatural pose). A dagger hangs from his belt, and a hunted animal is tied to the saddle of his horse.

Next is depicted another figure holding the horse's reins in one hand and scales in the other, seated cross-legged. To the right of the figure holding the scales, a pitcher and cup - common elements of such reliefs, are depicted. Then follows the image of a loaded donkey led by another figure whose body itself becomes part of the braided ornamental frame. The figures of the donkey and the man with scales resemble the motifs of a tombstone located near the western entrance of St. Astvatsatsin Church. Based on stylistic similarities, it is probable that the same master worked on both tombstones, although the master's name has not survived. All figures have expressive faces, notably narrow eyes, and finely detailed garments and hats. The tombstone’s northern side features four arches, each containing a carved cross. Overall, this

tombstone stands out from others due to its high level of craftsmanship, well-organized composition of figures, and state of preservation (Fig. 14).

The presence of the figure with scales becomes clearer after reading the inscription, located in the concave upper portion of the tombstone. It reads as follows: "I, Tiratur from Julfa, erected this cross for the intercession of Melkum Kaspar, brother from Julfa."[4] Thus, it becomes evident that the deceased was from Julfa. Julfa Armenians were renowned merchants, a fact the artist emphasized with the image of scales. It should be noted this is not the only tombstone belonging to Julfa Armenians. Apparently, the same Tiratur erected another tombstone for the salvation of Nerses' soul [Divan, volume 4, №170][5]. Thus, there are tombstones belonging to the same Julfa Armenian family inexplicably located far from each other.

Barkhudaryan notes in the Divan that east of St. Astvatsatsin Church, opposite Tonoyan's house, there is a group of tombstones, apparently the family cemetery of Julfa Armenians, of which only one is dated (1553)[6]. Immediately at the western entrance of the church, we see another large tombstone stylistically resembling Tiratur's tombstone, indicating they may be the work of the same master (Fig. 15, 16).

[4] Reading the protocol from our field notes. We would like to thank art historian David Ghazaryan for assisting in reading the protocol.
[5] We have not yet been able to find this tombstone.
[6] It should be noted that we tried to find this family cemetery, but now the village school is located east of the church, there are no residential houses, and the local residents did not recognize anyone with the surname Tonoyan from the nearby houses.

The Bab Family Plot

During our recent visit to Noratus Cemetery, in its northeastern part, we discovered a small burial plot consisting of four identical tombstones. All four tombstones have the same dimensions, each northern face featuring identical images of a pitcher and plate. On the southern sides, three tombstones depict the deceased with a triple-lobed crown and hands crossed upon the chest. All three reliefs are enclosed in identical ornamental frames, which highlight the figures without completely framing the entire stone. On one tombstone, the deceased's feet are not depicted; on the other two, they point northwards. Three of the four tombstones bear inscriptions, three have crosses on their frontal sides, and a pointed arch on the other. Given their iconographic and stylistic similarities, these four tombstones are likely the work of a single master (Fig. 17). Below are their inscriptions[7]:

1. "THIS IS THE RESTING PLACE OF GABREL[8], SON OF SARGIS, YEAR 1725"

2. "THIS IS THE RESTING PLACE OF MARKAR, SON OF BAB, YEAR 1748"

3. "THIS IS THE RESTING PLACE OF HABAB, SON OF SARGIS, YEAR 1748"[9]

[7] Presented by us for the first time.

[8] It is an interesting personal name, the etymology of which is missing in Hr. Acharyan's Dictionary of Personal Names. In a conversation with Khachik Harutyunyan, a doctor of political science, an interesting explanation was given, linking it to the rural expression of the personal name Karapet.

[9] 1. ԱՅՍԷ ՀԱՆԳԻՍՏ ՍԱՐՔԻՍԻ ՈՐԴԻ ԿԱՊՈՒԵԼԻՆՅ Թ ՌՃՀԴ (1725թ.) 2. ԱՅՍԷ ՀԱՆԳԻՍՏ ԲԱԲԻ ՈՐԴԻ ՄԱՐՔԱՐԻՆ Թ ՌՃՂԷ (1748թ.) 3. ԱՅՍԷ ՀԱՆԳԻՍՏ ՍԱՐՔԻՍԻ ՈՐԴԻ ՀԱԲԱԲԻՆ Թ ՌՃՂԷ (1748թ.)

The name "Bab" is known from a khachkar inscription mentioning "carved by Bab" (1703), indicating a khachkar master by that name. Perhaps the Bab mentioned in the third inscription is the same craftsman. Interestingly, this burial plot lies immediately behind the khachkar carved by Bab.

Conclusions

In conclusion, due to the absence of a comprehensive scholarly study on the tombstones of Noratus, our research mainly relies on our own fieldwork. Having visited approximately ten villages within Gegharkunik Province, in addition to Noratus, and acquiring rich comparative material, we can assert that Noratus stands out in this region for its rich tombstone and khachkar art, diverse thematic content, abundance of reliefs, and chronological scope. Thanks to their faithful representation of historical reality, the reliefs of Noratus tombstones serve as essential and irreplaceable resources not only for studying sculptural art but also for understanding the everyday life and culture of medieval Armenia.

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