



THE ART OF POTTERY DESIGN AND CAVE DRAWINGS IN ARMENIA. CHRONOLOGICAL AND STYLISTIC ORDINARINESS

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Abstract - The art of pottery design and cave drawings in Armenia. Chronological and stylistic ordinariness According to preliminary data there are about a hundred thousand cave drawings in Armenia. They are mainly situated in high mountains and comprise both personal and thematic compositions of various types. More widely-spread are the images of domestic animals, such as goats, bulls, deer, horses and beasts of prey – lions, panthers, wolves, reptiles – snakes. There is both static and dynamic portraying of them.

The anthropomorphic images, i.e. the images of mythological heroes and deities make a separate group.

Very interesting are thematic compositions, which, as a rule, are accompanied with the image of the Sun. These images portray hunting, battle, household and mythological sceneries. But the dating of this huge heritage of art remains undetermined. The meticulous analyses of archaeological finds could certainly give assistance to their dating.

Exquisitely variable and rich are the pottery ornaments of Early and Middle Bronze Ages of Armenia. In these ornaments we come across images peculiar to those in cave drawings. The comparison and the coordination of both designs will help us to determine the origin and the chronology of the cave drawings.

Riassunto - Le decorazioni sul ceramica e le pitture in grotta in Armenia. Una proposta di catalogazione cronologica e stilistica

Secondo i dati preliminari, in Armenia ci sono circa 100 000 i disegni rupestri, principalmente situati in alta montagna con rilevanti differenziazioni tematiche e tipologiche. I soggetti più comuni sono quelli che rappresentano gli animali domestici (capre, tori, cervi e cavalli) e le bestie da preda (leoni, pantere, lupi, rettili e serpenti) raffigurati sia in stile statico che dinamico. Le immagini antropomorfe, che raffigurano eroi e divinità mitologiche, costituiscono un gruppo distinto. Le composizioni tematiche (con immagini di caccia, di battaglia, di vita domestica e familiare e scene mitologiche) sono molto interessanti e, in generale, sono accompagnate rappresentazioni solari. Ma la datazione di questo enorme patrimonio artistico rimane incerta e solo l'attenta analisi dei ritrovamenti archeologici potrebbe contribuire ad una sua definizione.

Le decorazioni su ceramica della prima e media età del Bronzo in Armenia sono incredibilmente ricche e varie. In questo repertorio figurativo possiamo individuare dei grafemi specifici di arte parietale. Il confronto fra le due tipologie grafiche potranno aiutarci a determinare l'origine e la cronologia dei disegni parietali

Résumé - L'art de la décoration sur poterie et les dessins dans les grottes en Arménie. Un ordinaire chronologique et stylistique

Selon les données provisoires, il y a environ 100 000 dessins de grotte en Arménie. Ils sont principalement situés en haute montagne et ils comprennent des compositions personnelles et thématiques de différents types. Les images les plus répandues sont celles qui représentent des animaux domestiques, tels que chèvres, taureaux, cerfs et chevaux, et des bêtes de proie, comme les lions, les panthères, les loups, les reptiles et les serpents. Ils sont représentés tant de manière statique que dynamique. Les images anthropomorphes, c'est-à-dire les images de héros et de divinités mythologiques, constituent un groupe distinct. Les compositions thématiques sont très intéressantes : en règle générale, elles sont accompagnées de l'image du soleil. Ces images représentent des scènes de chasse, de bataille, de la vie familiale et de la mythologie. Mais la datation de cet énorme patrimoine artistique demeure indéterminée. L'analyse méticuleuse des découvertes archéologiques pourrait certainement aider à les dater.

Les ornements des poteries du début et du milieu de l'âge du bronze en Arménie sont extrêmement riches et variables. Dans ces décorations, nous rencontrons des images spécifiques à l'art pariétal. La comparaison et la coordination de ces deux types de dessins nous aideront à déterminer l'origine et la chronologie des dessins pariétaux.

The art of rock drawing in the Armenian Highlands started in the Mesolithic period, and with different variations continued until the Middle Ages. The fifth-century AD historian Movses Khore-

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natsi in his *Armenian History* mentions the mythical hero Torq Angegh, who carved eagles and other images with his fingernails on rocks.¹

A great number of geometrical and plant ornaments, images of people (deities, mythological heroes, hunters), animals (goats, deer, bulls, horses, wolves, dogs, felines, etc), birds and reptiles (vishaps – dragons), carts and chariots, weapons and household utensils, solar symbols, mythological and battle scenes were carved, drawn or sketched on the flat surfaces of volcanic ‘bombs’, huge boulders and rocks. Rock drawings were generally grouped in high mountains and, supposedly, were sacred places, ancient open-air temples where for thousands of years religious rituals and feasts were performed. Especially dense are the mountains of Geghama in Sevan, Syuniq, Tashir and Artsakh. For thousands of years on the same sacred mountains rockcarvings were created, sometimes one over the other, thus making up complicated, multilayer images.

According to our preliminary data, there are about 100,000 rock paintings in Armenia. These ancient stone ‘information letters’ of Armenia that have reached us from times immemorial are of different size, plot and composition. These ‘canvases’ carved on stone passed to us the moral, philosophical and religious mentality, lifestyle, rituals, viewpoints and the world around the people who lived thousands of years ago. Thematic rock images present mythological and cosmogonic images, of heroic battle, ritual fertility, hunting and war scenes. Technically unskilled but very ingenious (frank) portraits present a unique world where reality and unreality are closely connected.

Rock carvings in Armenia are essentially monuments of ancient art. They may be divided into two large groups: naturalistic and stylised. In the rock art of the Neolithic period sketchiness goes with symbolic conditional images. The sketchy portrayal of animals with the help of symbols expresses real as well as mythical ideas. Thus, the density of herds was portrayed by one animal which, however, possessed enormous horns or five legs. The same principle is used in portraying anthropomorphic figures, which with their special peculiarities have different sizes for different parts of their bodies. The worship of the god of lightning who fought against the vishaps (dragons) with the flares of his mighty fingers was especially widespread. We have discovered figures in the primitive naturalistic style aiming at the true representation of anatomical composition (Paghaghbyur, Tashir region). The artifacts found during the excavations play a very important role in dating the rock-paintings. Their comparison with rock paintings gives the opportunity to view the rock painting archeologically within and apart from the point of view of art and style.

IDOLS

In rock art in Armenia there can be clearly distinguished strictly stylised images of idols of women. The image of mounted tetragons (four-sided figures) symbolising head and body is one of the series found in the Vardenis mountains (rocks). That they represent people is shown by the rim lines on the upper tetragon, representing the shoulders, and the slightly inverted bottom part of the lines joining the upper and lower tetragons, representing the neck. This image is accompanied by the figure of a vishak. The other man-like figure wears a spiral-like sign symbolising eternity on his head. In front of them are pictured a goat, a mythical animal with the half-moon on its leg and a feline. The four women idols from the Mount of Aragats correspond to those from Vardenis in their structure. Two of them have navel signs, the third has a belt and the fourth has a female sign in the form of a triangle. This not only substantiates the portrayal of women in these rock pictures, it also states a surprising generality (regularity, conformity) with other female images of the Early Bronze Age (fourth and third millennia BC) in Armenia. Thus, in Pulus four female statuettes of terracota sitting round the altar were discovered. They, like rock pictures, have tetragonal heads and oblique shoulders and like those on Mount Aragats are presented in a group, probably symbolising the goddess of fertility together with secondary deities (Martirosyan 1978).

Four goats and one lion-like creature were pictured together with the female idols. In the mythology of ancient peoples the goat symbolised the male beginning of fertility and appeared with female deities. The presence of celestials, goats, lions and vishaps together with female figurines denotes the divine nature of the latter, and the idea of events taking place in the heavens.

It is noteworthy to mention that the universal vishaps pictured on hydrias from kurgans 3 in Nerkin Naver and XVII in Treghk (20th–18th centuries BC) appear in the heavens, that is, in the cosmogonic environment. The contours of Middle Bronze Age royal kurgans N34 in Verin Naver

1 The name of the Armenian deity Torq is homonymous with the Hittite deity Tarkhu (Aram Ghanalanian, 1978, p. 26).

and NN1, 3, 5B in Nerkin Naver resemble the female figures from rock pictures of female idols. In these graves we have discovered hydrias with images of the sacrifice of vishaps, goats and felines (lion, leopard).

Near the rock pictures and in kurgans were laid stone statuettes. The basalt statue with horrifying eyes in the summer pastures near the village of Zarr is rather impressive. The tufa anthropomorphic figure from grave N 5G in Nerkin Naver is very similar to rock pictures. On his breast there were 11 discs arranged in a way as to present the disc of the sun.

It is notable that the idols from Pular, Nerkin Naver and Metsamor are similar in their forms to the stone statues of the ancestor-mother Nammu found in one of the temples in the Sumerian city of Eridu. One of them has large, distinct eyes, like the idol in Metsamor, and two figures of men are portrayed on its belly. On the belly of the other statuette a pair of goats were carved. These Sumerian statuettes are similar to Armenian idols not only in their form but in their content, comparing the images of women and goats. According to H. Martirosyan, the worship of Nammu was widespread among various peoples of ancient oriental countries, among them Armenia, and are seen both in rock art and archeological monuments.

According to the Sumerian myth of genesis, Nammu, who lived in the Ocean, was the beginning of everything; she gave birth to twins, An (the heavens - masculine beginning) and Ki (the earth - female beginning). Here we see a surprising coincidence between the words: Sumerian KI - Armenian ՎԻՆ-KIN (woman), so AN-KI i. e. ԵՐԿԻՆ - ERKIN (Heavens) and ԵՐԿԻՐ - ERKIR (Earth) coincide rhythmically.

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