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Manifestations of the Phenomenon in the Context of the
Written Heritage of the Armenian Highlands**

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Epigraphic Stable Formulae: Manifestations of the Phenomenon in the Context of the Written Heritage of the Armenian Highlands

The epigraphic culture of the Armenian Highlands is noteworthy for its distinctive manifestations, among which the structure of the text stands out with a number of specific features. The phenomenon becomes especially intriguing when studied diachronically, through a comparison of pre-Christian and Christian written heritage.

A comprehensive study of stable epigraphic formulae – examined here for the first time on the basis of the cuneiform inscriptions of the Kingdom of Van, the Aramaic inscriptions of Classical Armenia, and Armenian medieval epigraphic inscriptions – reveals that the tradition of composing inscriptions in the Armenian Highlands follows a unified canonical system. Within this system, the introductory, occasion-event, purpose-expectation, and concluding (curse-blessing) formulae of the text are clearly distinguished.

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Formule epigrafice stabile: manifestări ale fenomenului în contextul patrimoniului scris al Ținuturilor Înalte Armene

Cultura epigrafică a Ținuturilor Înalte Armene se remarcă prin manifestările sale distinctive, dintre care structura textului se evidențiază printr-o serie de trăsături specifice. Fenomenul devine deosebit de interesant atunci când este studiat diacronic, prin compararea patrimoniului scris precreștin și creștin.

Un studiu cuprinzător al formulelor epigrafice stabile – analizate aici pentru prima dată pe baza inscripțiilor cuneiforme ale Regatului Van, a inscripțiilor aramaice ale Armeniei Antice și a inscripțiilor epigrafice medievale armene – relevă faptul că tradiția compunerii inscripțiilor în Ținuturile Înalte Armene urmează un sistem canonic unitar. În cadrul acestui sistem, sunt clar delimitate formulele introductive, cele de tip ocazie-eveniment, scop-așteptare și cele de încheiere (blestem-binecuvântare) ale textului.

Introduction

Among the most significant achievements in human history are language and writing, which constitute the primary means of transmitting information and facilitating communication. Writing is also regarded as one of the greatest accomplishments of mediated communication, possessing its own stages of development and distinctive characteristics [Grigoryan 1940, 11-13; Robinson 2013, 7-13]. The present study is primarily intended to elucidate the structural features of the epigraphic heritage of the Armenian Highlands by establishing a typology of the stable formulae attested in inscriptions and their asso-

ciated formulaic patterns¹. These stable formulae are examined not merely as repetitive linguistic units, but as conventionalized written expressions that reflect established norms of epigraphic composition within specific historical and cultural contexts.

Notably, although the content-related, palaeographic, linguistic, and word-formational characteristics of these inscriptions have repeatedly been the subject of scholarly investigation, their structural features are equally significant in their own

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right – have thus far remained largely overlooked. In Armenian scholarship, this issue has recently been addressed on the basis of colophons in Armenian manuscripts [Harutyunyan 2019, 198-217]. Stable formulae have also been examined within the sphere of folklore, particularly in folktales [Khemchyan 2011, 206-229]. Earlier still, the folklorist Sargis Harutyunyan conducted a similar study using epigraphic material; however, his analysis focused specifically on formulae of curse and benediction attested in cuneiform inscriptions, Armenian inscriptions, and manuscript colophons [Harutyunyan 1975, 25-101].

Taking into account the various manifestations of the phenomenon attested within the rich epigraphic heritage of the Armenian Highlands, the present study examines it within the framework of three principal chronological phases – those of the Kingdom of Van, Classical Armenia, and the medieval Armenian epigraphic tradition – highlighting the most salient and characteristic features of each period.

Stable Formulae in the Cuneiform Inscriptions of the Kingdom of Van

In the mid-ninth century BC, within the Armenian Highlands – specifically in the basin of Lakes Van and Urmia – the Kingdom of Van, namely Biainili-Urartu, was formed. In the newly established kingdom, the cuneiform writing system was adopted², and already during the reign of Išpuini, the son of Sarduri (ca. 830-810 BC), a script reform was implemented, resulting in the creation of a local cuneiform script [Melikishvili 1960, 33; Hmayakyan 1994, 19]. This writing system, alongside its content-related, ideological-semantic, and other characteristics, also possessed distinct structural as well as formulaic features. These are most clearly observable in extensive inscriptions, which, as a rule, consist of an introductory section, the main body of the text, and a concluding part. The latter usually summarizes the royal titulary attested in the cuneiform inscription and includes a curse formula [Melikishvili 1960, 93-106; Movsisyan 2021, 212-213].

The inscriptions composed during Išpuini's sole reign (ca. 830-820 BC) are generally concise

and predominantly construction-related in character. In such inscriptions, the main point was to place on record the king's building activity, which was to be carried out “by the greatness of Ḫaldi”, “by the might of Ḫaldi” or “by the power of Ḫaldi”, the supreme god of the Urartian pantheon [Arutiunian 2001, N 14 A-D, N 17-19, 25; Salvini 2018, A 2-1, A 2-3 a-d, A 2-7 A-B, A 2-8, A 2-10, A 2-11]. In the shortest inscriptions left by the king, the following formulation is attested: “Išpuini, the son of Sarduri, built this house (structure)” [Arutiunian 2001, N 16; Salvini 2018, A 2-2 A-G]. It may be surmised that in such inscriptions the name of the deity remained implicit, tacitly presupposed within the surrounding textual context.

According to currently available data, the titulary³ of King Išpuini is attested only in inscriptions discovered in the area of the *Upper Anzav* fortress: “By the might of Ḫaldi, Išpuini, the son of Sarduri, built this fortress to perfection⁴. He is a mighty king, a great king, king of the universe, king of Biainili (the land)” [Arutiunian 2001, N 531-532; Salvini 2018, A 2-6 A-C]. Furthermore, at the end of the inscription on a stela discovered at *Karahan*, which records construction and agricultural works, the benedictory formula mentions not only the king's name but also that of the crown prince: “By Ḫaldi (the god), by the ‘Gate of Ḫaldi,’ by Ua(ni) (the god), may there be life for Išpuini, the son of Sarduri, and (for) Menua, the son of Išpuini ...” [Arutiunian 2001, N 20 A₁₄₋₁₉; Salvini 2018, A 2-9 A₁₄₋₁₉, B₁₀₋₁₅]. As in comparable Mesopotamian examples, this benediction likewise seeks a blessing for the donor from the very deity who has received the offering [Steymans 1995, 374]. Accordingly, it may be observed that the benedictions attested in Urartian cuneiform inscriptions are predominantly associated with construction activities and, in certain cases, also with stelae erected for the gods [Arutiunian 2001, N 120, N 121; Salvini 2018, A 5-79, A 5-80].

Significantly, upon the crown prince Menua's accession to co-rulership alongside Išpuini (ca. 820-810 BC), Urartian inscriptions began to document events bearing witness to victorious

2. According to W. Mayer, the borrowing of the cuneiform writing system from Assyria by the Urartians took place as early as the 10th century BC; however, no written monuments have been preserved [Mayer 2013, 111-112].

3. The royal titularies of the Urartian kings are also closely related to Assyrian inscriptions [Mayer 2013, 111; Grekyan 2018, 50].

4. The Armenian term *hnjulquuq* (Urartian equivalent: rendered conventionally as “to perfection”) denotes outstanding or exceptional quality of workmanship.

military campaigns and conquests. In the introductory sections of stela inscriptions commemorating events of a military nature, the supreme deity is likewise invoked: “To Խaldi, the lord, Iṣpuini, the son of Sarduri, and Menua, the son of Iṣpuini, erected this stela. Խaldi marched forth and made [the enemy] submit to his weapon... Խaldi is mighty; the weapon of Խaldi is mighty. By the might of Խaldi they marched...” [Arutiunian 2001, N 32₁₋₉, 33₁₋₉, N 35₁₋₉; Salvini 2018, A 3-5 Ro₁₋₉, Vo; A 3-9 Vo₁₋₉].

Such inscriptions preserve structural patterns that portray the god Խaldi as a “leader”; at their core lies the record of a victorious campaign achieved through the deity’s power, in which Խaldi himself figures as a “participant” [Arutiunian 2001, N 32₁₅, N 33₁₈, N 35 Obv₁₅, Rev₁₉; Salvini 2018, A 3-5 Ro₁₅, Vo₁₈; A 3-9 Ro₁₅, Vo₁₉; Melikishvili 1960, 94-95]. A similar case is found in another inscription of a likewise military character composed in the names of Iṣpuini and Menua, where Խaldi again appears in stable formulaic constructions as one who “marches with his weapon”: “Խaldi (the god) marched with his weapon ...” [Arutiunian 2001, N 31, Obv₁₆₋₂₇, Rev₅₋₁₁; Salvini 2018, A 3-4 (Ro₁₅₋₂₆), (Vo₄₋₁₀)]. The text concludes with a curse formula: “Whoever breaks this inscription, whoever destroys it, whoever buries it in the earth, whoever throws it into water, whoever changes its place, whoever hides it from the sun, whoever compels anyone to do these (things), (or) says ‘destroy (the inscription)’, whoever says to another, ‘I did these (things)’, may Խaldi, Teisheba, and Šivini not leave either his name or his seed upon the earth” [Arutiunian 2001, N 31, HK₂₂₋₃₄; Salvini 2018, A 3-4, Vo₂₁₋₃₄].

In the Ancient Near East, curses were directed not only against the primary transgressor but also against his descendants. The individual who sought to eradicate the king’s name – that is, the memory of the king – was subject to a similar punishment, since in the absence of descendants his own name would likewise remain unremembered [Radner 2005, 84, 206; see Maraṡten 1998, 189-200].

Somewhat different in character is the Kelishin inscription composed during the period of the joint reign of Iṣpuini and Menua. Here, in addition to the damage of the stela, the curse is also directed against anyone who seizes the property attested in the inscription: “Iṣpuini, the son

of Sarduri, (and) Menua, the son of Iṣpuini ... declared: whoever drives the herd away from the ‘Gates of Խaldi’ ... may Խaldi (the god) destroy his offspring upon the earth”. This is followed by a curse directed against anyone who damages the stela, in which, for the first time, the local deities of the city of Ardini-Muṣaṣir are also mentioned [Arutiunian 2001, N 30₂₅₋₄₁; Mayer 2013, 19; Salvini 2018, A 3-11 Vo₂₅₋₄₁, Ro₂₂₋₄₂]. The so-called imprecation designed to safeguard the property recorded in this inscription is pronounced by the kings themselves, since they appear as figures endowed with divine power, whereas the actual punishment – namely, the annihilation of the offender’s progeny – is reserved for the god Խaldi [Harutyunyan 1975, 36; Mayer 2013, 19]. In the tradition of the Ancient Near East, the curse formula of inscriptions was perceived as the written fixation of an orally uttered curse. Such formulae literally reproduce the verbal expressions pronounced for the protection of the inscription and the property recorded therein and were regarded as the most dangerous of threats [Watanabe 1984, 99; Radner 2005, 254].

In the Kelishin inscriptions, as well as in the inscriptions from Ashotakert that attest to the construction of the “Gates of Խaldi”, the title “lord of the city of Tushpa,” which thereafter became an integral component of the titulary of Urartian kings, is mentioned for the first time [Arutiunian 2001, N 36₃; Salvini 2018, A 3-2₃; Grekyan 2024, 15].

During the period of the joint reign of Iṣpuini and Menua there also emerges the use of direct speech articulated in the king’s name, first attested in the inscription of the Gate of Meher and subsequently recurring numerous times in later cuneiform texts: “Iṣpuini, the son of Sarduri, says; Menua, the son of Iṣpuini, says: by the god Խaldi ...” [Arutiunian 2001, N 38₂₅₋₂₆; Salvini 2018, A 3-12₅]. A similar formulation appears in the inscription of the so-called “Tavriz Gates” on the eastern face of the Van Rock, which likewise begins with the king’s direct speech: “By the might of Խaldi, Iṣpuini says ...” [Arutiunian 2001, N 20₁₋₂; Salvini 2018, A 4-1₁₋₂].

The formula “Menua says ...” became widespread during Menua’s own reign (ca. 810-790/780 BC) and is attested in a wide range of inscriptions, including those recording military campaigns, construction activities, or the appointment of a viceroy

[Arutiunian 2001, N 47⁷⁻⁸, N 771-5, N 59 A¹⁷⁻¹⁹, N 80^{3,6}; Salvini 2018, A 5-1⁷⁻⁸, A 5-8¹⁷⁻¹⁹, A 5-21⁴⁻⁵, A 5-68^{3,6}]. In the brief inscriptions of later kings commemorating conquests in the northeastern and eastern regions of the Armenian Highlands, the opening formula is frequently reduced to the simple formulation: “By the greatness (command) of Haldi, by (his) might ... says ...” [Arutiunian 2001, N 180¹⁻³, N 249¹⁻³, N 388¹⁻², N 409¹⁻²; Salvini 2018, A 8-11¹⁻³, A 9-6¹⁻³, A 10-2¹⁻², A 11-4¹⁻²].

Following the same principle, inscriptions composed during Menua’s reign also contain, for the first time, a formulation referring to his accession to the paternal throne “by the command of Haldi” [Arutiunian 2001, N 148⁵, N 149³, N 123⁵; Salvini 2018, A 5-11 A⁵, A 5-11 B³, A 5-8 9⁵]. This formulation in itself elucidates contemporary conceptions of kingship as grounded in divine power and will.

Significantly, beginning with the reign of Menua (ca. 810-790/780 BC)⁵, the king himself is the one who pronounces the curse in the curse formula: “Menua says: whoever destroys this inscription, whoever breaks it, whoever compels another to do these things, whoever says to another, ‘I am the one who constructed this canal’, – may Haldi (the god), Teisheba (the god), Shivini (the god), (and all) the gods annihilate him under the sun” [Arutiunian 2001, N 47, 53; Salvini 2018, A 5-1, A 5-3]. The recording of the curse as uttered by the king continues in the Urartian written tradition until the fall of the kingdom. Judging from testimonies of the Classical period, the curse became an inseparable part of life, something that only a god could alter, while its inscription rendered it perpetual [Wiefel 1969, 219].

Another innovation attested in cuneiform inscriptions during the reign of Menua is the formulaic constructions concerning the subjugation of a conquered land by the god Haldi “before Menua” [Salvini 2018, A 5-11-3]. This formulation is related to Middle Assyrian inscriptions [Grekyan 2018, 47-48] and is also attested subsequently, particularly in the inscriptions of Argishti, the son of Menua (ca. 790/780-770/750 BC), and Sarduri, the son of Argishti (ca. 770/750-730 BC).

In the inscriptions bearing the name of Menua, another formulaic construction – related to

Middle Assyrian inscriptions – is attested for the first time, namely the formula of the king’s appeal to the gods prior to a campaign: “I prayed to Haldi (the god) ...” [Salvini 2018, A 5-2 A-F; Grekyan 2018, 45-46]. This formula is also attested subsequently, again in the annals of Argishti, the son of Menua, and Sarduri, the son of Argishti, as well as in inscriptions relating to the events recorded therein. In the epigraphic text of a stele discovered at Sarighamish, commissioned by King Argishti, the son of Menua, the following is attested: “Argishti says: ‘I prayed to Haldi (the god), Teisheba (the god), Shivini (the god), (and all) the gods; the gods heard me...’” [Arutiunian 2001, N 176⁹⁻¹²; Salvini 2018, A 8-6⁹⁻¹²].

Notably, in the inscriptions of certain monumental stelae composed during the reign of Menua, the royal titulary is attested at the beginning: “By the might of Haldi, Menua, the son of Ishpuini, erected this stele for Haldi, the lord. By the greatness of Haldi, Menua, the son of Ishpuini, is a mighty king, a great king, king of the land of Biainili, lord of the city of Tushpa” [Arutiunian 2001, N 59¹⁻¹⁶, N 75; Salvini 2018, A 5-8¹⁻¹⁶, A 5-17, A 5-24].

In an inscription discovered at Manazkert – presumably belonging to a temple cornerstone [Arutiunian 2001, N 90⁴⁻⁷; Salvini 2018, A 5-51⁴⁻⁷] – the extensive titulary of King Menua is attested. This same titulary is also employed by the last powerful king of the Kingdom of Van, Rusa, the son of Argishti (ca. 690/680-650/640 BC), in the inscriptions of the temple at Ayanis and the stele of Zvartnots: “...a mighty king, a great king, king of the universe, king of the land of Biainili, king of kings, lord of the city of Tushpa” [Salvini 2018, A 12-1 VII⁹⁻¹⁰, A 12-8²⁶⁻³⁰]. This titulary is likewise attested in the annals of Menua’s successor, Argishti, the son of Menua [Arutiunian 2001, N 174 A 3³⁻⁷; Salvini 2018, A 8-1 Ro⁵⁻⁷], as well as in the annals of King Sarduri, the son of Argishti, and in other inscriptions left by the latter [Arutiunian 2001, N 241 G¹²⁻¹³, N 242 A II+I⁶⁻⁸; Salvini 2018, A 9-1 Ro 6-8, A 9-3 VII¹²⁻¹³].

In the inscriptions and annals bearing the name of Argishti, the son of Menua, an innovation appears in connection with construction activities, namely the stable formulaic constructions: “(May there be) strength for the land of Biainili, (and) subjugation (?) for the hostile lands”

5. For the chronology of the Urartian kings [see Grekyan 2024, 8-9].

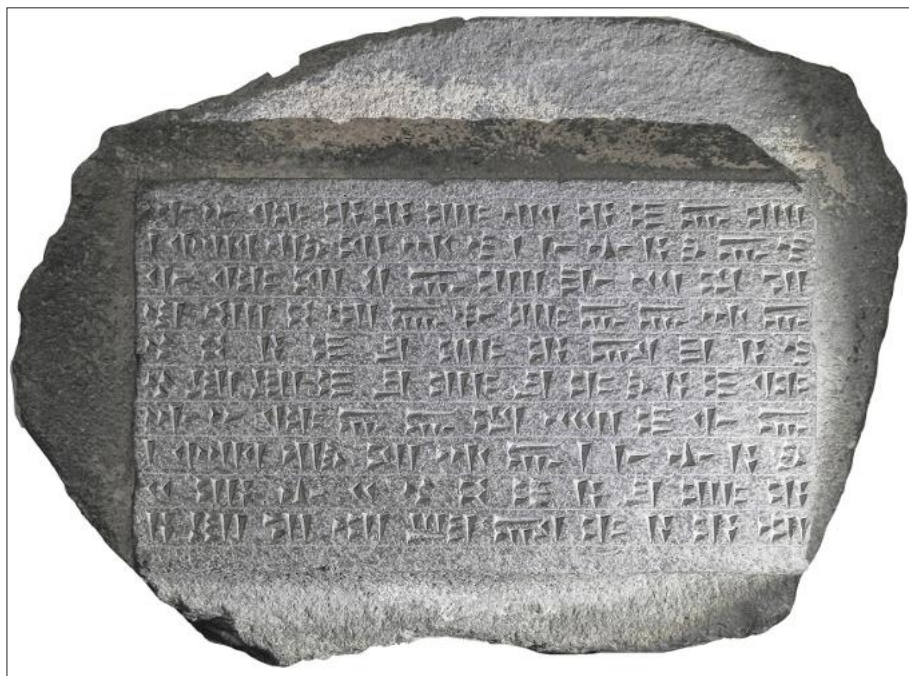


Fig. 1. The inscription of Argishti, the son of Menua, concerning the founding of the fortress of Erebuni, 782 BC (© V. Sargsyan 2023).

[Arutiunian 2001, N 173, II₃₃₋₃₄, N 174 A 2₁₆₋₁₇, N 197, N 198, N 200, N 201; Salvini 2018, A 8-1, Vo₁₆₋₁₇, A 8-3, II₃₃₋₃₄, A 8-17 A-B, A 8-18, A 8-19] (fig. 1). This is likewise attested in inscriptions of later kings within analogous contexts, preceding either the royal titulary or the curse formula [Arutiunian 2001, N 241 E₁₆₋₁₇, N 388₇, N 389₁₇₋₁₈, N 409₁₀; Salvini 2018, A 9-3, IV₁₆₋₁₇, A 10-1₇, A 10-2₁₇₋₁₈, A 11-4₁₀, A 11-6₁₂].

Notably, an inscription of Sarduri, the son of Argishti, discovered at Armavir, which is distinguished by an appeal addressed to future kings, followed by a curse directed at whoever might destroy the inscription: “The king who ... shall later be ruler, let him not abandon this fortress ... Sarduri says: whoever abandons this fortress, whoever destroys (it) ...” [Arutiunian 2001, N 275; Salvini 2018, A 9-13; Melikishvili 1960, 102].

As for the inscriptions bearing the name of King Rusa, the son of Sarduri (ca. 730-714 BC), of particular interest is the concluding section of the epigraph discovered at Gavar, which rather resembles a benedictory formula: “(May there be) strength for the land of Biainili, (and) subjugation (?) for the hostile lands. Rusa, the son of Sarduri, a mighty king, who rules over the land of Biainili” [Arutiunian 2001, N 388₆₋₈; Salvini 2018, A 10-1₆

]. The same formulation of ruling over the land of Biainili is also attested in the bilingual inscription from Topuzava left by the king, where Rusa, the son of Sarduri, is additionally designated by new descriptive formulae: “servant of the god Haldi” and “true shepherd of the people” [Arutiunian 2001, N 387₂₄₋₂₅; Salvini 2018, A 10-5 Ro₂₄₋₂₅, Vo₂₃]. Such formulations were, in all likelihood, conditioned by the fact that the legitimacy of Rusa, the son of Sarduri, was contestable, and they were borrowed from Assyrian inscriptions and prayers [Wilhelm 1986, 110; Mayer 2013, 60-61]. Comparable expressions are also attested in the inscription of Rusa, the son of Erimeña [Salvini 2018, A 14-2 Vo₃₁₋₃₂], as well as in the titulary of Argishti, the son of Rusa (ca. 710-690/680 BC): “a mighty king, king of the land of Biainili, servant of Haldi, true shepherd of the peoples” [Arutiunian 2001, N 406₂₈₋₃₂; Salvini 2018, A 11-2 Vo₂₉₋₃₁].

Finally, certain features attested in the curse formulae of the cuneiform inscriptions composed in the name of Rusa, the son of Argishti. Thus, in the extensive inscription of the stele erected at Zvartnots, the curse is directed against whoever damages it: “whether a native of Biainili or a foreigner” [Arutiunian 2001, N 421₄₀₋₄₂; Salvini 2018, A 12-8₄₀₋₄₂, A 12-1 VIII₇, A 12-2 VIII₆] (fig.



Fig. 2. The stele of Rusa, the son of Argishti, discovered during the excavations of the Zvartnots's temple, 7th century BC (© A. Harutyunyan 2016).

2). This phenomenon may be said to recur later in the curse formulae of medieval Armenian epigraphs, when no distinction was made regarding the ethnic affiliation of the one who defaced the sacred inscription (*see in the relevant section*). It is plausible that the curse formula attested in the Zvartnots inscription contains literal translations from Assyrian [Lehmann-Haupt 1931, 857], while in the epigraph known from the fortress of Kefkalesi, likewise composed in the name of the same king, the curser is the king himself: "Rusa says: 'Whoever destroys this inscription, may the Sun-god burn him' [Salvini 2018, A 12-10].

The foregoing analysis thus demonstrates that the earliest examples of epigraphic compositions endowed with distinct structural features in the Armenian Highlands are already attested from the period of the Kingdom of Van (9th-7th centuries BC). The more extensive cuneiform inscriptions left by the kings of Urartu demonstrate

that the tripartite structure and stable formulaic constructions of these written monuments – conditioned by the traditions of Old Near Eastern cuneiform writing of the second millennium BC – continued, with transformations, in subsequent periods characterized by the use of different writing systems.

Stable Formulae in the Aramaic Inscriptions of Classical Armenia

The epigraphic heritage of Classical Armenia, encompassing inscriptions in Greek, Aramaic, and Latin, is considerably extensive⁶, however, the phenomenon under consideration – namely, the stable formulaic constructions attested in epigraphs – is most prominently observable in the Aramaic inscriptions. Accordingly, it will be examined here exclusively on the basis of the Aramaic inscriptions composed during the reign of King Artaxias I the Pious (189-160 BC).

As documentary testimonies of national reunification and statehood, Aramaic inscriptions in the Armenian Highlands appear as early as the second century BC and continued in use through the Early Middle Ages. In Armenia, Aramaic inscriptions have also been documented through archaeological excavations at Garni and Artashat [Arakelian 1982, 33; Perikhanian 1964, 124]. They are distinguished by their formulaic character, conditioned by the function of the language as a medium of administration and international communication – a function that is manifested both in the external organization of the texts and in the structure of their linguistic components.

Aramaic inscriptions are, as a rule, characterized by a left-to-right direction of writing. The text is often carved on a smoothed stone surface without any ornamental elements, a feature that points to the primacy of communicative and functional purposes. The number of lines is usually lim-

6. Among the inscriptions of the Classical period, particular note should be made of funerary inscriptions bearing the abbreviation "D. M." at the top, one of which was discovered in 1969 in the village of Pokr Vedi in Armenia. The epigraph commemorates Gaius Valerius Crescent, a soldier of the First Italic Legion, who fell during the campaigns of Emperor Trajan [Speidel 2020, 146]. As for the abbreviation "D. M.", it is expanded as *Dis Manibus*, that is, "dedicated to the Manes" [Rosivach 2016, 152]. In ancient Roman belief, the Manes were regarded as the spirits of the dead, whose veneration held central importance in life. Such inscriptions were intended to secure the benevolence of these spirits toward the living.

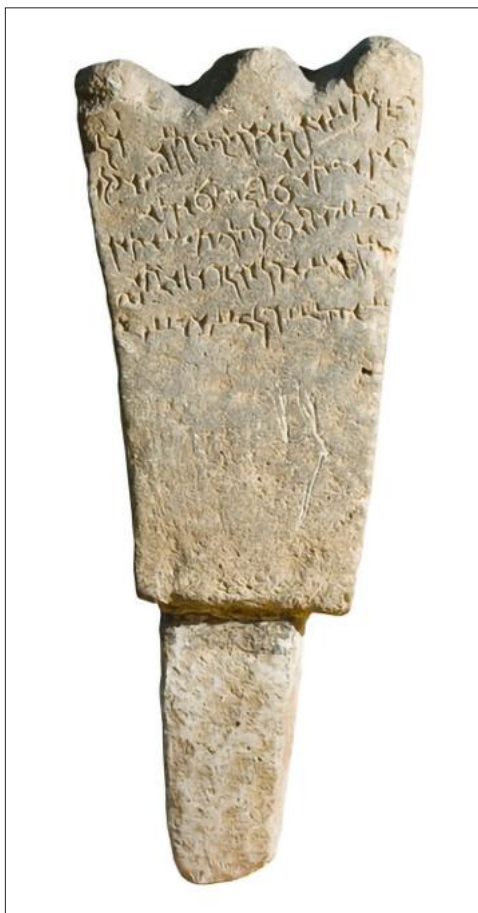


Fig. 3. A limestone boundary stone-monument from the 2nd century BC discovered in Teghut, bearing an Aramaic inscription (© History Museum of Armenia).

ited, and the size of the letters is relatively uniform, though at times uneven and irregularly carved.

Of particular interest are the so-called “Artaxian boundary stones” erected by King Artashes. These are stone stelae generally measuring 1-1.5 m in height, with a trident-shaped upper part, bearing Aramaic inscriptions carved on one of their broad faces. These inscribed stone monuments functioned as boundary markers in those areas of the realm where the state frontier had been demarcated. Especially distinctive and unique are the trident-like elements at the upper part of the stones, which may be associated with the phenomenon known as the *corona muralis*. This is the crown symbolizing city walls, towers, or fortresses, which during the Artaxiad period appears as a particular form of royal decree issued by the king.

Artashes I, the founder of the Artaxiad dynasty, proclaimed independence in Greater Ar-

menia in 189 BC following the defeat of the Seleucids at the Battle of Magnesia (190 BC) and the conclusion of the Treaty of Apamea [Polibii 2005, XXV/2, 12]. Having reunified the Armenian provinces, he expanded and restored the country and undertook land reforms, the most vivid testimony of which is provided by the stone monuments – boundary stones – erected by the king in order to demarcate communal and private lands [Sargsyan 1971, 526].

The earliest of the royal titulary of Artashes I has come down to us through the Aramaic inscriptions on the boundary stones. Such boundary stones were first discovered in Armenia at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the basin of Lake Sevan [Dupont-Sommer 1946-1948, 54]. The Aramaic inscriptions, consisting of several lines, were carved on the frontal face of the boundary stones.

Within the territory of the Republic of Armenia, sixteen such inscribed monuments are known. The majority were found in the Sevan basin, while several others were discovered at Ishkhanasar (Syunik) [Perikhanian 1965, 107], at Teghut [Périkhanian 1971, 170] (fig. 3; 4), and at other sites [Khachatryan 2014, 43-59; Hakobyan, Hmayakyan 2008, 181-189].

According to the testimony of the prominent archaeologist Gevorg Tiratsyan, the Ara-

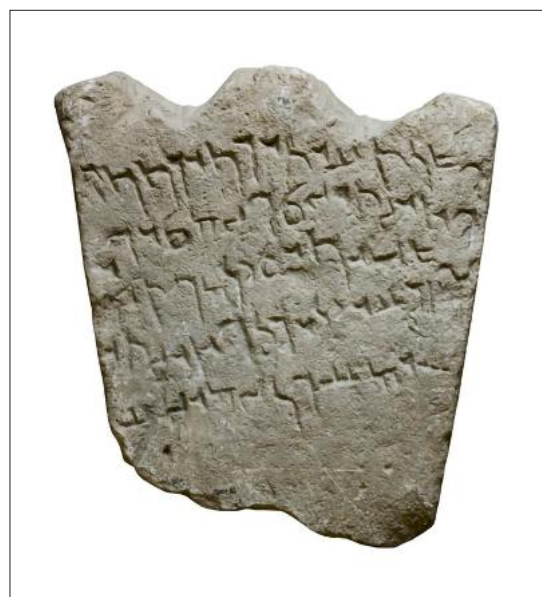


Fig. 4. A limestone boundary-stone monument from the 2nd century BC, discovered in Teghut, with an Aramaic inscription (© History Museum of Armenia).

maic word **RWNDKN** (Ervandakan), attested in the inscriptions, represents the general dynastic name of Artashes – “Yervandian” – and does not refer to the name of a land parcel, as had previously been assumed, for example by I. Diakonoff and K. Starkova [Tiratsyan 1957, 105, 110]. This dynastic designation does not occur in the titulary of other kings.

Artashes I, according to an inscription discovered at Sisian, also bore the Aramaic honorific title TB (“the Pious”) [Perikhanian 1965, 108] (fig. 5). This is clearly a specimen of Hellenistic royal title, corresponding to the Greek Εὐσεβής (“Pious”). Most likely, Artashes received this title in connection with the establishment of the cult of royal ancestors.

Let us now turn to the linguistic and structural features of the boundary-stone inscriptions. Primarily, language is Imperial Aramaic, which had been employed in so-called “bureaucratic” practice since the Achaemenid Empire [Tiratsian 1972, 99, 116]. The titulary attested in the inscriptions appears in both concise and expanded forms.

For example, in the inscriptions known from the Sevan basin the titulary is generally brief:

“Artashes, king, the son of Zareh” or “Artashes, king, the son of Zareh, Yervandian” [Borisov 1946, 97, 107]. Although these formulations are similar in nature, a certain variation in the sequence of the descriptive elements applied to the king can occasionally be observed. Thus, on one boundary stone we read: “King Artashes, the son of Zareh, the Yervandian, divided the land into portions” [Tiratsyan 1957, 107]; on another monument: “King Artashes, the noble Yervandian, the son of Zareh, divided the land here, in (such-and-such) village” (Tiratsian 1980, 99); or, again, “King Artashes, the Good, the Yervandian, the son of Zareh, and the crown-bearer Nikephoros (or Nikpar), the son of Akhshahrsart” [Perikhanian 1965, 108].

In the Spitak inscription discovered in 1977, the titular sequence is somewhat different. 𐤀𐤓𐤕𐤍 ...the sequence of the royal titles is somewhat different: “Artashes, king, Yervandian, the Good, the son of Zareh” [Tiratsian 1980, 99, 104]. Here the collective designation “Yervandian” is placed not at the end, but immediately after the word “king,” followed by the honorific title “the Pious,” which stands between the dynastic name and the patronymic, while the indication “the son of Zareh” appears only at the end [Markaryan 2017, 224].

The abbreviated formulation of Artashes’ royal titulary, observable on the *Sevan* monuments, suggests that this titulary was in use during the initial years of his accession to power in Armenia [Markaryan 2017, 224].

The adoption of the dynastic name “Yervandian” in the inscriptions allowed King Artashes to underscore his kinship ties not only to the preceding Yervandian rulers of Armenia but to the Achaemenids as well. According to Strabo, the lineage of the Yervandunis traced its origin to the Persian Hydarnes, who was a descendant of the Achaemenid dynasty [Strabo 1964, XI, XIV, 15].

Another characteristic feature of the inscriptions preserved on the boundary stones is the presence of a section indicating their function. The text was generally composed according to established and widely accepted formulae that were stable and nearly invariable. As a rule, the inscription first presents the king – here, Artashes the Pious – from whose authority the command is issued; this is followed by an emphasis on his kinship with the Yervandian royal house, which

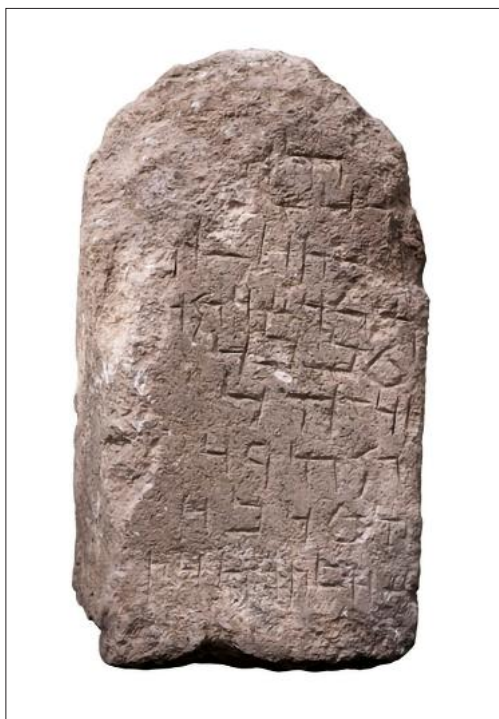


Fig. 5. A boundary-stone monument from the 2nd century BC discovered in Sisian, bearing an Aramaic inscription (© History Museum of Armenia).

served to affirm the dynastic legitimacy of the preceding dynasty; finally, the functional purpose of erecting the monument is specified, namely the delimitation of the village's land ownership.

Thus, the Aramaic documents inscribed on the monuments erected by Artashes I are of exceptional significance in elucidating the history of the restructuring of the Armenian nation. They constitute key milestones in the history of writing as one of the most salient manifestations of the formation of statehood.

Stable Formulae in the Armenian Medieval Inscriptions

Following the invention of the Armenian alphabet by Mesrop Mashtots (405 AD), inscriptions composed in the Armenian language and written in the newly created script gradually spread throughout the Armenian Highlands. The earliest known Armenian inscription to date – preserved only in the form of a plaster cast copy – originates from the Cathedral of Tekor (displayed at the History Museum of Armenia, 2.83×88.5×7.8 m, Inv. No. 3074) (fig. 6,a-b). The period of leadership of the figures mentioned in the inscription – Prince Sahak Kamsarakan (†505 AD) and Catholicos Hovhan Mandakuni (478-490 AD) – together

with the paleographic characteristics of the letter forms, make it possible to date the inscription at least to the 480s: ...Սահակ Կամսարական, շինեաց զայս վկայարան Սրբոյ Սարգսի... եւ հիմարկեցաւ տեղիս ի ձեռն Յովհանու հայոց կաթաղիկոսութեան... – ...**Sahak Kamsarakan built this martyrium of Saint Sargis ... and this place was founded during the catholicosate of Yohan of the Armenians...** [Ghafadaryan 2007, 118-119, 121; Greenwood 2004, 80; Harutyunyan *et all.* 2025, 33]. Like this inscription, the other inscriptions known from the early medieval period are also predominantly constructional in nature, which primarily clarifies the central purpose of composing inscriptions in the early Christian era: namely, to record and transmit to future generations the accomplishment of construction works.

Certain formulaic features are already noticeable in the structure of 5th-7th century inscriptions. It should first be noted that early medieval written sources had not yet adopted the practice of recording dates numerically. Therefore, the principal method of indicating time during that period was to mention the names of the secular and ecclesiastical leaders reigning at the time, and occasionally also the specific year of their rule, or even the exact month, date, and day.

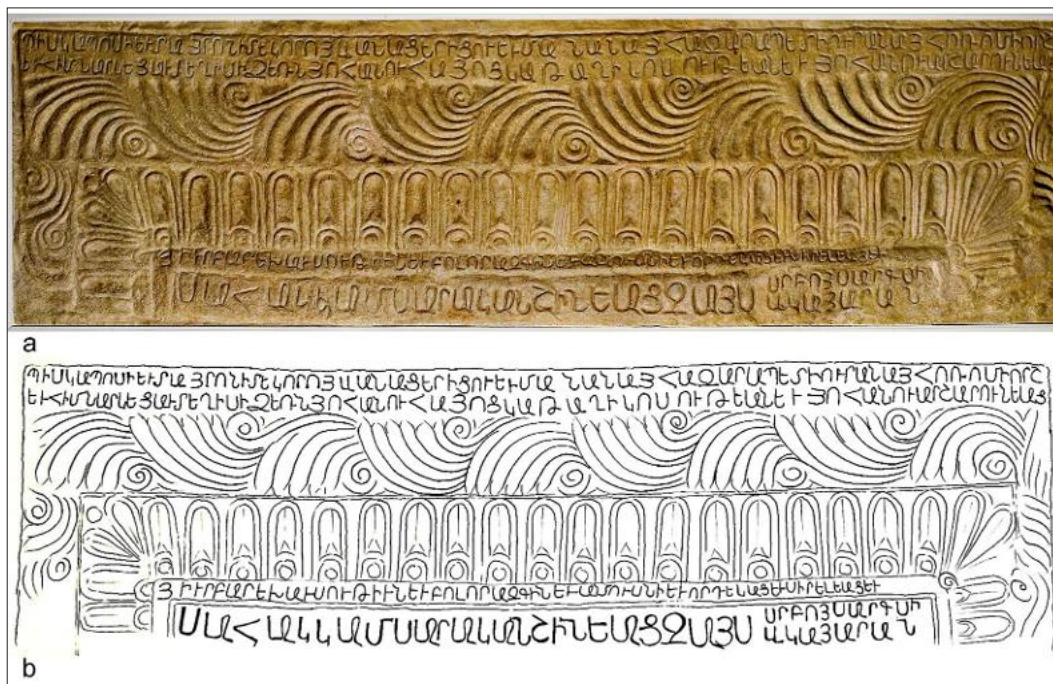


Fig. 6, a-b. The oldest Armenian inscription, Tekor's temple, 480s AD (© History Museum of Armenia).

This phenomenon became especially widespread in inscriptions of the 6th-7th centuries, eventually turning into an almost essential component of their introductory section. For instance, if in the case of the building inscription of the Tekor's Cathedral the direct mention of the secular and ecclesiastical leaders of the country was crucial for dating the inscription, then in the now-lost inscription of the ruined Church of Saint John the Baptist of Bagavan, the beginning and completion of the church's construction were explicitly recorded. The construction was said to have begun on the 30th day of the month of Hrotits, in the 21st regnal year of the Byzantine king Heraclius (Heraclius I, 610-641 AD), corresponding to June 16, 631 AD, and to have been completed on the 20th day of Navasard in the 29th regnal year of the same emperor, that is, July 9, 639 AD, during the catholicosate of Ezer (Ezras), Catholicos of the Armenians (630-641 AD): Քսան եւ ւփ ամոյն աստուածապահ Երակղի թագաւորի, Հրոտից ամսոյն, որ ար երեսուն էր, եւ Եզրաս Հայոց կաթողիկոս եւ Սուրբ վանաց երէց, հաճոյիւքն Աստուծոյ հիմն արկի սրբոյ եկեղեցոյս եւ ի քսան եւ իններորդ ամի նոյն Երակղի թագաւորի, յամսեան Նաւասարդի, որ ար քսան էր, յաւուրն ուրբաթ, եղեւ կատարումս... – **In the twenty-first year of the God-protected King Heraclius, on the thirtieth day of the month of Hrotits, I, Ezras, Catholicos of the Armenians and priest of the holy monastery, by the grace of God laid the foundation of this holy church; and in the twenty-ninth year of the same King Heraclius, in the month of Navasard, on the twentieth day, on a Friday, its completion took place...** [Orbeli 1963, 386; Barkhudaryan 1963, 26; Greenwood 2004, 825].

Similarly, the now-lost inscription of the Church of Saint Anania in Alaman likewise follows a comparable formula. According to it, the church was constructed in the 27th year of the reign of King Heraclius, that is, in 637 AD, under the patronage of Nerseh, the lord of the Shirak and Arsharunik cantons: Քսան եւ երթնեմոյ Հերակղի բարեպաշտ թագաւորի, Ներսէի Շիրակայ եւ Արշարունեաց տեառն... – **In the twenty-seventh year of the pious King Heraclius, Nerseh – the lord of Shirak and Arsharunik...** [Orbeli 1963, 395; Greenwood 2004, 81-82]. According to the three-line inscription on the western

wall of the church of Mren Cathedral, the church was built in the 29th/30th year of the reign of King Heraclius, that is, in 639/640 AD, during the rule of David Kuropalates, who was the patrician (governor) and commander-in-chief of the Armenians and Assyrians, under the episcopacy of Bishop Theophilus, and in the time of Nerseh – the lord of the Shirak and Arsharunik cantons: Ամոյն քսան եւ իններորդի (կամ՝ երեսներորդի – Ա. Հ.) Հերակղի բարեպաշտ թագաւորի, յիշխանութեան Դաւթի ամենագոյ պատրկի, կուրապաղատի եւ սպարապետի Հայոց եւ ասորոց եւ եպիսկոպոսութեանն սրբաւորի տեառն Թեովփիղոսի եւ ի տանուտերութեան Ներսէի Շիրակայ եւ Արշարունեաց տեառն... – **In the twenty-ninth (or thirtieth – A. H.) year of the victorious King Heraclius, during the rule of David, the most renowned patrician, kuropalates, and commander-in-chief of the Armenians and Assyrians, under the episcopacy of the God-loving Bishop Theophilus, and in the lordship of Nerseh – the lord of Shirak and Arsharunik...** [Orbeli 1963, 401; Greenwood 2004, 837; Karapetyan 2012, 55]. Incidentally, Prince Nerseh Kamsarakan is also mentioned, together with his spouse Shushan and his son Hrahat, in the building inscription of the Church of the Holy Mother of God in Talin Cathedral [Orbeli 1963, 434; Greenwood 2004, 86₁₂].

The building inscription of the now-destroyed Church of Saint Theodoros of Bagaran is composed according to the same dating principle. In this case, the patron of the construction is But from the Araveghian lineage, who initiated the building of the church in the 34th year of the reign of the Persian king Khosrov Parvez, that is, in 624 AD. However, four years later, in 628 AD, he was killed by a certain Gobti and Khumath, and the construction work was completed only three years afterward, in 631 AD, under the care of his spouse Anna, on the 20th day of the month of Tre, that is, on October 9: Երեսուն եւ չորրորդ ամի Խոսրովայ արքայի, երանելի Տէր Բուտ Առուեղեան ձգեաց հիմունս սուրբ եկեղեցոյս եւ երեսուն եւ ութ ամոյն Գոբթի եւ Խումաթ կորուսին զԲուտն եւ յետ երից ամաց մահուան Բոին կատարեաց սուրբ եկեղեցիս Աննայ Բոին ամուսին, Տրէ ամսեան ի քսան... – **In the thirty-fourth year of King Khosrov, the blessed Lord But**

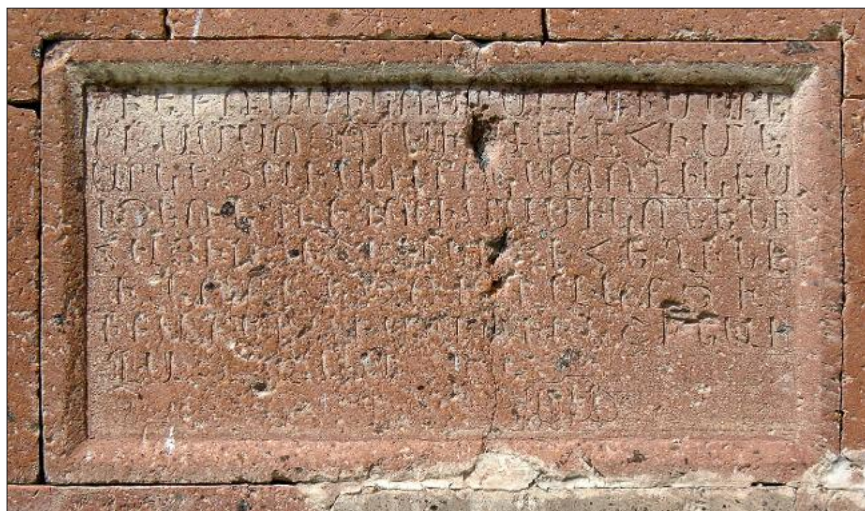


Fig. 7. The Building Inscription of Aruch's Cathedral, 662 AD (© Hrayr Baze Khacherean 2017).

Araveghian laid the foundations of this holy church; and in the thirty-eighth year, Gobti and Khumath killed But; and three years after But's death, Anna, But's spouse, completed this holy church, on the twentieth day of the month of Tre... [Orbeli 1963, 393; Greenwood 2004, 81₃].⁷ Another one, in the inscription preserved externally on the eastern wall of the Church of Saint Gregory the Illuminator in Aruch Cathedral, the foundation of the church is attributed to the 21st year of the reign of the Byzantine emperor Constantine (Constans II, 641-668 AD), on the 15th day of the month of Mareri, which corresponds to March 25, 662 AD (in the original text recorded as 29, later corrected): Ի ԷԼ Թ (=Ա) ամի Կոստանտինի, Մարերի ամսոյ, որ արք Ժ ԷԼ Ե (15), հիմարկեցաւ Սուրբ Կաթողիկէս... – **In the twenty-ninth year of Constantine, in the month of Mareri, on the 15th day, the Holy Cathedral was founded...** [Orbeli 1963, 402; Matevosyan 1987, 58; Greenwood 2004, 86₁₁] (fig. 7).

As we can see, in the aforementioned building inscriptions the masters recorded the fact of the

churches' construction with characteristic formulae, such as: "was founded" (հիմարկեցաւ – Tekor, Aruch), "laid the foundation" (հիմա արկի, ձգեաց հիմունս – Bagavan, Bagaran), or simply "I built/was built/we built/builder" (շինեցի/շինեցաւ/շինեցաք/շինաւ – Alaman, Talin, Mren, Vaghshapat, Ateni, etc.). At the same time, the inscriptions also record the purpose and expectation of those who initiated the construction of a given church, which, as a rule, are confined to supplicatory requests for intercession before the Lord, for the salvation of souls, or for being remembered by the readers. At times, this shifts from the individual to the collective, seeking intercession: ...Կամարականաց, ԷԼ Սրենոյ, ԷԼ ամենայն երկրի... – **...for the Kamsarakans, and for Mren, and for the whole land...** [Orbeli 1963, 401]. It may be observed that Armenian epigraphy in the early Middle Ages, according to the examples known to us, was already to some extent systematized, displaying formulaic expressions stemming from the nature of inscriptions themselves, and possessing a clear three-part structure: introduction, motive, and intended purpose or expectation, namely:

a. *Introduction* – which, within the context of the time, summarizes the names and titles of secular and spiritual leaders, and sometimes also includes the specific year of their reign (as well as the month, date, and day).

b. *Motive* – which constitutes the core event prompting the composition of the inscription, whether it be the founding of a church, the beginning of construction, its completion, and so forth.

7. The tradition of indicating the beginning and completion of construction work in inscriptions is sometimes also observable in later centuries. For example, the building inscription of the main church of the Marmashen monastery records the beginning of the church's construction in the year of the Armenian era 437 (988 AD) and its completion in 478 (1029 AD) [Barkhudaryan 2017, 94₁₃₆]. The construction of the Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist at Gandzasar Monastery was initiated by Hasan-Jalal Dola in the year of the Armenian era 665 (1216 AD) and completed in 687 (1238 AD), while its consecration took place in 689 (1240 AD) [Barkhudaryan 1982, 38-40₈₂]. The examples can be continued.

c. *Purpose and expectation* – which encapsulates the appeal for mediation and intercession, or for the salvation of souls, in return for the works accomplished.

Let us turn to the inscriptions of the High Middle Ages. Beginning in the second half of the 8th century, Armenian inscriptions gradually started to record the date as well, with the letters of the Mesropian alphabet serving as numerical symbols according to their numeric values. Although several methods of interpreting dates circulated during the Middle Ages, the one most characteristic of inscriptions is the so-called “Great Armenian era”, whose starting point is considered to be July 11, 552 AD [Abrahamyan 1973, 112-114]. As a rule, the actual date-forming numeral letters were preceded or followed by set formulae, such as: “in the Armenian yea/date” (ի թուին Հայոց), “of the Armenian chronology”

(թուականութեան Հայոց), and other standardized expressions. As such, the earliest known dated Armenian inscription to this day is considered to be the inscription bearing the Armenian date 232 (783 CE), preserved on the western face of the southern pillar of the Talin’s Cathedral. It was composed by a certain monk named Ukhtatur and his brother on the occasion of bringing water to Talin – that is, constructing a canal [Harutyunyan 2022, 86]. From this perspective, the inscription is once again construction-related in character; however, it is noteworthy in that it is also reinforced with a formula of curse – something that seems to have been absent from early Armenian inscriptions: ՄԼԲ (783 թ.) թուականութեան Հայոց, ես Ուխտատուր վանականս եւ Տուտի եղբայր իմ, բերաք զաղբիւրանիս ի Քարկապանու վատեն ի Թալին, թէ յիշխողաց որ իսկէ, իմ մեղացս պարտական եղիցի – **In the year of the Armenian era 232 (783 AD), I, the monk Ukhtatur, and Tuti, my brother, brought these water from the Karkapan to Talin. If anyone in authority should divert them, may he be accountable for my sins** [Harutyunyan 2024a, 190] (fig. 8,a-b): For inscriptions of this type, four main components can be typologized: time, actor(s), occasion/event, and the concluding formula (curse and blessing).

From the mid-9th century to the 15th century, alongside Armenian building inscriptions as well as Georgian inscriptions documented in the territory of Armenia, there is also a large number of dedicatory and canon-law inscriptions. These too are distinguished by a range of structural features [Sargsyan 2006, 109-133; Sargsyan 2007, 40-92; Muradyan 1977, 27-30]. A component of inscriptions from the specified period was not only the recording of the date specifying the time, but also the titles and names of rulers (sometimes including references to their ancestors), the motive, purpose, expectation, and, of course, the well-known formulae

of curse-blessing or commemoration, with which the inscription was typically concluded.

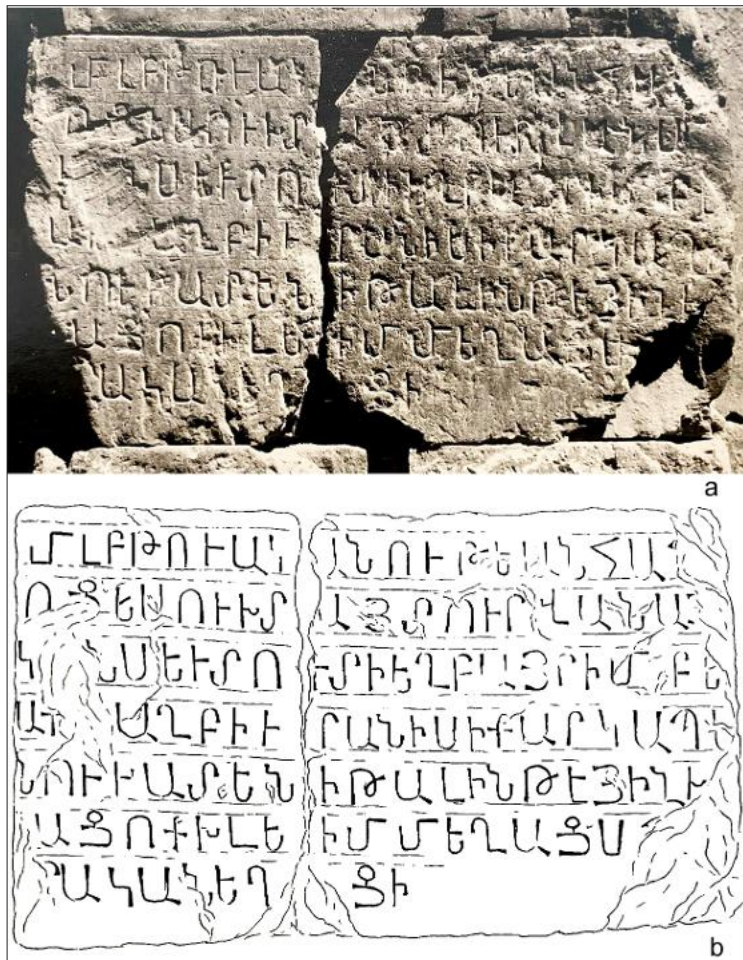


Fig. 8, a-b. Oldest Dated Inscription, Talin Cathedral, 783 AD (© A. Harutyunyan 2024).

Thus, the 874 AD inscription preserved on the eastern face of the drum of the Church of St. Karapet of Sevanavank, which is building-donative in nature, provides noteworthy information about the political events of the medieval Armenia, the institution of patronage, and the newly formed monastic landownership system. The text is composed in the name of Ashot I Bagratuni (885-890 AD), who had not yet been formally anointed king at the time, and his daughter – Princess Mariam. In it, Ashot is referred to with the title “king”, while Mariam is given the honorific title “Lady of Syunik”. Princess Mariam built churches in the monastery, and together with King Ashot they made donations to the monastery – namely, they transferred ownership of several villages, arable lands, and one vineyard each in Garni and Yerevan. The inscription is reinforced with curse-blessing formulae and concluded with the recording of the date [Melikset-Bek 2010, 374; Ghafadaryan 2007, 165].

First of all, the introductory section of inscriptions from the mentioned period, actions are generally presented as occurring by the will, grace, name, or simply divine power of God – similar to the well-known openings of Urartian cuneiform inscriptions from the Kingdom of Van, where events are likewise carried out through the power, greatness, or might of the god Haldi (see the first part of this article). This may also be a direct manifestation of otherworldly conceptions and medieval perceptions of sacred writing, as reflected in the practice – found in many inscriptions – of placing a carved cross at the beginning and concluding the text with the Lord’s “Amen” (as seen in Saghmosavank, Hovhannavank, Kecharis, and others).

In the context of events occurring by the will of God, the aforementioned Sevanavank’s inscription presents the so-called actors: Mariam – Lady of Syunik, and King Ashot: Կամսան Աստուծոյ, Միւնեաց տիկին Մարիամ..., միացաւ թագաւորն Աշոտ... – **By the will of God, Mariam – Lady of Syunik... and King Ashot... were joined...** [Melikset-Bek 2010, 374; Ghafadaryan 2007, 165]. They undertake to participate in two key actions: the construction of churches and the granting of estates to the monastery: ...շինեցի զեկեղեցիքն յանուն Մբ Առաքելոցն... եւ տվաք վախմ Մբ Առաքելոցս... – **I built the churches in the name of the Holy Apostles...**

and we gave vakhm (inviolable estate – A.H.) to the Holy Apostles [Melikset-Bek 2010, 374; Ghafadaryan 2007, 165]. Then the villages and field tracts donated to the monastery are listed – Varsar, Gomadzor, Tsamakaberd, Berd, Ureatstap, and others – as well as vineyards in Garni and Yerevan. The inscription concludes with a curse-blessing formula and is finalized with the recording of the date specifying the time: ...նվ խափանէ, ՅԺԸ (318) հայրապետացն նզովեալ եղիցի, կատարիչքն աւրինին յԱստուած, թվին ՅԻԳ (874 թ.) – **...whoever violates it shall be cursed by the 318 patriarchs (of the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea – A. H.); may those who carry it out be blessed by God; in the year of the Armenian era 323 (874 AD)** [Melikset-Bek 2010, 374; Ghafadaryan 2007, 165].

The content of inscriptions known from the 9th-10th centuries and later directly attests to the existence of the new feudal landholding institution formed in medieval Armenia, under which monasteries became major landowners and tax-exempt establishments. In this context, an inscription acquires the value of a document certifying the completed “transaction”, illuminating the agreement “sealed” between the donor and the recipient, often concluding with the celebration of liturgical services set by the leader of the monastery or the monastic congregation – frequently on religious feast days designated by the donor. For example, the extensive 903 AD inscription on the drum of the Church of St. Gregory the Illuminator in Vanevan (fig. 9), which is building-donative in nature, exhibits a clear structural pattern. In the introductory section, the main actor appears first: Sparapet Shapuh Bagratuni, the son of Ashot I, who, during the reign of his brother, King Smbat I Bagratuni (891-914), and under Catholicos Hovhannes Draskhanakerttsi (898-929), in the year 903 AD, undertook – together with his sister, Princess Mariam of Syunik – to build a church in the Vanevan monastery for the sake of God, being fully aware that everything in life is transient and fleeting: ...իմացայ եւ ծանեայ, թէ ամենայն փառք եւ մեծութիւն ըսպառելոց են եւ վաղիւ կորընչելոց... – **...I have understood and realized that all glory and greatness are fleeting and long ago perished...** [Barkhudaryan 1973, 121⁴⁹¹]. The primary occasion for composing the inscription was not only the construction of the



Fig. 9. Building-Donative Inscription of Vanevan's Cathedral, 903 AD (© A. Harutyunyan 2020).

church, in connection with which the well-known saying about attaining virtue is cited: ...յորժամ բանքն սպառին եւ գործքն թագաւորեն – **When words run out, the deeds accomplished are crowned** [Barkhudaryan 1973, 122₄₉₁], but also the making of donations to the monastery, which served as a means of commemorating the donors. The text concludes with the recording of the date: ...ի թուին Հայոց ՅԾԲ (903) – **in the year of the Armenian era 352 (903 AD)** [Barkhudaryan 1973, 122₄₉₁].

The 1255 AD inscription of the scriptorium-church of Saghmsovank, also building-donative in nature, exhibits a more regular structure, with clear distinctions between the sections recording the time, the names, the occasion or event, the purpose, the expectation, and the curse-blessing

formulae (fig. 10). The inscription begins with a carved cross, followed by the recording of the date: † Ի թվին ՉԴ (1255) – **† In the year of the Armenian era 704 (1255 AD)**, after which the construction and donation are described, along with the nominal mention of the initiators – Kurd Vachutyan and his spouse Khorishah – who, in memory of their prematurely deceased daughter Mamakhatun, built the scriptorium-church and made donations: ...շինեցաք զգրատունս եւ հաստատեցաք զմատուռս յանուն դստեր մերոյ Մամախատունին, որ տարածամ փոխեցաւ ի Քրիստոս, եւ մեք զարդիր նորա արարաք խաչ ոսկի եւ Աւետարան ոսկետուփ, Է (7) նափորս (շուրջառ – Ա. Հ.) եւ վառ (խաչվառ – Ա. Հ.) եւ զարդք եկեղեցոյ... – **...we built the scriptorium and established the chapel in memory of our daughter Mamakhatun, who prematurely passed to Christ, and we donated her ornaments: a golden cross, a Gospel in a gold case, seven chasuble, one gonfalon, and other church utensils...** [Yeghiazaryan 1961, 44-45₁₈; Petrosyants 2023, 300-301]. Following the primary occasion comes the recording of the purpose and expectation – namely, the commemoration of Mamakhatun through the liturgical services to be performed for her, with the precise designation of religious feast days, such as: Christmas, Easter, Holy Mother of God, Holy Cross, etc [Yeghiazaryan 1961, 45₁₈; Petrosyants 2023, 301].



Fig. 10. Building-Donative Inscription of Saghmsovank's Church-Scriptorium, 1255 AD (© A. Harutyunyan 2020).

The inscription concludes with formulae of blessing and curse: ...կատարիչ գրոյս արինին յԱստուծոյ, ով խափանէ, դատի ի Տեառնէ. ամէն – **...may those who carry out this inscription be blessed by God; whoever disrupts it shall be judged by the Lord. Amen** [Yeghiazaryan 1961, 45¹⁸].

The donor could also belong to the clergy, even the leader of the monastery. According to the dated 1217 AD inscription of Sanahin monastery, the abbot Grigor Vardapet, donated a large cross (possibly reliquary), thirteen books, and other items to the local Church of the Holy Mother of God. In return, a regulation was established with blessing and curse formulae: ...գրեցաւ ինձ Սրբոյն Բարսղի տաւնին ամէն եկեղեցիքս՝ մինչ ի կատարած (վերջը – Ա. Հ.) աշխարհի: Որք յաւժար կամաւք կատարեն զինդիրս իմ՝ արինին յԱստուծոյ, իսկ թէ ոք խափանել ջանայ նզովս առցէ յԱստուծոյ եւ ամենայն սրբոց – **...he wrote to me on the Holy Basil, for all my churches (altars) – until the end of the world: Whoever faithfully fulfills my request shall be blessed by God, but if anyone tries to violate it, let them take my curse from God and all the saints** [Barkhudaryan *et al.* 2012, 45-46⁴⁴].

The same structural formulae typical of building or donative inscriptions is often observable in inscriptions of a canon-law nature as well. As an example, consider the 1295 AD charter of the Church of St. Hripsime in Vagharshapat, whose structure is entirely comparable to the previously mentioned examples (fig. 11). The inscription, beginning with the recording of the date, has an extensive introductory section in which the names of the local rulers and those exempting the monastery from the tenth of cotton (shariat) are attested: Ի պարոնութեան իշխանաց իշխանին մեծին Շահրնշահի եւ Աղբուղին, եւ Շիրին խաթունս ու Պայալուն խաթունս, ու Թաղթէս, ու Թալէս, ու Խոճէս, ու Ղայիրս... – **In the lordship of the great prince of princes Shahanshah, and Aghbugha, I – Shirin Khatun and Payalun Khatun, and Toghta, and Tala, and Khocha, and Ghayir...** [Harutyunyan 2016, 267-528]. Then the main occasion is stated: ...թողաք զճոյսիսմուցս զբաբակին շարիատն... – **...let the Shariat tax of cotton...**, followed by rather extensive curse formulae and a very brief blessing: ...արդ, ի մերոց

կամ յաւտարաց, ի մեծաց կամ ի փոքունց խափանել ջանայ, ՅԺԸ (318) հայրապետացն նզոված է, Կայէնի եւ Յուդայի մասնակից է, եւ յիր հաւատէն ապիգար է (նզովված է – Ա. Հ.), յամէն յազգէ նալլաթ է (նզովված է – Ա. Հ.), եւ արինեալ հող զնա մի՛ ծածկեցէ, կատարիչքն արինին յԱստուծոյ – **...but if anyone, whether of our people or of strangers, whether great or small, should attempt to violate it, they are cursed by the 318 patriarchs, a participant in Cain and Judah, and an enemy of the faith, accursed for all generations; and may they not cover their blessed land, and may those who carry out [this grant] be blessed by God** [Harutyunyan 2016, 267⁵²⁸].

The phenomenon is also noticeable in the case of late medieval inscriptions, except that during this period the classical donative inscriptions are replaced by brief commemorative notes composed in the names of visiting pilgrims; inscriptions of a canon-law in nature almost disappear,

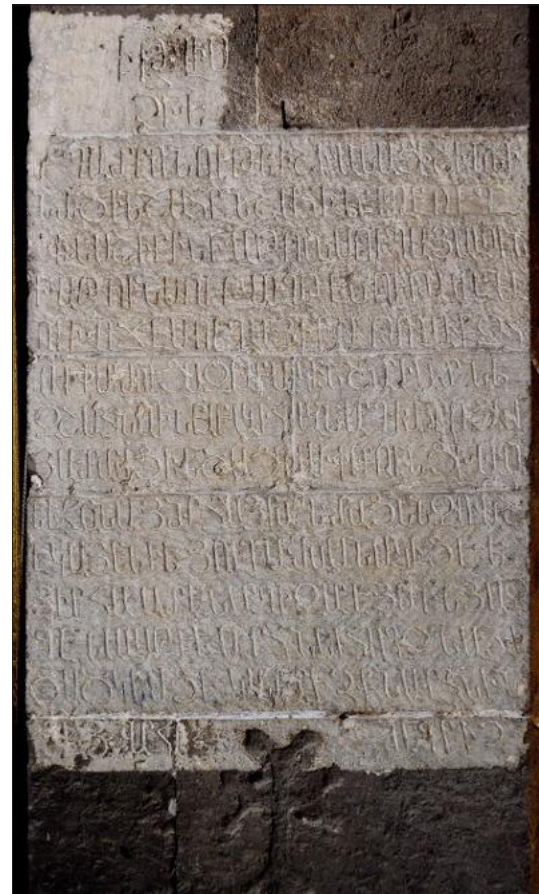


Fig. 11. Medieval Legal Inscription from St. Hripsime Cathedral, 1296 AD (© A. Harutyunyan 2021).



Fig. 12. A Building Inscription Mentioning the Names of the Patron and Members of his Family, 1693 AD (© A. Harutyunyan 2020).

while building inscriptions are sometimes composed in a more extensive form. Foremost among them are the nominal – often detailed – commemorations of the patron of the construction and the members of his family. For example, the metrical building inscription of the Holy Mother of God Church (Zoravor) in Yerevan mentions the names of Panos, a merchant-khoja and patron of the church built in 1693 AD on the site of the hermitage of Saint Anania's the Apostle during the catholicosate of Nahapet Yedesatsi, Catholicos of All Armenians (1691-1705), as well as those of his sons Eliaz and Movses, and his grandson Aharon: ...խօճայ Փանոս վերայձայնի, Սբ Աստուածածինս շինողի, յիշատակ ուրն եւ նախնի ծնողաց ուրոց, հարցն առաջի, որոց ուրոցն էլիագի եւ Մովսէսի քաղցր ողկոյզի, թոռան ուրոյ Ահարոնի... – ...**Khoja Panos, the builder of this Holy Mother of God church, in memory of himself and of his forefathers and parents before him, and of his sons – Eliaz and Movses, “sweet clusters of the vine” – and of his grandson – Aharon...** [Harutyunyan 2020, 168₁] (fig. 12). The names of Panos's father, Satibek, and his spouse, Hurikhan, can be read in the inscriptions on the khachkars embedded into the exterior of the eastern wall of the same church, where the inscriptions are once again formulated according to phraseological patterns characteristic of the period: Յիշատակ է Սբ խաչս Սատիպէկի որդի խօճայ Փանոսին, թվին ՌՃԽԲ (1693) – **This Holy Cross is in memory of Khoja Panos, the son of Satibek, in the year of the Armenian era 1142**

(1693 AD) or Յիշատակ է Սբ խաչս Փանոսի կողակից Հուրիխանին, թվին ՌՃԽԲ (1693) – **This Holy Cross is in memory of Hurikhan, spouse of Panos, in the year of the Armenian era 1142 (1693 AD)** [Harutyunyan 2020, 171_{2,3}].

A similar case is the metrical building inscription of the Shoghakat Church in Vagharshapat, which is likewise accompanied and supplemented by brief commemorative inscriptions on the khachkars embedded in the church walls (fig. 13). According to the inscription, the church was built in 1694 AD during the catholicosate of Nahapet Yedesatsi, through the means of Khoja Aghamal, originally from Nakhichevan: ...արդեամբք Աղամալին բարեպաշտօնի, գոլով քաղաքէն Նախիջեւանի, շինեաց յիշատակ փրկել զիր հոգին, հօրն Աղաջանին, մօրն Նանագուլին, նաեւ կենակցին իւր Մարիամին եւ որոց իւրոց՝ Ալբերդիոսին, Ագաթանկէղոսին, Աղէքսանդրոսին եւ Խարիսիմոս փոքր եղբայր սոցին, դստերաց իւրոց Նոյեմզարային, այլեւ զԱսանէթ եւ Նանագուլին... – ...through the efforts of the Aghamal, from the city of Nakhichevan, he built [this church] in memory for the salvation of his soul, for his father Aghajan, his mother Nanagul, as well as for his spouse Mariam, and for his sons Alberdios, Agathangelos, Alexanderos, and Kharisimos, the younger brother among them, and for his daughters Noyemzar, as well as Asaneth and Nanagul... [Harutyunyan 2016, 339₆₇₉]. If we take into account that many of their names are also attested in the khachkar commemorative inscriptions of the same church, it is



Fig. 13. A Building Inscription Mentioning the Names of the Patron and Members of his Family, 1694 AD (© A. Harutyunyan 2022).

also possible to reconstruct a partial genealogical tree of the Aghamalian family, which we have previously done [Harutyunyan 2016, 339].

As for the inscriptions on monumental memorials – particularly medieval khachkars and tombstones – they are likewise characterized by formulaic expressions, sometimes with identical openings and closings. If epitaphs are more commonly characterized by formulaic openings, such as: “this is the tomb”, “this is the resting place”, “this grave”, or “this monument”, as well as by lines lamenting those who died at a young age [Harutyunyan 2024b, 549,], then in the case of khachkars the commemorative inscription typically begins with well-known formulas, such as: “this Holy Cross is an intercessor” or “this Holy Cross is in memory” which became especially widespread in the developed and late medieval periods. On the basis of approximately two hundred inscribed monuments attested in the Noratus cemetery alone, it is possible to document several manifestations of this phenomenon [Barkhudaryan 1973, 13-49¹⁻¹⁸⁸], which are also typical of inscriptions on other monumental memorials as well.

As for earlier khachkars, their primary purpose and function can be clearly determined on the basis of the inscriptions themselves, whose structure is generally understood through the following four canonical components: occasion, act of erection, purpose, and request-message [Petrosyan 2008, 316]. With certain variations, these can be documented even in early examples of khachkar culture known from the mid-9th century, since khachkar inscriptions depart from their canonical structure

only in rare cases, and even then, only when there is a change in the occasion of erection [Petrosyan 2008, 315]. Thus, Queen Katranide I of Bagratid Kingdom, as early as 879 AD – six years before the official coronation of her husband Ashot I Bagratuni – erected a khachkar in Garni for the intercession of her own soul, referring to herself as queen: ...*Էս Կատրանիդէ, Հայոց թագուհի, որ կանգնեալ զսուրբ խաչս ի բարեխոսութիւն ինձ – I, Katranide, Queen of the Armenians, who have erected this Holy Cross for my intercession...* [Petrosyan 2008, 94]. According to the inscription of the 924 AD khachkar known from the village of Janfida (Armavir province, Armenia), Priest Gorg erected the monument: ...*ի բարեխոսութիւն հաւատացելոց – ...for the intercession of the faithful* [Yarutiwnian 2020, 466]. And, for example, the introductory part of the extensive inscription on the back of the 990 AD khachkar from Karmrashen – originally a “vishapak’ar” (dragon stone) later turned into a khachkar – directly describes how a certain Grgorik, by divine revelation, discovered the monument, brought it to the church with great difficulty, and erected it there as a khachkar: ...*աստուածային տեսչութեանք զսի զարձանս, բազում աշխատութեամբ եւ մեծ յուսաւ բերի ի դուռն եկեղեցոյս – by divine revelation I found this stone, and with great labour and great hope I brought it to the door of this church...* [Harutyunyan 2019, 505], then the event is authenticated: ...*կանգնեցի նշան սուրբ խաչ... – ...I erected the sign of the Holy Cross...* [Harutyunyan 2019, 505], followed by the statement of purpose and expectation: ...

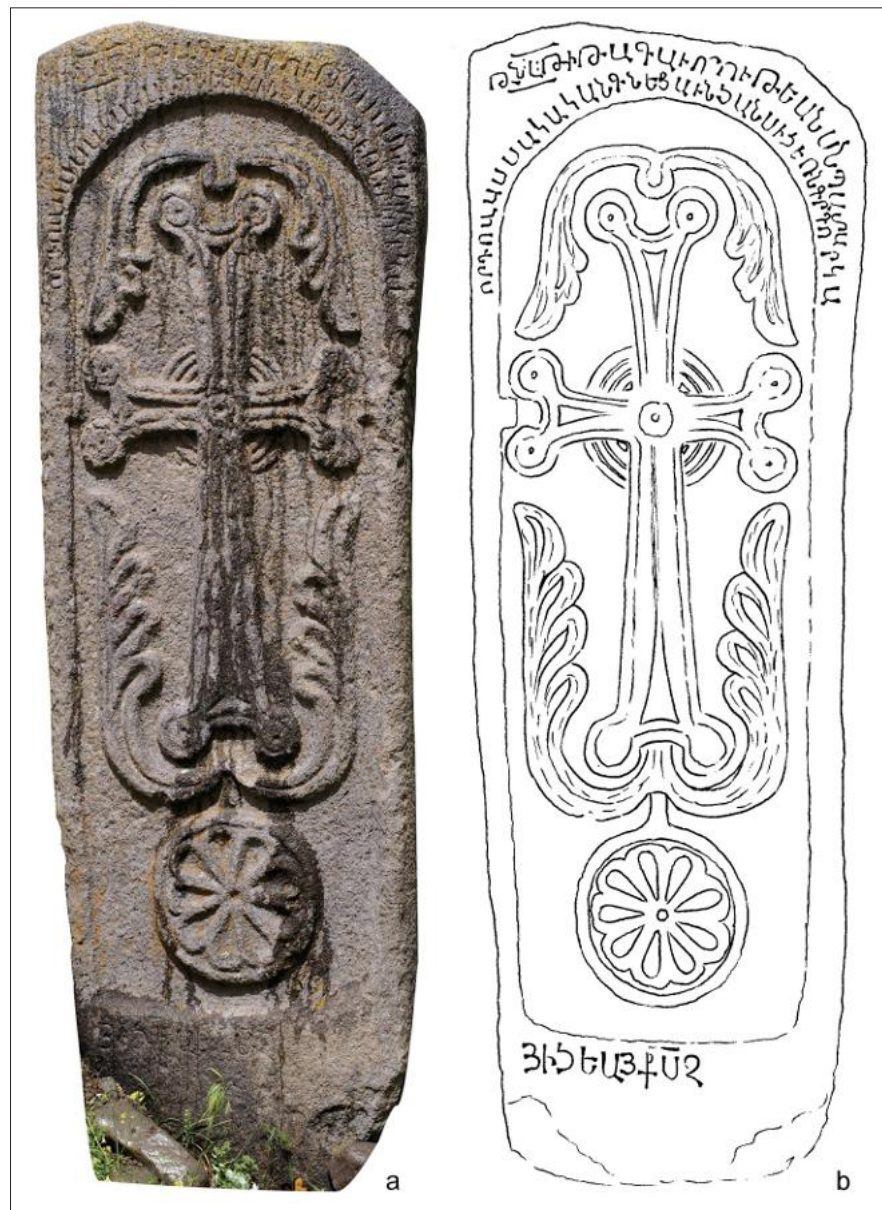


Fig. 14, a-b. The Dragon-Stone (Vishapakar) of Karmrashen turned into Cross-Stone (Khachkar), 990 AD (© A. Harutyunyan 2019).

իմ զաւակաց արեւշատութեան, որ աւուրս Ահել զալստեան Որդոյն Աստուծոյ, առեալ զսա դանպար լուսոյ ընդառաջ՝ տեսանել զփառս Քրիստոսի – **...for the well-being and long life of my children, so that on the day of the dread coming of the Son of God, taking this as a lamp of light, they may go forth to meet and behold the glory of Christ** [Harutyunyan 2019, 505], followed by the well-known formulae of request-message: ...որք ընթերնուք զգծագիրս ի վէմս քանդակեալս, յիշեցեք եւ զիս՝ յաւգնամեղս – **...you who read these carved writings on stone,**

remember me also, a sinner [Harutyunyan 2019, 505] (fig. 14,a-b; 15,a-b). Notably, the formula of commemoration characterizes the inscription as a “diagram carved on stone,” which is unique in its kind. Examples of this nature could be further multiplied; however, within the scope of the present study, those already cited are sufficient to clearly illustrate the phenomenon under consideration across its historical development.

Conclusion

Notably, the written culture of the Armenian Highlands has an ancient history. Over time, the

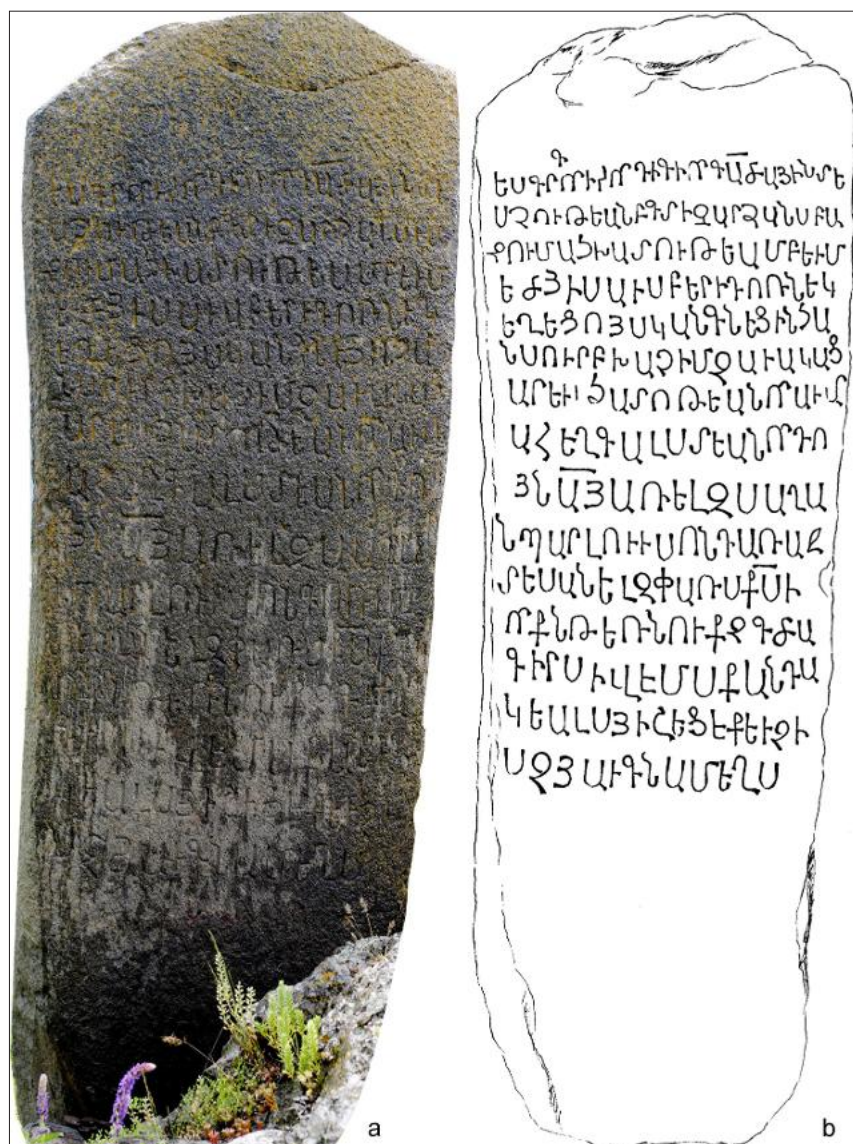


Fig. 15, a-b. The Dragon-Stone (Vishapakar) of Karmrashen turned into Cross-Stone (Khachkar), 990 AD (© A. Harutyunyan 2019).

transformations undergone by different writing systems have also been reflected in their structural features and stable formulae. What is noteworthy is that throughout all periods in the history of written culture, the traditional foundation of inscription composition has remained largely the same: to record events, thereby ensuring the commemoration of the individuals mentioned.

The question remains what additional components might accompany an inscription. In the introductory section, the executed works were sometimes attributed to God or divine power; the names of secular and spiritual leaders of the country were recorded with their respective titles;

especially in medieval inscriptions, emphasis was placed on the purpose of the act and what was to be received in return, most commonly expressed through the offering of liturgical services. The inscription was then concluded with formulae of curse directed at those who might violate or neglect the established order, and with blessings addressed to those who fulfilled it.

The epigraphic examples drawn from the three main stages illuminating the written culture of the Armenian Highlands demonstrate that both the cuneiform inscriptions of the Kingdom of Van, the Aramaic inscriptions of Classical Armenia, and the medieval Mesropian (Armenian)

inscriptions were composed with a single overarching purpose: to transmit information through writing to future generations, ensuring its preservation and continued legibility.

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