

# REFLECTIONS ON SPATIAL AND STRUCTURAL TRAITS OF CEMETERIES: THE CASE OF BRONZE AND IRON AGE SYUNIK, ARMENIA

## MEZARLIKLARIN YAPISAL VE MEKANSAL NİTELİKLERİNE YÖNELİK DÜŞÜNCELER: ERMENİSTAN SYUNIK BRONZ VE DEMİR ÇAĞ ÖRNEĞİ

### Makale Bilgisi

Başvuru: 27 Ocak 2018  
Hakem Değerlendirmesi: 6 Şubat 2018  
Kabul: 30 Ekim 2018  
DOI Numarası: 10.22520/tubaar.2018.os.01.010

### Article Info

Received: January 27, 2018  
Peer Review: February 6, 2018  
Accepted: October 30, 2018  
DOI Number: 10.22520/tubaar.2018.os.01.010

Hayk AVETISYAN \* - Artak GNUNI \*\*

Henrik DANIELYAN \*\*\*- Arsen BOBOKHYAN \*\*\*\*

**Keywords:** Armenia, Syunik, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Topography, Environment, Structure of Cemeteries.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ermenistan, Syunik, Tunç Çağı, Demir Çağı, Topografya, Mezarlıkların Yapısı

### ABSTRACT

*The present contribution considers problems of spatial distribution and structural traits of cemeteries in the Bronze and Iron Age Armenia (ca. 3rd - first half of the 1st millennia BC) with special reference to its southern regions (Syunik). Being situated within various natural environments, the cemeteries in southern Armenia of the mentioned period demonstrate own principles of internal structure (concerning locations of tombs within cemeteries, formation of the cemetery centers and intra-cemetery complexes) which are visible within the common South Caucasian cultural zone.*

\* Dr., Professor, Yerevan State University, Alek Manoukian 1, 0025 Yerevan, Republic of Armenia, E-mail: hykavetisyan@yahoo.com

\*\* Dr., Yerevan State University, Alek Manoukian 1, 0025 Yerevan, Republic of Armenia, E-mail: telepinus@rambler.ru

\*\*\*MA, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, Armenian Academy of Sciences, Charentsi 15, 0025 Yerevan, Republic of Armenia, E-mail: henrikh.danielyan@gmail.com

\*\*\*\*Dr., Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, Armenian Academy of Sciences, Charentsi 15, 0025 Yerevan, Republic of Armenia, E-mail: arsenbobokhyan@yahoo.com

**ÖZET**

*Elinizdeki çalışma, güney bölgelerinden (Syunik) hareketle Bronz ve Demir Çağı'nda Ermenistan'daki (yaklaşık olarak MÖ 3. bin yıl ile 1. binin ilk yarısı) mezarlıkların mekansal dağılım ve yapısal özelliği ile ilgili problemleri ele alır. Çok çeşitli doğal çevrelerde yer alan Ermenistan'ın bahsedilen döneme ait mezarlıkları, Güney Kafkasya ortak kültürel kuşağında da görülebilen kendi iç yapısının özgünlüğünü ve dinamiklerini (mezarların mezarlıklardaki lokasyonları, mezarlık merkezlerinin oluşumu ve mezarlık içindeki komplekslerle ilgili olarak) yansıtır.*

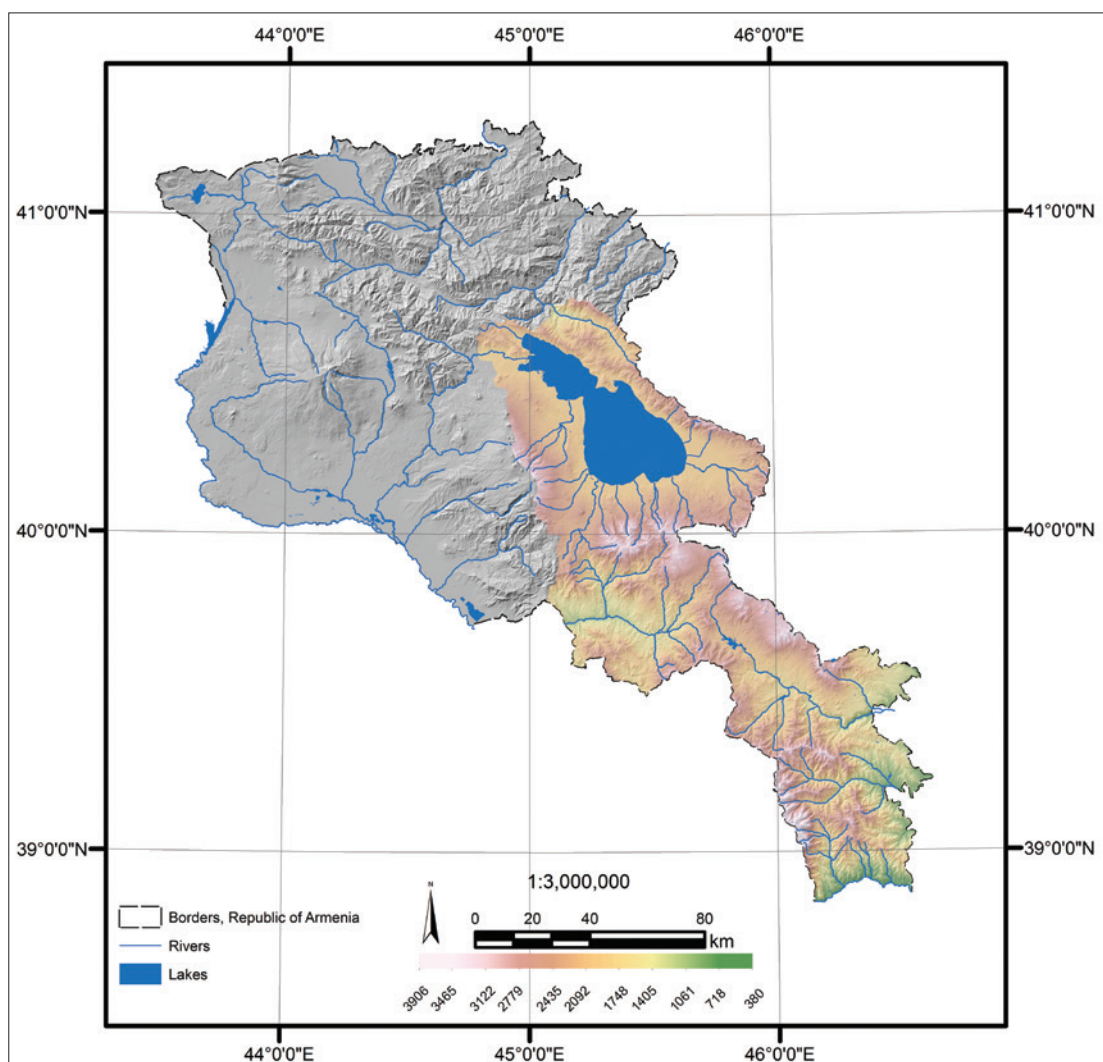


Figure 1: Map of the Republic of Armenia, Marked with the Region Under Investigation (H. Danielyan) / *H. Danielyan'ın Nezareti Altında Bölgeler Şeklinde İşaretlenen Ermenistan Cumhuriyeti Haritası.*

## INTRODUCTION

In every society the burial rite belongs to the group of important passage rituals reflecting various spiritual and social aspects. Archaeological record enables to trace back many of such aspects. The present article reflects on one of them connected to spatial and structural traits of cemeteries and using the case of the Bronze and Iron Age (ca. 3<sup>rd</sup>- first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC) Armenia, particularly its southern regions (historical Syunik) (Fig. 1, 2). Practically are considered interconnections of the following three levels: the burial itself, the burial complex (super-structures, structures in surroundings, stelae) and the burial group (amalgamations of burials and their components). The complete study of the problem is possible only in case of common reflection of all these components<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> for theory cf. Alyokshin 1986; Ol'khovskij 1986; Mel'nik 1990; Williams 2003.

## SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION

Regarding the temporal-spatial developments of burials/ groups of burials in Armenia we should note that, if during the Neolithic-Chalcolithic period they are placed under the floors of dwellings within the settlements, then since the Early Bronze Age (ca. 3000 BC) cemeteries appear also beyond the settlements, connected with urbanization processes<sup>2</sup>. They can be located by the settlements (e.g. Norabak, Tsovak, Karchaghbyur, Harzhis, Fig. 3), in their neighbourhood (Tsovak 2, Ayrk, Fig. 5), or beyond them even in high altitude mountainous zones (Nazeli, Sev Sar, Fig. 8-10)<sup>3</sup>. As a rule, the cemeteries are located in the following environments.

<sup>2</sup> cf. Gnuni 2010: 99-100

<sup>3</sup> cf. Biscione/Hmayakyan/Parmegiani 2002; Avetisyan/Gnuni/Bobokhyan/Sargsyan 2015.

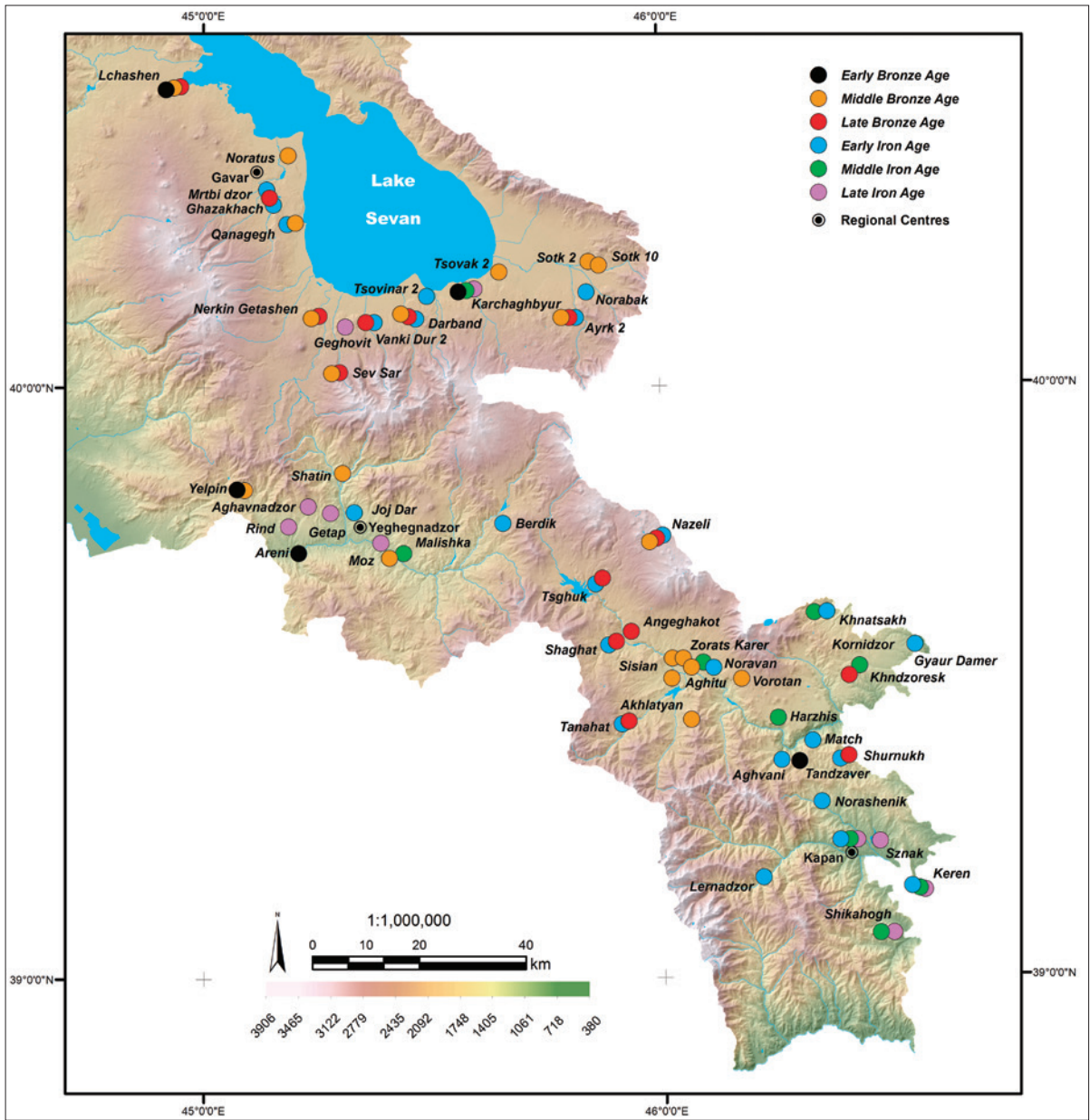


Figure 2: Main Archaeological Sites Mentioned in the Text (H. Danielyan) / *H. Danielyan'ın Metninde Bahsi Geçen Ana Arkeolojik Sit Alanları.*



Figure 3: Cemetery of Harzhis, Barrow (H. Avetisyan) / *Harzhis Mezarlığı, (H. Avetisyan).*



Figure 4: Cemetery of Harzhis, Demarcation Line (H. Avetisyan) / *Harzhis Mezarlığı, Sınır Çizgisi (H. Avetisyan).*

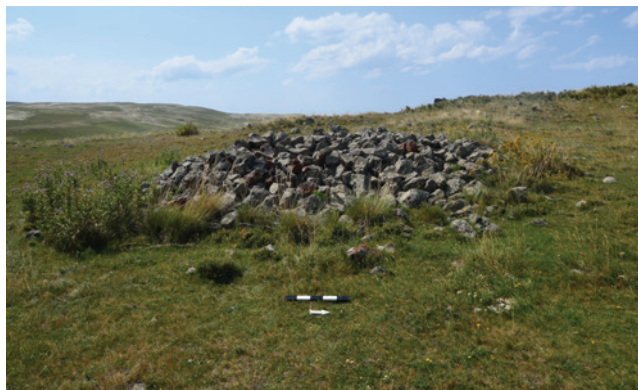


Figure 5: Cemetery Beyond Ayrk, Barrow (A. Gnuni) / *Ayrk'in Ötesindeki Mezarlık, (A. Gnuni)*.



Figure 7: Cemetery of Nazeli, Barrow on the Slope of The Hill (A. Bobokhyan) / *Nazeli Mezarlığı, (A. Babokhyan)*.



Figure 6: Cemetery Beyond Ayrk, Demarcation Line (A. Gnuni) / *Ayrk'in Ötesindeki Mezarlık, Sınır Çizgisi (A. Gnuni)*.



Figure 8: Cemetery of Nazeli, Barrow on the Plateau (A. Bobokhyan) / *Nazeli Mezarlığı, (A. Babokhyan)*.

Peak of the hill: Such locations of cemeteries are attested in Tsovinar<sup>4</sup>, Ayrk, Artsvanist<sup>5</sup>, Tanahat and Akhlatyan<sup>6</sup>. In this context the tombs by the village Sarnakunk should be mentioned, as well as those in pasturelands of the mount Nazeli, on the conical height of 3200 m a.s.l. (investigations by H. Avetisyan, A. Gnuni, A. Bobokhyan), cf. also the so called “Giants’ tombs” on Small Ararat on the height of 3900 m a.s.l.<sup>7</sup>.

Slope of the hill: Cemeteries were often spread also on the slopes of the hills, which is obvious in cases of Keren, Angeghakot, Aghvan<sup>8</sup>, Joj Dar<sup>9</sup>, Qanagegh<sup>10</sup>, Ghazakhach<sup>11</sup>, Nazeli (Fig. 7). Such disposition of tombs could be conditioned by existence of settlements on the peaks. Similar phenomenon is attested in the cemetery by the fortress Tsovak, to be located on a natural amphitheatre, on the slope of the hill<sup>12</sup> cf. also similar cemeteries in

Khndzoresk and Shaghat, in<sup>13</sup>.

Plateau: Cemeteries can be located on plateaus, among them those of Moz, Elpin, Murad tapa, Aylagh, Shahumyan, Tsg huk, Noravan, Sev Sar as well as Nazeli (Fig. 8)<sup>14</sup>. The cemeteries of Qanagegh<sup>15</sup> and Berdik<sup>16</sup> are situated on flat capes.

Road and gorge: Very seldom tombs appear along the ancient roads and gorges. One such case is attested in the cemetery of Darband<sup>17</sup>.

Water basin: The existence of a water basin plays an important role for locating cemeteries<sup>18</sup>. Between the river Artsvajur and its tributary Sarnajur the cemetery Erku jur is placed, on the banks of the rivers Astghadzor and Argichi - those of Vanki Dur 2 and Lernakert<sup>19</sup>, on the bank of Gavaraget is located the cemetery of Mrtbi dzor<sup>20</sup>. The cemeteries of Sisian and Akhlatyan

<sup>4</sup> Lalayan 1907: 180

<sup>5</sup> Biscione/Hmayakyan/Parmegiani 2002: 116

<sup>6</sup> Hasratyan 1985: 168

<sup>7</sup> Protokoli 1879: 32, 39, 49

<sup>8</sup> Avetisyan/Gnuni/Bobokhyan/Sargsyan 2015: 90

<sup>9</sup> Biscione/Hmayakyan/Parmegiani 2002: 147

<sup>10</sup> Areshian 1981: 2

<sup>11</sup> Lalayan 1907: 184, 186

<sup>12</sup> Biscione/Hmayakyan/Parmegiani 2002: 98

<sup>13</sup> Avetisyan/Gnuni/Bobokhyan/Sargsyan 2015: 90-91

<sup>14</sup> Xnkikyan 2002: 58

<sup>15</sup> Areshian: 1981, 2-4

<sup>16</sup> Avetisyan/Gnuni/Bobokhyan/Sargsyan 2015: 89

<sup>17</sup> Biscione/Hmayakyan/Parmegiani 2002: 144

<sup>18</sup> cf. Ivanovskij 1911: 88, 146, 153

<sup>19</sup> Biscione/Hmayakyan/Parmegiani 2002: 138, 157, 193

<sup>20</sup> Piliposyan 1991: 31

are situated on the bank of the river Vorotan and its tributary Ayri<sup>21</sup>. Along the previous land line of the Lake Sevan the cemeteries of Adiaman, Tsovinar, Tsovak 2 are stretched<sup>22</sup>. Cemeteries can be located also along watersheds, such as the one in Shurnukh<sup>23</sup> and Keren<sup>24</sup>.

## PROBLEM OF DEMARCATION

Natural environment was often perceived as a symbolic border for many cemeteries. At the same time natural borders could be assigned also by special masonry such as in Harzhis or Ayrk (Fig. 4, 6). In Berdik a “cyclopean” wall is built along the small ravine bordering the cemetery in the east<sup>25</sup>. In the same way, in Zorats Karer the border of the cemetery is assigned by a row of menhirs. If in the enumerated examples the artificial border defines the natural one, then in the cemetery of Kapan it is an independent factor: excavations here revealed a single row wall bordering the cemetery from the northern and north-eastern sides<sup>26</sup>. In some cases also the fortress wall could be perceived as a symbolic border of the cemetery, which is attested in such fortresses as Tsovak and Tsovinar<sup>27</sup>. A peculiar way of bordering is known from Khnatsakh, where a sacrificial altar was placed on the outside edge of the western wall of the fortress, on the way to the cemetery<sup>28</sup>.

## STRUCTURAL TRAITS

Location of tombs in cemeteries: Two ways of tombs' locations are visible thus far: by rows<sup>29</sup> and from top to bottom<sup>30</sup>.

Formation of the cemetery center: The center is in fact a specific axis, around which the sacred area is formed. Natural units could play the role of a center, such as in the cemetery of Ghazakhach, where the holed rock played a role of such center, around which the tombs were concentrated<sup>31</sup>. While in Joj Dar burial structures are concentrated around the cave<sup>32</sup>.

In other cases the man-made structure or the altar can play such a role. So, in the cemetery of Berdik a central position was held by the structure encircled with a



Figure 9: Platform of Sev Sar, With Rock-Carvings on Stone-Plates (A. Bobokhyan) / *Kaya Tabakası Üzerindeki Oymalarla Sev Sar Platformu* (A. Babokhyan).



Figure 10: Cromlechs Around the Platform of Sev Sar (A. Bobokhyan) / *Sev Sar Platformu Etrafindaki Kromlekler*: (A. Babokhyan).

powerful cyclopean wall<sup>33</sup>. The case of Sev Sar should be also considered in this context: this is a stepped platform with a round plan, taking a predominant position in extensive plateau. The stones placed on the platform are covered by rock carvings and the cromlechs spread in its surroundings (Fig. 9-10)<sup>34</sup>.

The tomb as a main element of ancestors' cult forms a sacred area around itself, with a predominant position in its neighborhood. In the cemetery of Zorats Karer a central position is held by the tomb with a pseudo arch, surrounded by menhirs<sup>35</sup>. The symbolic center of the cemetery could differ from geographic center, such as in the cemetery Tsovinar 2, where bigger tombs are concentrated at the edge of the cemetery, and in Vanki Dsor 2 to be located on the left bank of the river<sup>36</sup>.

Parallel to the social developments, separate sub-centers

<sup>21</sup> Avetisyan/Badalyan/Gevorgyan/Khnikyan 2000: 3

<sup>22</sup> Biscione/Hmayakyan/Parmegiani 2002: 116, 117

<sup>23</sup> Avetisyan/Gnuni/Bobokhyan/Sargsyan 2015: 89

<sup>24</sup> Gnuni 2011: 87

<sup>25</sup> Avetisyan/Gnuni/Bobokhyan/Sargsyan 2015: 89

<sup>26</sup> Avetisyan/Gnuni/Bobokhyan/Sargsyan 2015: 100

<sup>27</sup> Biscione/Hmayakyan/Parmegiani 2002: 98, 147

<sup>28</sup> Avetisyan/Gnuni/Bobokhyan/Sargsyan 2015: 100

<sup>29</sup> Zagalu, Patshar: Lalayan 1906: 6, 11; Lalayan 1907: 166

<sup>30</sup> Keren, excavations by A. Gnuni

<sup>31</sup> Lalayan 1907: 186

<sup>32</sup> investigations by H. Avetisyan, A. Gnuni, A. Bobokhyan

<sup>33</sup> Avetisyan/Gnuni/Bobokhyan/Sargsyan 2015: 89

<sup>34</sup> investigations by H. Avetisyan, A. Gnuni, A. Bobokhyan,

<sup>35</sup> Xnkikyan 2002: 27; cf. Lisitsian 1938: 709-721

<sup>36</sup> Biscione/Hmayakyan/Parmegiani 2002: 137, 157



Figure 11: Cemetery of Keren, Tomb 106, Pithos Burials on Cremation Platform (A. Gnuni) / *Keren Mezarlığı, 106 Numaralı Mezar, Kremasyon Platformu Üzerindeki Pitos Gömütleri (A. Gnuni)*.



Figure 12: Cemetery Of Kapan, Complex 4, Platform With Deposited Finds (A. Gnuni) / *Kapan Mezarlığı, 4. Kompleks, Tortulaşmış Buluntuların Yer Aldığı Platform (A. Gnuni)*.

were formed in cemeteries, around which the tombs were grouped. So, in Joj Dar small tombs are grouped around bigger ones, sometimes common walls are used<sup>37</sup>. In Yeghegnadzor and Moz the groups of tombs are located around barrows<sup>38</sup>. In the tomb N 106 of Keren two pithos burials were concentrated under a single barrow, made on the platform intended for cremation. The first pithos was buried and the second one was placed on the

platform with surface. After making burials, the platform was covered by the common tomb (Fig. 11)<sup>39</sup>.

**Intra-cemetery complexes:** In this group are included non-central altars within the cemeteries, to be disconnected with separate tombs. An excellent example of such an altar was fixed in the cemetery of Kapan (Complex 4), with dozen small clay vessels and rich metal finds on the corresponding platform (Fig. 12)<sup>40</sup>.

The so called “Giants’ houses” should be also considered here: they are barrow-like stone accumulations with rectangular cells in the central part, which appear also in the context of cemeteries such as Murad tapa<sup>41</sup>.

Also roads can be mentioned within the group of intra-cemetery complexes. Such paths are known in Berdik, where the road, bordered with orthostatic walls, branches off to separate tombs and to the central structure. Another road, bordered by two-layered walls, rises from the neighboring small ravine and ends near the three big tombs of the cemetery, leaving “an impression of a road of the dead”<sup>42</sup>. In Kuri Kharaba stone rows, directed from east to west, lead to the tombs<sup>43</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Being situated in different natural environments (peak or slope of the hill, plateau, road/gorge, water basin), the Bronze and Iron Age cemeteries of southern Armenia were separated from their environment and had own principles of internal structure. The center of the cemetery was an axis, around which the sacred area was formed. Both the units of nature and the man-made structures could play the role of such centers. Parallel to social developments, separate sub-centers were formed in cemeteries, around which the tombs were grouped. The cemeteries, which appeared at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, demonstrate stable traits of organization of sacred area during the period under consideration.

<sup>37</sup> Avetisyan/Gnuni/Bobokhyan/Sargsyan 2015: 98

<sup>38</sup> Xnkikyan 2002: 70

<sup>39</sup> excavations by A. Gnuni, A. Tadevosyan

<sup>40</sup> excavations by A. Gnuni, G. Khachatryan, A. Tadevosyan

<sup>41</sup> investigations by H. Avetisyan, A. Gnuni, A. Bobokhyan

<sup>42</sup> Avetisyan/Gnuni/Bobokhyan/Sargsyan 2015: 102

<sup>43</sup> Ivanovskij 1911: 20

## REFERENCES

ALYOKSHIN, V.A. 1986

Social'naya struktura i pogrebal'nij obryad drevnezemel'cheskikh obshchestv (*Social Structure and Burial Rite of Ancient Agricultural Societies*). Leningrad, Nauka.

ARESHIAN, GR. 1981

"Pahpanakan pегhumner Qanageghum" ("Rescue Excavations in Kanagegh"), *Haykakan KhSH-um 1979-1980 tt. dashtayin hnagitakan ashkhatankneri ardyunknerin nvirvats nstashrjani zekutsumneri tezisner (Theses of Reports of the Session Dedicated to the Results of Archaeological Fieldworks Carried out in Armenian SSR during 1979-1980)* (Ed. B. Arakelyan), Yerevan, Academy of Sciences Press: 2-4.

AVETISYAN, H., GNUNI, A., BOBOKHYAN, A., SARGSYAN, G. 2015

*Bronz-erkatedaryan Syuniqi srbazan landshafty (The Sacred Landscape of the Bronze and Iron Age Syunik)*. Yerevan.

AVETISYAN, P., BADALYAN, R., GEVORGYAN, A., KHNKIKYAN, O. 2000

"Peghumner Sisiani dambaranadashtum" ("Excavations in the Cemetery of Sisian"), *Haykakan qaghakakrtutiuny hnagujn zhamanaknerits minchev kristoneutyany yndunumy (Armenian Civilization since the Ancient Times till the Adoption of Christianity)* (Ed. A. Kalantaryan), Yerevan, Academy of Sciences Press: 3-4.

BISCIONE, R., HMAKYAN, S., PARMEGANI, N. 2002.

*The North-Eastern Frontier: Urartians and Non-Urartians in the Sevan Lake Basin I, The Southern Shores, Documenta Asiana VII, Roma*. Istituto di studi sulle civiltà dell'Egeo e del Vicino Oriente.

GNUNI, A. 2011

"Novonaydennij mogil'nik v predgor'yakh Syunika", (*New Found Cemetery on the Foothills of Syunik*), *Arkheologiya, etnologiya i fol'kloristika Kavkaza (Archaeology, Ethnology and Folkloristics of the Caucasus)*. Tbilisi, 87-93.

GNUNI, A. 2010

"Hayastanum qaghakagoyatsman himnahartsi shurj", (*Towards the Problem of Urbanisation in Armenia*), *Vem Journal 4*, Yerevan: 89-111.

HASRATYAN, M. 1985

*Patma-hnagitakan usumnasirutyunner (Historical-Archaeological Studies)*. Yerevan.

IVANOVSKIJ, A.A. 1911

*Po Zakavkazyu (Along the Transcaucasus), Materiali po arkheologii Kavkaza (Materials on Archaeology of the Caucasus)*, VIII. Moscow, A. I. Mamontova Press.

LALAYAN, E. 1906

"Nor Bayazet kam Gegharqunik, nakhapatmakan shrjan", (*New Bayazet or Gegharkunik, Prehistoric Period*), *Azgagrakan Handes (Ethnographical Review)* XIV. Tbilisi: 6-34.

LALAYAN, E. 1907

"Nor Bayazet kam Gegharqunik, nakhapatmakan shrjan", (*New Bayazet or Gegharkunik, Prehistoric Period*), *Azgagrakan Handes (Ethnographical Review)* XV. Tbilisi: 164-206.

LISITSIAN, St. 1938

"Koshun-Dashskoye megaliticheskoe poseleniye v Sisiane, Zangezur" ("The Megalithic Settlement of Koshun-Dash in Sisian, Zangezur"), *Sbornik statey posvyashchyennykh akademiku N.Y. Marru (Collection of Articles in memoriam of Academician N. Y. Marr)*. Moscow-Leningrad: 709-721.

MEL'NIK, V.I. 1990

"Pogrebal'naya praktika i pogrebal'nij obryad" ("Burial Practice and Burial Rite"), *Kratkie Soobshcheniya Instituta Arkheologii (Brief Reports of the Institute of Archaeology)* 201. Moscow: 73-77.

OL'KHOVSKIJ, V.S. 1986

"Pogrebal'no-pominal'naya obryadnost' v sisteme vzaimosvyazannikh ponyatij", (*Burial Rite in the System of Interrelated Concepts*), *Sovetskaya arkheologiya (Soviet Archaeology)* 1. Moscow: 65-76.

PILIPOSYAN, A. 1991

"Peghumner Sevani kolektori Noratusi hn'avayrum", (*Excavations in the Site of Noratus of the Sevan Collector*), *Hayastani hanrapetutiumum 1989-1990 tt. dashtayin hnagitakan ashkhatankneri ardyunknerin nvirvats nstashrjani zekutsumneri tezisner (Theses of Reports of the Session Dedicated to the Results of Archaeological Fieldworks Carried out in the Republic of Armenia during 1989-1990)* (Ed. G. Tiratsyan). Yerevan, Academy of Sciences Press: 29-31.



## PROTOKOLI 1879

*Protokoli podgotovitel'nogo komiteta V arkheologicheskogo syezda v Tiflise (Minutes of the Preparatory Committee of the V Archaeological Conference in Tbilisi). Moscow, Sinodal'naya tipografiya.*

WILLIAMS, H. (ED.) 2003

*Archaeologies of Remembrance: Death and Memory in Past Societies.* New York.

XNKIKYAN, O.S. 2002

*Syunik during Bronze and Iron Ages.* Barrington.