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VISHAPS OF THE GEGHAMA MOUNTAINS. NEW DISCOVERIES AND PROPEDEUTICS TO A HISTORY OF RESEARCH

Arsen Bobokhyan, Alessandra Gilibert, Pavol Hnila

Introduction

Vishaps (Armenian for “dragon”) are stelae carved with animal imagery found in the high-altitude summer pastures of modern Armenia and neighboring regions (particularly in the regions of Javakheti/Trialeti, Nakhijevan, and around Erzurum/Kars). The vishaps are highly symbolic artifacts dating to the second millennium BC. They probably owe their name to local folk tales where dragons are monstrous giants living in the mountains or, perhaps, the name may be due to a misunderstanding of the imagery carved on them (actually, there are no dragons on the stelae, but rather, fishes and bovid hides). Vishaps are located between 2000 and 3000 m above sea level (asl). Overall, there are *c.* 150 known examples of such monuments, of which *c.* 90 are situated in the Republic of Armenia.

Based on their shape and iconography, we can identify three main classes of vishaps, instances of which exist in varying heights (150-550 cm) and local materials (mainly basalt). The first class, which we propose to term *piscis*, comprises stones cut and polished into the shape of a fish. The second typological class, which we define as *vellus*, comprises stones carved as if the hide of a bovid had been draped or spread on them. The third typological class, the *hybrid* class, combines the iconographies of the first and the second type.

Most vishaps still *in situ* lie collapsed or placed in a horizontal position on the ground. All three types of vishaps, however, are carved and polished on every face but the “tail”, which is invariably left uncarved. This fact indicates clearly that vishaps were originally standing stones.

Vishaps have been discovered at the turn of the twentieth century and subsequently investigated by different scholars (Atrpet, N. Marr, Y. Smirnov, A. Kalantar, B. Piotrovskiy, G. Kapantsyan). These early scholars were mostly interested in the symbolism of the stones. As to their function, they developed a theory according to which vishaps marked nodal points of prehistoric irrigation systems. In order to go beyond speculation and to investigate the problem with modern archaeological methods, the authors of this article in 2012 started a collaboration under the aegis of the Institute

of Archaeology and Ethnography in Yerevan and the Freie Universität in Berlin. During our trips we tested the information already published in the previous literature in the field and recorded both known and previously unknown vishaps *in situ*. As a result of our work, we had collected information on 96 vishaps, 73 of which we located and documented, including 17 vishaps previously unknown. We then began excavations on Mount Aragats, where we discovered Karmir Sar, a site previously unknown at 2850 m asl with at least 10 vishaps, most of them *in situ*.

Our most significant discovery is that vishaps are always associated with the context of cromlechs, barrows, or circular stone platforms. Most of them are packed in close groups in well-defined meadows, specifically at places where the landscape drops into slight depressions. These “secluded meadows”, sometimes ancient satellite volcanic craters, are rich in water, sometimes even marshy, and their concave form significantly reduces their overall visibility in the wider area. In sharp contrast to these vishaps clustered together in well-defined sites, we registered a small number of vishaps in isolated positions and in more exposed spots.¹

Earlier evidence of vishaps in the Geghama Mountains

The Geghama Mountains, situated to the West of Lake Sevan, represent an important epicentre of Armenian history. Their foothills are studded with archaeological sites of all epochs. And so, it is surely not by accident that the highest concentration of vishaps so far has been recorded in the Geghama Mountains (Fig. 2).²

The Geghama vishaps have been mentioned in the literature since the beginning of the twentieth century, and specifically at the sites of Azhdaha-Yurt, Tokhmaghan-Göl, Dava-Gözi, Göli-Yurt, and Imirzek. The history and activities of these early researchers are still poorly known. Below, we compile a complete list of specialists and travellers who mentioned the vishaps of the Geghama Mountains, giving preliminary information on their activities. However, the reader should keep in mind that only N. Marr, Y. Smirnov, L. Barseghian, and possibly also B. Piotrovskiy, conducted detailed research in the field (for the list of “older” vishaps, cf. Fig. 1).

Atrpet (pen name of the Armenian writer Sargis Mubaijyan). In 1906, Atrpet, according to his own words, saw more than 30 vishaps on the mountains behind the village of Garni and along the Azatarvak river.³ Photos or drawings by Atrpet do not seem to exist. Only once, in his fictional short story “Vishapamayr” (“Mother Vishap”), he prints a fantastical drawing of a meadow with vishaps. This drawing, although exaggerated, is an interesting and even plausible reproduction of the landscape setting

¹ For the history of investigation and the new “Vishap” project, common catalogue and maps cf. Gilibert *et al.* 2012; 2013. The names of vishaps in *italic* are the ones that have been documented by our expedition and comprise part of the catalogue.

² Cf. Petrosyan 1987.

³ Atrpet 1926: 408; 1929: 57.

Name	Barseghian No.	Marr, Smirnov No.	Marr, Smirnov Table	Marr, Smirnov Figure, Page	Gilibert <i>et al.</i> Cat. No.
Azhdaha-Yurt	1	6	8-9	62	5
	2	5	6		4
	3	1	2, 7	61	1
	4	2	3-4		2
	5	-	5b	63	3
	-	-	5a	-	6
Tokhmaghan-Göl	6	-	-		4
	7	-	-		5
	8	2	13, 14 6	88 .	2
	9	-	11(?), 12, 14 a	89	1
	10 -	4	15 a		3
	11	-	15 6	91	6
Dava-Gözi	12	-	-	-	1
	13	-	-	-	2
Göli-Yurt	14	1	16	-	1
	15	-	17	88 ←	2
	-	-	-	89	3
Imirzek	16	2	19-20	92 .	2
	17	1	18	93 ←	1
	18	3	21-22	93 .	3
	19	5	24		5
	20	4	23		4

Fig. 1. Geghama Mountain vishaps according to Barseghian’s 1968 numbering system and their concordances with Marr, Smirnov 1931 and Gilibert et al. 2012.

of the vishaps (Fig. 3).¹ In this image, a bird appears on one of the vishaps, on the central part of its body, just as is sometimes the case with real vishaps from the Geghama Mountains. This fact may imply that the image represent the landscapes of Tokhmaghan-

¹ Atrpet 1912: 17. This publication is mentioned by the well-known Russian orientalist V. Bartold in 1916, who notes that the discoveries of N. Marr were so important for Armenian society “that one of the Armenian writers Atrpet in 1911 (in reality in 1912 - *the authors*) in Alexandropol published a myth “Vishapamayr”, which was illustrated (according to imagination and not the monuments)” (Bartold 1966: 234). In fact, Atrpet was aware of vishaps earlier than Marr: he saw vishaps on Aragats as early as 1885 (Atrpet 1929: 56).

It seems that, at least for a certain period, vishaps became well known among Russian intellectual circles: for example, in 1917 the Russian writer V. Bryusov used vishaps as a hallmark and symbol for not only ancient Armenian culture but the whole Caucasian “civilization” (Bryusov 1917).

Göl or Azhdaha-Yurt, where on two vishaps (*Azhdaha-Yurt 5* and *Tokhmaghan-Göl 1*) bird images were found (such an image is present also on *Imirzek 1*, however this vishap appears not in a group, like the former two, but alone, unlike the drawings of Atrpet). This observation suggests that Atrpet really did see vishaps in the Geghama Mountains.

Atrpet's report lacks details. However, he mentions the names of some "vishap landscapes": "On the slopes of Arkhashen/Arkayashen there are the ruins of Arkhmisha, Arkhishan, Khosrov shah and Mankunk, Kara Lake, and vishap stelae are found nearby".¹ Kara Lake is known as Sev Lich/Karagöl; Khosrov shah is most likely near the abandoned village of Khosrov; Mankunk (also known as Mankuk) is a well known location within the Khosrov reserve; Arkhmishan and Arkhishan are local toponyms, now forgotten. Especially noteworthy is the name of Arkhashen, to be equated with Mount Arka(ya)shen (3097 m): this is a volcanic and water-rich peak, now called Tsaghkavet, situated in the Vedi river source district, and more precisely between the Ararat and Gegharkunik regions, in the Southern part of the Geghama Mountains, along the upper flow of the Karadsi river, 18 km south-west of the village Madina.² The nearest vishaps to Arkhashen lie north-east of it and are *Diktash 1–3* (Tab. IV–VI, Fig. 13), identified by our expedition in 2012. To the south-east, there is the vishap *Attash 1*, known also as the Karadsi or Madina vishap (Fig. 4).³ In theory, Atrpet could have seen these vishaps, but no direct data imply it with certainty. He could as well be referring to vishaps that escaped any documentation until today.

Nikolay Marr and Yakov Smirnov. During excavations at Garni between 1909 and 1911, N. Marr and Y. Smirnov surveyed "families of vishaps" at the sites Azhdaha-Yurt, Tokhmaghan-Göl, Göl-Yurt and Imirzek. This was the first scientific investigation of vishaps in the Geghama Mountains. In 1931, the results of the surveys were published and Marr declared that he saw 23 vishaps.⁴ In the published text, however, only 19 stones are discussed. In at least two cases (*Azhdaha-Yurt 1* and *Tokhmaghan-Göl 1*), Marr mistook the same stone photographed from two different angles for two different stones, thus counting each stone twice. But, even so, perhaps Marr arrived at the number 23 by counting as a *vishap* unidentified fragments not recorded in detail,⁵ or further fragments reused in medieval waterworks.⁶ In 1918, the papers, the photographs, the drawings and the notes from Marr's archaeological expeditions in Armenia were lost during transport by railway from Armavir to Tiflis via Baku.⁷ Contradictions and lack of a general systematic framework in the 1931 publication can be explained by this condition.

¹ Atrpet 1929: 57-58.

² Hakobyan et al. 1986: 446, 515; Brief Reference Dictionary 2007: 59.

³ First published by Xnkikyan 1997: 148; 2002: 114, Pl. 97/2; cf. also Biscione et al. 2002: 198, 378.

⁴ Marr, Smirnov 1931: 94.

⁵ Marr, Smirnov 1931: 91.

⁶ Marr, Smirnov 1931: 93.

⁷ Marr, Smirnov 1931: 10.

Levon Lisitsyan. In 1913, L. Lisitsyan, son of the well-known Armenian ethnographer Stepan Lisitsyan, visited Armenia with art historian Josef Strzigowsky from Vienna.¹ During the visit, Lisitsyan, with the help of one of the villagers, hiked from Garni to the Geghama Mountains and investigated rock carvings at Paytasar. In a letter addressed to his parents on 24 February 1914, he mentions next to the rock carvings the “azhdahas” (giants, that is the vishaps) of Tokhmaghan-Göl, which, according to him, were already known to N. Marr. He planned to present the results of these investigations in the seminar of Prof. Horneghin in Vienna. From his texts and from later interpretations one gains the impression that, alongside drawings of rock-carvings, Lisitsyan also did drawings of vishaps.²

Boris Piotrovskiy. One of the Geghama vishaps (*Tokhmaghan-Göl 4*), formerly unknown to other authors, is first mentioned by B. Piotrovskiy.³ He published a photograph of it but does not provide any detail in the text. He found it either in the field or during archival research (perhaps looking at the archives of Marr and Smirnov).⁴

Mark Grigoryan. M. Grigoryan published a basalt vishap with the head of a ram on it.⁵ The vishap, if it is one, was conspicuously re-worked during the Middle Ages and re-used as a grave stone. Grigoryan indicates Tokhmaghan-Göl as the find-spot (literally, he speaks of the “ancient reservoir of Geghard”). However, a photo from the archive of the Lisitsyans at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, NAS RA,⁶ that shows the same vishap from an identical angle but with more background (Fig. 5), proves that this is not the landscape of Tokhmaghan-Göl: in the background of the photo is a vast expanse of water, which can only be Lake Sevan. Thus, if this stela was found somewhere in the Geghama Mountains, but it was on the Martuni-Lchashen side, and not on the Garni side.

¹ L. Lisitsyan was a student of J. Strzigowsky at the University of Vienna between 1911 and 1914 (and, by the way, later in 1917 also of N. Marr at the University of Peterburg). He also acted as the mediator of a scientific tandem between two great historians of architecture: J. Strzigowsky, his teacher, and T. Toramanyan. In spring 1913, Strzigowsky through Lisitsyan invited Toramanyan to Vienna, and in the autumn of the same year he himself visited Armenia (especially Shirak and Aragatsotn regions: Toramanyan 1987: 110). It was during this visit that Lisitsyan, who was interested also in prehistoric periods (cf. Harutiunyan 1973: 94) hiked through the Geghama Mountains (for details on Lisitsyan’s life, cf. Evoyan 1973; Harutiunyan 1973; Gharibjanyan, Vardanyan 1993).

² Lisitsyan 1972: 52; Harutiunyan 1973: 99; Gharibjanyan, Vardanyan 1993: 55.

³ Piotrovskiy 1939, Tab. XI.

⁴ According to Barseghian *et al.* 1964: 88, B. Piotrovskiy personally visited the Geghama Mountain vishaps.

⁵ Grigoryan 1959: 261-263, Fig. 10.

⁶ Which Lisitsyan could the photograph belong to? Under the photo in question is written in Russian: “This stela (Aragats) has a fish form.” It was intended for a publication by Srubli Lisitsyan, the daughter of Stepan Lisitsyan. However, while the vishap is erroneously ascribed to Aragats, it could perhaps originally belong to her father Stepan, who is known, among others, as one of the active builders of the historical monuments protection system and developer of historical tourism in early Soviet Armenia (cf. Vardanyan 2005). The possibility that the photo belonged to Levon Lisitsyan cannot be excluded.

Lavrenti Barseghian. In 1963, L. Barseghian, together with his colleagues A. Kalantaryan and Z. Khachatryan, visited some of the vishaps found by Marr and Smirnov, and discovered new ones.¹ The authors write that they have discovered “five”² or “four”³ new vishaps. In reality, the expedition discovered three new vishaps: a vishap at Tokhmaghan-Göl⁴ (= *Tokhmaghan-Göl* 5) and two vishaps at the locality of Dava-Gözi.⁵ As to other “new” vishaps mentioned by the authors, the Bzovani Yurt one⁶ is known to Marr and Smirnov⁷ (= *Imirzek* 5), and the bull of “Tokhmaghan-Göl”⁸ to Piotrovskiy⁹ (*Tokhmaghan-Göl* 4). Another example of a vishap from the bottom of Tokhmaghan-Göl is mentioned in the Russian summary of the article,¹⁰ although neither drawings nor photos of it have been published, making its existence questionable.¹¹

Babken Arakelyan. Leading excavation works at the Hellenistic site of Garni in 1963, B. Arakelyan found the upper half of a vishap of the *vellus* type re-used in the foundations of a palace dating to the third century AD. On the vishap there was a secondary Urartian inscription of king Argishti I.¹²

Harutiun Martirosyan. In the publication of his 1967–1968 expedition investigating rock carvings of the Geghama Mountains, Martirosyan mentions vishaps (Tokhmaghan-Göl, Imirzek). He also elaborates briefly on their archaeological context – a fact quite rare in other authors, speculating that some of them may have something to do with graves or rock carvings.¹³ It is noteworthy that three tombs, not directly connected with vishaps but in their proximity, were excavated by this expedition (and particularly by R. Torosyan) in Tokhmaghan-Göl. The tombs were dated to the period of “widespread use of iron”, i.e., the eighth to fifth centuries BC.¹⁴

Emma Khanzadyan. In 1980, during the interment works of a pipeline, a vishap was discovered by chance 2.5 km south-west of the village of Lchashen (*Lchashen* 1). The vishap had been used to cover a burial chamber of wooden construction, which had been robbed in antiquity. The burial pit was oriented north-south and contained

¹ Barseghian *et al.* 1964; 1968.

² Barseghian *et al.* 1964: 87.

³ Barseghian 1968: 289.

⁴ Barseghian *et al.* 1964, Fig. 1b.

⁵ Barseghian *et al.* 1964, Fig. 2.

⁶ Barseghian *et al.* 1964, Fig. 3.

⁷ Marr, Smirnov 1931: Tab. 23.

⁸ Barseghian *et al.* 1964, Fig. 1a.

⁹ Piotrovskiy 1939, Tab. XI.

¹⁰ Barseghian *et al.* 1964: 88.

¹¹ For comparison of Marr-Smirnov and Barseghian vishaps cf. Gilibert, Storaci, forthcoming.

¹² Arakelyan, Arutiunyan 1966.

¹³ Martirosyan 1969: 191-193.

¹⁴ Martirosyan 1969: 193-194.

a disturbed skeleton with the head placed at the northern end of the quadrangular shaft. Painted vessels found inside the grave date to the Middle Bronze Age III.¹ E. Khanzadyan, who was called to lead the salvage excavation and later published a short report, does not mention the precise location of the findspot. We managed to locate it thanks to the help of Gurgun Gyurjyan from Lchashen village, now aged 89, who took part in the process of transportation of the vishap to Metsamor Museum in 1980 (Fig. 11). E. Khanzadyan has also investigated other high altitude vishaps on Geghama. However, her work remains unpublished and the access to her manuscript is restricted.

Hamlet Petrosyan. During a survey of classical period sites along the upper flow of the river Azat that took place in the years 2003–2005, the Armenian–Italian expedition documented three new vishaps, later elaborated by H. Petrosyan: Avanik, Pokr Gilanlar (cf. also Fig. 10), and Vishapasar.²

Levon Petrosyan. In the early 2000s, L. Petrosyan found a further vishap not too far away from the meadows where *Lchashen 1* had been found (the two findspots lie each on a different side of the same hill). Although fragmentary, *Lchashen 2* is an easily recognisable example of a vishap of a *vellus* kind and has been documented by us with photographs and drawings (Tab. VIII).

Simon Hmayakyan. In 2011, a new vishap of the *vellus* kind was documented by S. Hmayakyan at a meliorated field belonging to the village of Sarukhan.³

State List of Monuments. Information on vishaps from *Geghashen 1* (in the village cemetery) and *Goght 1* (now set up in front of the National Museum–Institute of Architecture in Yerevan) is kept in the List of Officially Registered Monuments of the History and Culture of the Republic of Armenia (2002).⁴

Other travellers. The vishaps in the Geghama Mountains were also visited by early travellers and hikers, who sometimes took valuable notes and photos. In 1929, the Russian writers Nikolay Tikhonov and Volf Ehrlich travelled along the route New Bayazet (Gavar) – Deli Kardash (Sarukhan) – Geghama – Tazakend (Tazagyugh/by Goght on Garnichay/Azat river) – Geghard monastery. In the Geghama Mountains, they report seeing a “high vishap” which had “huge fish or dragon-like body” and “stood” “stuck in stones” at an altitude of 2800 m asl, on spot where the Akdagh (Spitakasar) and Kizildagh (Azhdahak) summits were visible, near a small lake.⁵ This vishap may have been *Goght 1*, Göli-Yurt or one of the Tokhmagan-Göl vishaps. Since Tikhonov

¹ Khanzadyan 2005.

² Petrosyan 2008: 76–78; Petrosyan forthcoming.

³ Hmayakyan forthcoming. Cf. also Hakobyan 2010: 59.

⁴ In the list there is also some information on a “vishap” from the village of Lichk. Our visit to this site proved that the object in question is not a vishap.

⁵ Tikhonov 1970: 77–79.

writes that the vishap is “high”. Göli-Yurt does not perhaps fit the description. The site of Tokhmagan-Göl, on the other hand, is perfectly located on the way from the pass down to the monastery. Perhaps one of the vishaps was re-erected by herders after Marr and Smirnov saw it and before the small lake became functional again? Tokhmagan-Göl was empty when Marr and Smirnov visited it. But in 1929, when Tichonov was there, it might have been a small lake again, since the maps from 1950s show it filled with water. When the lake was enlarged at the end of the 1960s, the two vishaps were moved to a nearby hill ridge and later cemented in an upright position.¹

Figures 6–10 represent vishaps from Imirzek, Tokhmagan-Göl and Pokr Gilanlar as photographed by Arthur Harutiunyan and Vladimir Saroyan, who hiked through the Geghama in the 1970s. Such documentation is especially important to trace the process of landscape transformation and also because in the meantime some of the vishaps have been removed to Yerevan (*Azhdaha-Yurt 2, Goght 1, Tokhmagan-Göl 2, 3, 5*), Sardarapat (*Azhdaha-Yurt 5*) or Metsamor (*Lchashen 1*) and their original landscape settings can now only be studied through photographic documentation.

New discoveries of vishaps in the Geghama Mountains

In 2012, our expedition visited virtually all previously known sites of vishaps recorded on the Geghama (the only findspot we could not precisely identify is Dava-Gözi). We also made detailed topographic maps of the site of Azhdaha-Yurt and added three new sites with vishaps.

As a result of our fieldwork, we registered a total of 18 vishaps *in situ* (*Arshaluis 1-2; Azhdaha-Yurt 1, 3-4, 6; Diktash 1, 3; Garni 1; Göli-Yurt 1-3, Imirzek 1-5, Maghalner 1*) and two *in loco* (that is, immediately next to their original location: *Sarukhan 1, Lchashen 2*). We were able to determine precisely the *in situ* location of further four vishaps, which are now no longer *in situ* (*Azhdaha-Yurt 2, 5; Diktash 2, Lchashen 1*) and track down the geographical site of Tokhmagan-Göl, where the stones originally stood (*Tokhmagan-Göl 1-5*, cf. Figs 8–9). It turned out that four structures with vishaps underwent recent illicit diggings (*Azhdaha-Yurt 3, 5* and *Diktash 1, 2*).

We also identified two “secluded meadows”, comprising a minimum of five to a maximum of nine registered cromlechs with vishaps (Tokhmagan-Göl and Azhdaha-Yurt). As to the sites of Göli-Yurt and Arshaluis, we also identified smaller clusters of three cromlechs with vishaps located in equally well-defined, flat meadows rich in water – but lacking the characteristically hollow shape. We also registered a small number of cromlechs with vishaps in isolated positions, found in relatively secluded meadows (*Maghalner 1*) as well as in much more exposed spots (*Azhdaha-Yurt 6, Diktash 1-3, Imirzek 1-5*). Their most conspicuous trait and the striking difference from the cromlechs

¹ In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Tokhmagan-Göl reservoir, i.e., the historical Vanki Lich, was reconstructed by the Geghard monastery. However, the nomads of the nearby pastures soon destroyed the barrage. In 1923, new engineering works began and in the 1960s the reconstruction process entered its last stage (Shirmazan 1962: 107).

clustered in groups is that they are placed in such a way that from their location no other vishaps can be seen. In the case of the *Imirzek* group, the cromlechs loosely follow the mountain ridge and rigidly avoid intervisibility.

On the whole, our expedition found three new vishap clusters at the sites of Arshaluis (West of Tokhmaghan-Göl), Diktash (East of Imirzek) and Maghalner (North-East of Göli-Yurt). *Diktash 1* appears to be still standing in its original position. These vishaps are also located on flat meadows, within cromlechs, near rock-carvings (Arshaluis and Maghalner), as well as other cromlechs, barrows and prehistoric tower-like constructions (Maghalner). *Diktash 3* is the highest vishap found in Armenia (Figs 12–14, Tabs I–VII).

Arshaluis 1

Typology: vellus

Material: dark grey basalt

Condition: good

Measures: 220x72x33 cm

Original location: Arshaluis pastures

Altitude: 2639 m asl

Associated features: cromlech, apparently destroyed in antiquity

Current location: in situ

Secondary uses: -

Arshaluis 2

Typology: vellus(?)

Material: grey basalt

Condition: unknown

Measures: impossible to record (most of the stone still beneath ground surface)

Original location: Arshaluis pastures

Altitude: 2645 m asl

Associated features: cromlech

Current location: in situ

Secondary uses: -

Arshaluis 3

Typology: piscis

Material: light brown basalt

Condition: good

Measures: 140x35x35 cm

Original location: Arshaluis pastures

Altitude: 2714 m asl

Associated features: -

Current location: in loco, context disturbed

Secondary uses: -

Diktash 1

Typology: vellus

Material: dark grey basalt

Condition: good

Measures: 287x80x27 cm

Original location: Diktash

Altitude: 2936 m asl

Associated features: cromlech, recently looted

Current location: in situ

Secondary uses: carved cross on back face, traces of contemporary ritual libations

Diktash 2

Typology: piscis

Material: light grey, fine-grained basalt

Condition: broken and slightly weathered

Measures: 358x33x59 cm

Original location: between Diktash and Derbent (Sheikhi Oba)

Altitude: 2990 m asl

Associated features: cromlech, recently looted

Current location: in loco, original context disturbed

Secondary uses: line of cup marks carved on the back of the fish

Diktash 3

Typology: piscis

Material: grey, fine-grained basalt

Condition: weathered

Measures: 132x48x15 cm

Original location: hill above Diktash 1

Altitude: 3174 m asl

Associated features: cromlech

Current location: in situ

Secondary uses: -

Maghalner 1

Typology: piscis

Material: grey, fine-grained basalt

Condition: good

Measures: 270x68 cm (Length not measurable)

Original location: Maghalner pastures

Altitude: 3013 m asl

Associated features: cromlech, petroglyphs and looted tomb nearby

Current location: in situ

Secondary uses: -

Conclusion

In the Geghama Mountains exists the largest recorded concentration of vishaps in the Armenian Highland (c.42 of a total c.150 known vishaps). The Geghama vishaps are the most sophisticated ones: the *vellus* type appears everywhere, the *piscis* kind almost everywhere, but the highly artistic *hybrids* are found only in the Geghama Mountains. Mount Aragats, where 27 examples have been found so far, and which appears to be the second most dense location of vishaps, has less variation in kind and style. This observation may indicate that the Geghama Mountains may have been the epicentre of the blossoming period of the “vishap culture”.

As for the distribution of vishaps in the landscape, by mapping the heights of the vishaps above the sea level, we can see that they appear on two main levels:

1. high-altitude landscapes (c.2100/2400–3200 m asl) with cromlechs (tombs and ritual platforms), rock carvings, tower like constructions, but without traces of permanent settlements: *Diktash 1-3* (2936-3174 m), *Maghalner 1* (3013 m), *Imirzek 1-5* (2100-2338 m), *Göli-Yurt 1-3* (2963-2968 m), *Arshaluis 1-3* (2639-2714 m), *Tokhmaghan-Göl 1-5* (c.2700 m), *Azhdaha-Yurt 1-6* (2472-2510 m), and

2. foothill landscapes (c.1300-2100/2400 m) with cromlechs (tombs and ritual platforms) and permanent settlements: *Sarukhan 1* (2012 m), *Lchashen 1-2* (1975-2057 m), *Garni 1* (1387 m).

This bipartite division also makes sense in terms of climate zones (Tab. IX). Our field observations lead us to believe that the division line between high-altitude and foothill landscapes is flexible and cannot be easily nailed to a specific isoline. Sometimes, as in the case of Imirzek at c. 2100 m, the landscape makes a pronounced step and it suddenly changes from steep foothill slopes to high-mountain plateau pasturages, whereas at the same altitude at Lchashen and Sarukhan the landscape is rising gently and no immediate change can be observed (cf. also Fig. 2 and Tab. X). For this reason, we operate with a division line in the range between c. 2100 and 2400 m. The upper figure is at the same time the current limit for the distribution of permanent settlements¹ and agriculture² in Armenia, although local variations naturally exist even here (cf. Tab. XI).

Further studies will enable us to reconstruct the traits of interconnection between these two levels in the common context of socio-economic and cultural relations of ancient Armenia.

¹ Cf. Biscione *et al.* 2002; Badalyan, Avetisyan 2007; Smith *et al.* 2009.

² For discussion in Caucasian context, cf. Kaloev 1981: 202. For prehistoric Caucasian agriculture, its climatic and landscape zones as well as artificial terraces up to 2000 m and more. cf. Lisitsina. Prishchepenko 1977: 44-46. For the Armenian case, cf. Hovsepyan 2009.

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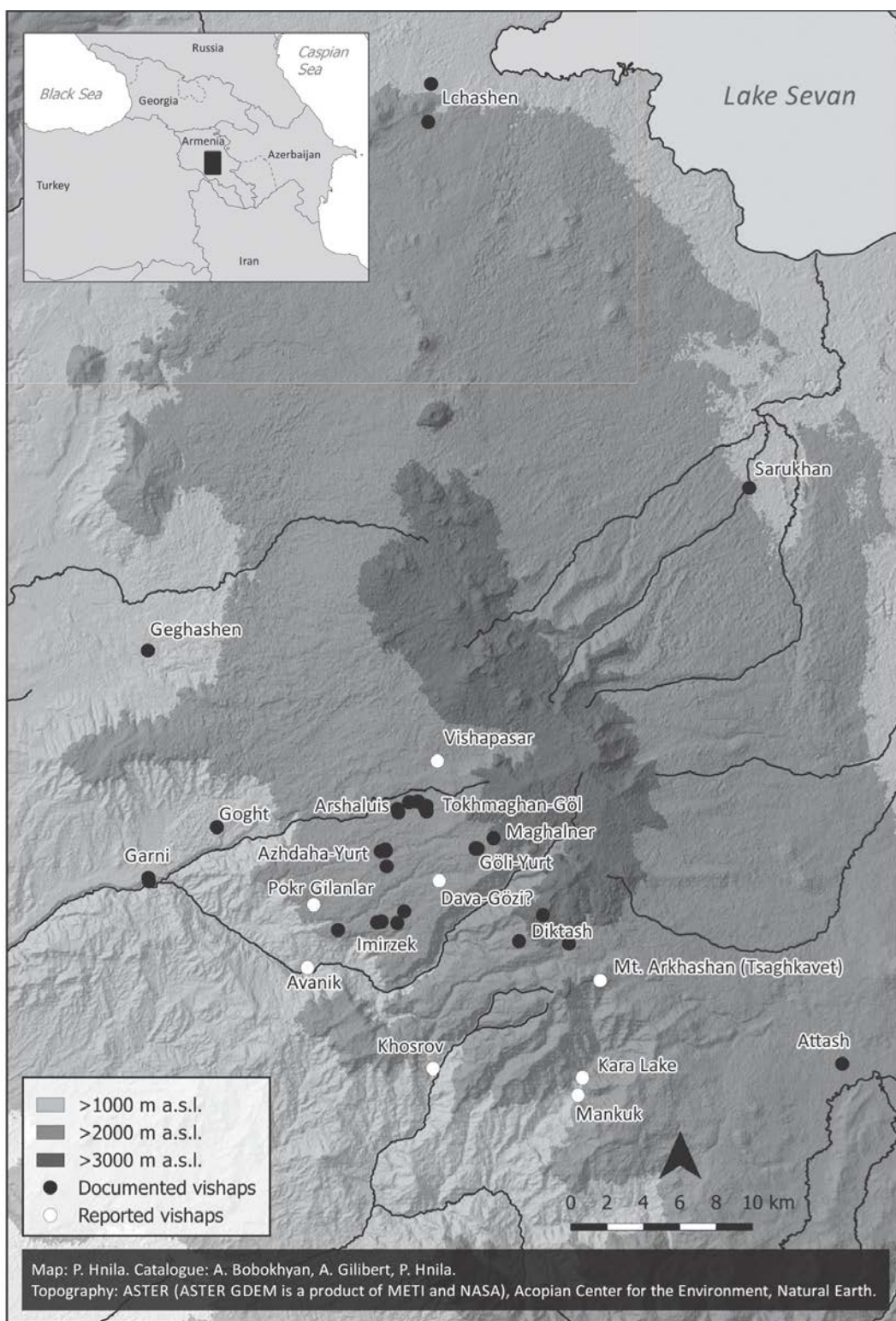


Fig. 2. Vishap concentrations in the Geghama Mountains.

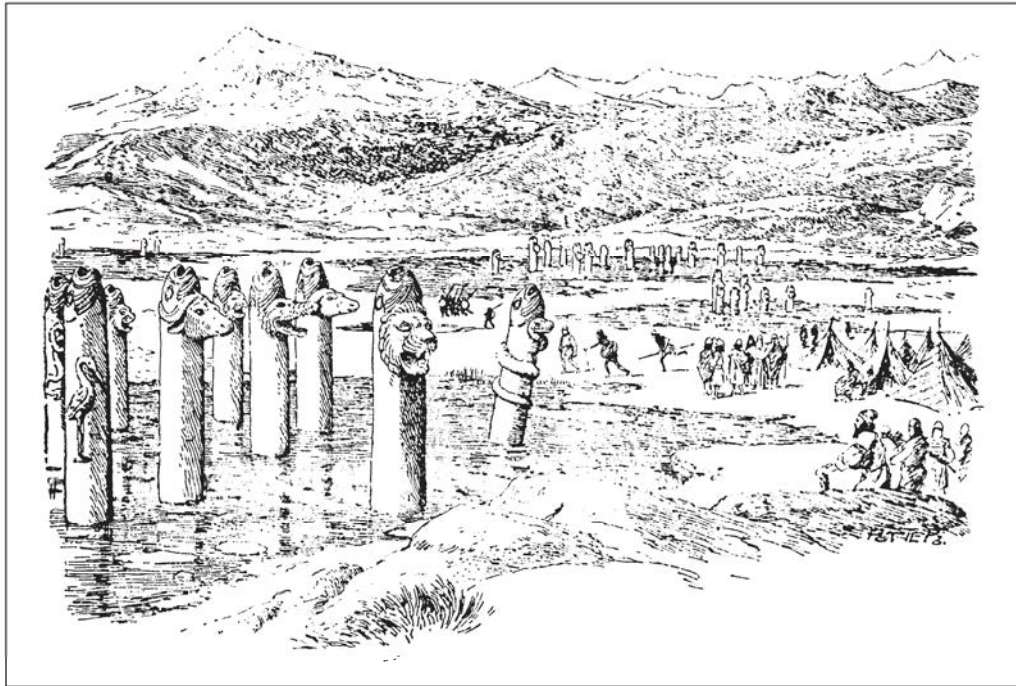


Fig. 3. Imaginative reconstruction of vishapous landscape in the Geghama Mountains after Atrpet (1912, 17).



Fig. 4. *Attash I*, perhaps known to Atrpet.



Fig. 5. A vishap from the Geghama Mountains, photo from Lisitsyans archive, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, NAS RA.



Fig. 6. *Imirzek 1*, beginning of 1970s (photo by Arthur Harutiunyan).



Fig. 7. *Imirzek 4*, beginning of 1970s (photo by Arthur Harutiunyan).

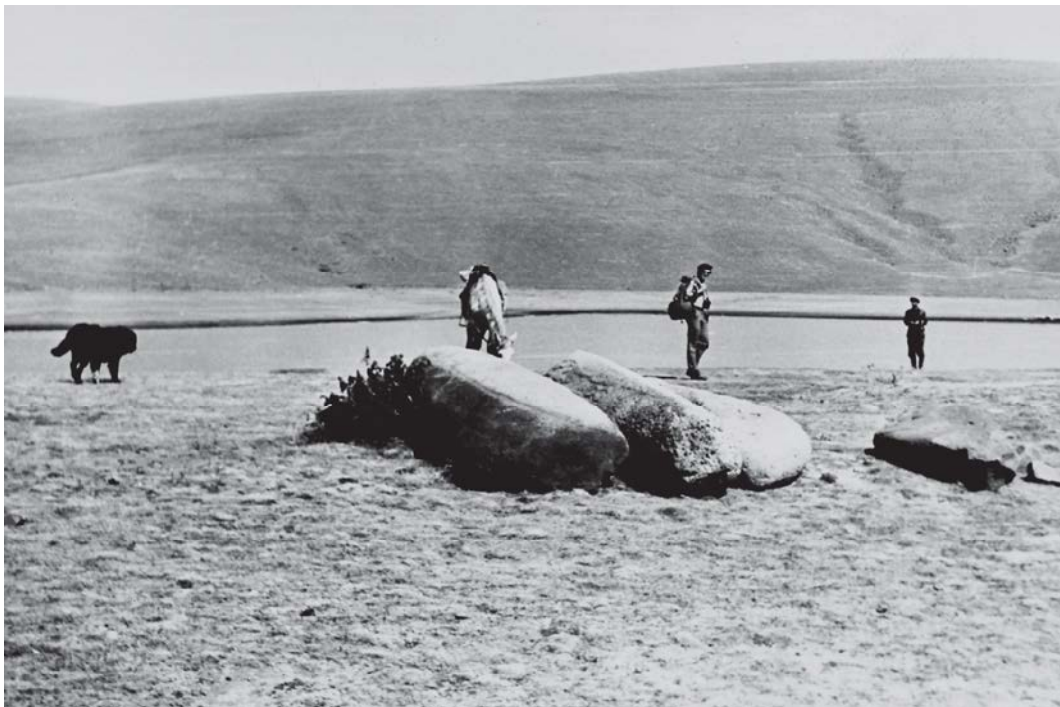


Fig. 8. Vishaps gathered together on the meadow of Tokhmaghan-Göl before their transportation to the nearest hill (*Tokhmaghan-Göl 1* and *Tokhmaghan-Göl 4*) and Yerevan (*Tokhmaghan-Göl 2 – II* Massive and perhaps *Tokhmaghan-Göl 5 – II* Massive), 1971 (photo by Vladimir Saroyan).



Fig. 9. Tokhmaghan-Göl 4, 1972–1975 (photo by Vladimir Saroyan).



Fig. 10. Pokr Gilanlar 1, 1972–1975 (photo by Vladimir Saroyan).



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