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Examining the Late Medieval Village from the Case at Ambroyi, Armenia

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Introduction: By the Side of the Road and at the Edge of the Paradigm

This article examines the archaeological evidence from excavations at the medieval Armenian village of Ambroyi dating to the 13th–14th centuries AD (all dates throughout are AD). It focuses on reconstructing medieval life in the village and situates its analysis within wider trends of studying village archaeology in the medieval Near East. First, the article examines how villages have been approached in the wider Near East, before looking at the specific challenges of studying the village in Armenia in particular. It will then turn to evidence from archaeological excavations and what they reveal about villagers in medieval Armenia as participants in various social institutions, and

in medieval life as a greater phenomenon. The data from Ambroyi contributes to an important work of integration, bringing studies of medieval Armenian and Near East society into conversation with each other. The research presented here also demonstrates the significance of medieval Armenia as a case study which bears upon wider discussions of medieval sociality, interaction, and complexity in Eurasia generally. A critical result of the research at Ambroyi is the empirical foundation for arguments regarding not only the continuation of social life in villages during periods of so-called “upheaval,” such as the 13th c. Ilkhanid period, but also for the participation of village inhabitants in interactions extending beyond the village site itself to towns, cities, and the passing travelers who slept and ate at the nearby caravan inn.

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Medieval Villages in the Near East: Discourses and Deconstructions

The village as a site of social life has been historically marginalized in archaeological investigations of the medieval Near East. In general, with the exception of salvage excavations or cases of accidental discovery, archaeological excavations have followed the lead of medieval geography and focused on life in urban centers. This concentration on cities began with the

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first archaeological excavations in the Near East that targeted Islamic cities. Early excavations focusing on the medieval period in the Near East were frequently underwritten by museums and private individuals, and driven by the aim of procuring material for museum collections. As a result, these projects focused on major centers of medieval elite life such as Samarra, Nishapur, Rayy, and Fustat, where the results were expected to be the most spectacular and thus generate exemplary museum objects.¹ Significant excavations of village sites, such as those carried out at Alishar Huyuk and Chatal Hoyuk in the Amuq, were undertaken in the course of investigations of earlier periods that underlay (or were intruded by) medieval contexts and materials.²

A major influence on research has also been the latent presumption that while village life was socially important in the Byzantine and Christian medieval ecumene, the primary locus of social production within the so-called “world of Islam” was the “Islamic city,”³ which has therefore been the focus of historical and archaeological scrutiny to the exclusion of rural settlement. Emphasis has been placed on the construction of new Islamic cities, or the evolution of already-existing cities after the Islamic conquest in the 7th century.⁴ In the historical and geographical sources often used as the

source of inspiration for these archaeologies, villages generally do not have names or are only mentioned in passing. Village names do appear in other sources, such as endowment inscriptions (see below), manuscript colophons,⁵ and lists of churches.⁶ In a similar trend, intense study on the part of historians, archaeologists, and scholars interested in Islamic period (i.e., post-7th c. medieval) architecture has focused primarily on the monumental forms which are both located in and categorically define cities. This focus on urban centers as the locus of Islamic social life, centered on monumental institutions, has only relatively recently been complemented by research on extra-urban social contexts as well as the architectural forms, such as castles and caravanserais, which have long attracted study as part of the larger monumental corpus.⁷

In the Caucasus, this is also manifested in the excavation of cities (see Figure 1), namely the Armenian cities of Ani and Dvin,⁸ as well as the fortresses of Garni and Anberd.⁹ In Azerbaijan, attention has

¹ Alistair Northedge, “Creswell, Herzfeld, and Samarra,” *Muqarnas* 8 (1991): 74–93; Tasha Vorderstrasse, *Al-Mina: A Port of Antioch from Late Antiquity to End of the Ottomans*, PIHANS 104 (Leiden, 2005); Tanya Treptow, with Donald Whitcomb, *Daily Life Ornamented: The Medieval City of Rayy*. Oriental Institute Museum Publications 26 (Chicago, 2007); Marcus Milwright, *An Introduction to Islamic Archaeology* (Edinburgh, 2010); Tanya Treptow, *Evolving Excavations: The Origins of the Practice of Islamic Archaeology in Egypt* (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2013); Arzu Terzy, “Samarra Excavations in Ottoman Bureaucracy,” *Beiträge zur Islamischen Kunst und Archäologie* 4 (2014): 10–15.

² See, Tasha Vorderstrasse, “The Archaeology of the Anatolian Countryside in the Islamic Period” (forthcoming).

³ See, for example, Janet Abu Lughod, “The Islamic City – Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance,” *International Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 19 (1987): 155–76; Paul Wheatley, *The Places Where Men Pray Together: Cities in Islamic Lands, Seventh through the Tenth Centuries* (Chicago, 2001).

⁴ Hugh Kennedy, “From Polis to Madina: Urban Change in Late Antique and Early Islamic Syria,” *Past and Present* 106 (1985): 3–27; Donald Whitcomb, “Amsar in Syria? Syrian cities after the conquest,” *ARAM* 6 (1994): 13–33; Hugh Kennedy, “From *Shahrestan* to *Medina*,” *Studia Islamica* 10 (2006): 5–35; D. Whitcomb, “Formation of the Islamic City: A Second Archaeological Period of Urban Transition,” in *Proceedings of the 7th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East. Volume 2*, ed. Robert Matthews et al. (Wiesbaden, 2012), 619–32.

⁵ See, for example, Marlia Mundell Mango, “Patrons and Scribes Indicated in Syriac Manuscripts, 411 to 800 AD,” in *Akten des XVI. Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress Wien. Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 32 (1982): 3–12.

⁶ Ernst Honigmann, “Nordsyrische Klöster in vorarabischer Zeit,” *Zeitschrift für Semistik* 1 (1922): 15–33.

⁷ Matthias Grawehr, Jamal Ramadan, and Majd Hijazi, “Syrisch-deutsche Arbeiten in Shayzar/Larissa. Erster Vorbericht,” *Zeitschrift für Orient-Archäologie* 2 (2009): 208–32; Cristina Tonghini, *Shayzar I: The Fortification of the Citadel*, History of Warfare 71 (Leiden, 2012); Tasha Vorderstrasse, “review of *Shayzar I: The Fortification of the Citadel* by C. Tonghini,” *BASOR* 372 (2014): 249–51. For developing research on extra-urban contexts, see Fokke Gerritsen et al., “Settlement and Landscape Transformations in the Amuq Valley, Hatay. A Long-Term Perspective,” *Anatolica* 34 (2008): 241–314; Balasz Major, “A Special Type of ‘Urban Site’ in the 13th century Levant? The Case of Margat (Qal’at al-Marqab),” in *Ciutats mediterrànies: civilització i desenvolupament/ Villes méditerranéennes: civilisation et développement*, ed. A. Riera, J. Gutart, and S. Giner (Barcelona, 2015), 195–98.

⁸ Nikolai Marr, *Ani, Knizhnaya istoriya goroda I raskopi na meste gorodishcha* (Leningrad, 1934); Karapet Ghafadaryan, *Dvin kalaka yev nra pelumnera*, 2 volumes (Yerevan, 1952 and 1982); Aram Kalantarian, *Dvin I: Kentronakan talamasi pelumnera 1964–1970 t.’t.’* (Yerevan, 1976); Karo Ghafadaryan and Aram Kalantarian, *Dvin: histoire et archéologique de la ville médiévale* (Neuchâtel, 1996); Grigor H. Karakhanyan, Karapet Ghafadaryan, and Aram Kalantarian. *Dvin II: Dvin kalaka yev nra pelumnera (1973–1980 t.’t.’)* (Yerevan, 2002); Aram Kalantarian et al., *Dvin IV: Gorod Dvin i ego raskopki (1981–1985 gg.)* (Yerevan, 2008).

⁹ Babken Arakelyan and Grigor H. Karakhanyan, *Garni III: 1949–1956 tt* (Yerevan, 1962); Sergei Harut’yunyan, *Anberd* (Yerevan, 1978); Hamlet Petrosyan and Babken Arakelyan, *Garni IX–XIV darrerum* (Yerevan, 1988).

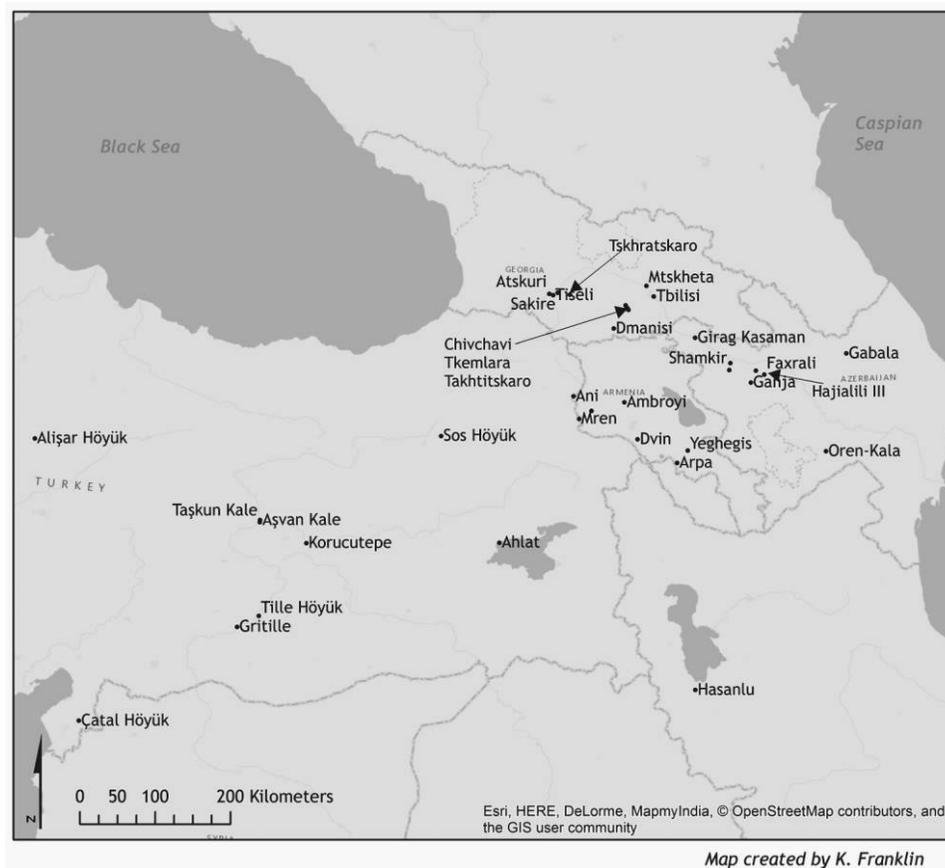


Figure 1—Map of the Caucasus and adjoining regions, showing the locations of some of the medieval sites mentioned in this article.

again largely focused on cities, such as Oren-Kala, Gabala, and Shamkir.¹⁰ The same is also true in Georgia, where again excavations focused on the fortress city of Dmanisi and cities including Mtskheta and Tbilisi, or on well-known monastery complexes such as David Gareja.¹¹ There have been a number of recent pub-

¹⁰ See, for example, Aleksandr A. Iessen, *Trudy Azerbaidzhanskoi (Oren-Kalinskoi) arkhelogicheskoi ekspeditsii*, Vols. I–III (Moscow, 1959 and 1965); Maisa Rähimova, *Sämkir: Arxeoloji, irsi, tarixi və memarlığı: birinci respublika elmi-praktik konfransin materialları, 28–29 Noybar 2007* (Baku, 2008); Ruhangiz Heydarova, *Qäbälä: Arxeoloji ekspedisiyasinin hesabatları, 2005–2010 / The Gabala Archaeological Expedition, 2005–2010* (Baku, 2012).

¹¹ See, for example, Andria Apakidze et al. *Mtskheta: Itogi ark'heologicheskikh issledovaniı* (Tbilisi, 1958–1999); Jumber Kopaliani, *Dmanisis ts'itadeli* (Tbilisi, 1996); Zurab Tvalchrelidze, “Garejis samonastro ts'khovrebis ganvitarebis etapibi ark'eologiuri monats'ebbis mikhedvit,” in ed. Zaza Skhirtladze, *Desert Monasticism: Gareja and the Christian East* (Tbilisi, 2001), 27–47; Davit Mindorashvili, *Ark'eologiuri gat'khrebi dzvel v'bilishi* (Tbilisi, 2009).

lications of material from Georgia and Armenia that have largely focused on the medieval pottery of the region,¹² again primarily coming from these city excavations, thus emphasizing the cities as important centers of wealth and commerce.

The past twenty years, however, have brought an increasing recognition that medieval villages are a significant and productive object of study in their own right, as the loci of various forms of medieval daily life. This development has emerged as a result of shifts not only in Near Eastern archaeology, but as part of a general trend in history and archaeology toward an intensified focus on, in the former, histories of the everyday, and in the latter, on material culture and processes situated at the scale of the

¹² Nodar Bakhtadze, *Ceramics in Medieval Georgia* (Tbilisi, 2013); Anelka Grigoryan and Iveta Mkrtychyan, *Armenian Ceramics IX–XIII cc. Dvin, Ani* (Yerevan, 2014).

household or the community.¹³ In particular, work in Jordan has brought attention to Mamluk, Ottoman, and post-Ottoman villages¹⁴ as well as “Early Islamic period” (7th–9th centuries) single houses.¹⁵ Studies in the Islamic world have increasingly begun to look at settlements in marginal areas, such as marshes¹⁶ and deserts, where the spread of Islam into rural areas not long after the Islamic conquest has been studied in detail.¹⁷ In Byzantine Cappadocia, villages have been studied in considerable detail,¹⁸ including specific work of different aspects of domestic architecture such as courtyards,¹⁹ kitchens,²⁰ and stables.²¹ Therefore, we are becoming increasingly better informed about villages in the Near East.

¹³ A good example of everyday history and archaeology is M. Johnson’s *English Houses 1300–1800: Vernacular Architecture, Social Life* (London, 2010). Of course, equating “the village” with “the community” has led to new problems and challenges: for discussion, see, for example, Marcello Canuto and Jason Yeager, eds., *Archaeology of Communities: A New World Perspective* (London, 2000).

¹⁴ Bethany Walker, “The Northern Jordan Survey 2003–Agriculture in Late Islamic Malkā and Ḥubrās Villages: A Preliminary Report on the First Season,” *BASOR* 39 (2005): 67–111; and “The Politics of Land Management in Medieval Islam: The Village of Malka in Northern Jordan,” *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 9 (2007): 253–61. Bethany Walker et al., “The Northern Jordan Project 2006: Village Life in Mamluk and Ottoman Ḥubrās and Saḥam: A Preliminary Report,” *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 51 (2007): 429–70; Reem al-Shqour, “2008 Excavations at the Islamic Village at Tall Jalul,” *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 53 (2009): 641–55.

¹⁵ P. M. Michèle Daviau, *Excavations at Tall Jawa, Jordan. Volume 4. The Early Islamic House* (Leiden, 2002).

¹⁶ Asa Eger, “The Swamps of Home: Marsh Formation and Settlement in the Early Islamic Middle East,” *JNES* 70 (2011): 55–79.

¹⁷ Gideon Avni, “Early Mosques in the Negev Highlands: New Archaeological Evidence on Islamic Penetration of Southern Palestine,” *BASOR* 294 (1994): 83–110; Uzi Avner and Jodi Magness, “Early Islamic Settlement in the Southern Negev,” *BASOR* 310 (1998): 39–57; Gideon Avni, “From Standing Stones to Open Mosques in the Negev Desert: The Archaeology of Religious Transformation in the Fringes,” *NEA* 70 (2007): 124–35.

¹⁸ See recently Robert Ousterhout, *A Byzantine Settlement in Cappadocia*, *Dumbarton Oaks Studies* 42 (Washington D.C., 2011).

¹⁹ Fatma Gül Öztürk, “Negotiating between the Independent and Groups of Courtyard Complexes in Cappadocia,” in *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand: OPEN 30*, ed. Alexandra Brown and Andrew Leach (Gold Coast, Queensland, 2013), 837–49.

²⁰ Veronica Kalas, “The Byzantine Kitchen in the Domestic Complexes of Cappadocia,” in *Archaeology of the Countryside in Medieval Anatolia*, ed. Tasha Vorderstrasse and Jacob Roodenberg, *PIHANS* 113 (Leiden, 2009), 109–27.

²¹ Filiz Tütüncü, *The Land of Beautiful Horses: Stables in Middle Byzantine Settlements of Cappadocia* (M.A. Thesis, Bilkent University, 2008).

Yet, while the village as a setting of social activity is receiving increased attention, archaeologists still must negotiate the lingering tendency to define the rural village in opposition to the urban, and persistent assumptions that are made about what kind of sociality is possible in a village. In particular, the implications of using the village as an unproblematic stand-in for the quotidian baseline in models of medieval sociality centered on (Christian or Islamic) cities is illustrated by the ways in which villages are “read” in archaeological analysis. For example, studies on village architecture in the Crusader southern Levant have applied ethnically-deterministic models to argue for the presence of Crusaders and local Christians in planned (orthogonal) villages in contrast to local Muslims in more “agglutinative” villages.²² This distinction between religions is also observed in Egypt, where archaeologists who study the architectural remains associated with the Coptic Christian community do not study the contemporary “Islamic” houses from sites such as Fustat thought to be inhabited primarily by Muslims, or vice versa.²³ Other studies of villages in Greece have made explicit the assumed direct connections between modern ethnography and archaeology,²⁴ thereby mapping the social landscape of the present onto the past.

Our work at Ambroyi both builds upon this corpus of published work on medieval villages, but also aims to continue challenging some of the discourses and assumptions about the role of the village in medieval sociopolitics that have structured archaeological interpretations of excavated villages. Most importantly for this article, a wave of development projects in Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in the last several decades (in the case of Azerbaijan and Georgia, specifically the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline) has resulted in a series of rescue excavations, undertaken to record sites that would otherwise completely disappear due to rising dam waters or the construction of oil pipelines.²⁵ This phenomenon meant that a number of villages were investigated in detail: village sites in

²² Roni Ellenblum, *Frankish Rural Settlement in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Cambridge, UK, 1998); Adrian J. Boas, *Domestic Settings: Sources on Domestic Architecture and Day-to-Day Activities in the Crusader States*, *The Medieval Mediterranean* 84 (Leiden, 2010).

²³ Tasha Vorderstrasse, “Reconstructing Houses and Archives in Early Islamic Jēme,” in *Household Studies in Complex Societies: (Micro) Archaeological and Textual Approaches*, ed. Miriam Müller, *Oriental Institute Studies* 10 (Chicago, 2015), 409–36.

²⁴ Sharon Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium: Art, Archaeology, and Ethnography* (Cambridge, UK, 2015).

²⁵ Vorderstrasse, “Archaeology of the Anatolian Countryside.”

the Republic of Turkey include Gritille, Aşvan Kale, Taşkun Kale, and Tille Höyük on the Euphrates; and various villages in Azerbaijan and Georgia located on the BTC pipeline.

The lack of architectural plans found in Azerbaijan, perhaps because the architecture was mud brick and not preserved,²⁶ means that it is not possible to make comparisons between these villages and those in Turkey. Further, these village sites have been dated by archaeologists to the 12th century or earlier, meaning that they are not totally contemporary with the villages in eastern Turkey, Armenia, and Georgia. Nonetheless, archaeologists working on the pipeline material in Georgia documented a number of villages that can be used for comparison with the villages in eastern Anatolia and Armenia. The material from the BTC pipeline, as well as surveys in Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan, and southern Georgia supplement our own recent work, demonstrating that village settlements were part of a broad and complex landscape of sites, infrastructure, and land use during the late medieval period throughout the South Caucasus. The work in Georgia and Azerbaijan, because it was concentrated in particular geographical areas, suggests the existence of a rich hinterland beyond the urban centers of the late medieval south Caucasus which remains to be studied.²⁷

²⁶ This suggestion is made by the excavators themselves: see Shamil Hajafov, Muzaffar Huseynov, and Bakhtiyar Jalilov, *Dashbulag Report on Excavations of Dashbulag Settlement at Kilometre Point 342 of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and South Caucasus Pipelines Right of Way* (Baku, 2007), 25.

²⁷ Heritage Protection Department of Georgia, *Study of the Monuments within Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline Route Corridor: Phase III. Report* (Tbilisi, 2003); Tarikh Dostiyev, Victor Kvachidze, Muzaffar Huseynov, *Long Report Excavations of Girag Kasaman Settlement KP 405 - BTC ROW* (Baku, 2007); Hajafov, Huseynov, and Jalilov, *Dashbulag Report*; Bakhtiyar Jalilov and Viktor Kvachidze, *Long Report Excavations of Fakhrli Settlement KP 289 - BTC ROW* (Baku, 2007); Vakhtang Licheli et al., *Archaeological Investigation at Site IV- 266/320, KP211/212, Atskuri Village, Akhalsikhe Region* (Tbilisi, 2007); Tarikh Dostiyev and Arif Mammadov, *Long Report Excavations of Hajjalili III Settlement KP 302 - BTC ROW* (Baku 2008); Davit Mindorashvili, "Tiseli Settlement," in *Rescue Archaeology in Georgia: The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and South Caucasian Pipelines*, ed. Gela Gamkrelidze (Tbilisi, 2010) 502–24; Paul M. Taylor and David Maynard, "Archaeological Excavations on the BTC Pipeline, Azerbaijan," *Internet Archaeology* 29 (2011) <http://intarch.ac.uk/journal/issue29/1/toc.html>; Lauren Ristvet et al., "Settlement and Society in Naxcivan: 2006 excavations and survey of the Naxcivan Archaeological Project," *Iranica Antiqua* 46 (2011): 1–53; William Anderson et al., "Archaeological survey in the South Caucasus (Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia): approaches, methods and first results," *Anatolia Antiqua* 22 (2014): 11–33.

In Georgia, the villages documented by archaeologists working on the BTC pipeline (see Figure 2) were all built from stone and documented extensively. Some of these villages had been investigated previously, but—thanks to the pipeline investigations—these have now been published in an accessible way and dated. Village sites in Georgia are markedly similar to the case documented by Sharon Gerstel in Greece,²⁸ in that they are focused on a church in the center of the village, with any additional churches located at the fringes of the main settlement.²⁹ The centrality of the church to the village, as documented in medieval Georgian and Greek villages, can also be observed at the Armenian village of Mren in eastern Turkey (see below), where the Mren cathedral was at the center of the settled area. Villages in Georgia were also often fortified, and many round structures can be identified in them, which could be towers attached to the houses, suggesting they might have been for storage or animals. Additionally, there were buildings made up of a series of small rooms, many of which had rounded corners; archaeologists excavating these rooms did not document the activity areas which can be observed in eastern Turkish and Azerbaijani villages (see below).

At Nachivchavebi village (11th–16th centuries; see Figure 2B), the excavators observed that the domestic houses typically had five to six rooms, including kitchens, wine cellars, bakeries, and places for storing cattle; the structures were associated with fields nearby, surrounding the church in the center of the village. The church in the center of the village was surrounded by a wall and had a cemetery, while there was also another church on the fringes of the village that also had a cemetery. This is similar to Tkemlara village (11th–16th centuries) (see Figure 2A), which had similar patterns of domestic settlement and a church in the village. Chivchavi Gorge village (10th–16th centuries; see Figure 2F) also consisted of groups of settlements with a church and a cemetery, and a fortification wall. Takhtiskaro (see Figure 2D) village (10th–16th century) was a large settlement that had houses which varied in size from one to seven rooms and a fortification wall. There was also a small church on the fringes of the village. At Tskhratskaro Gorge village (medieval period; see Figure 2E), the village consists of houses

²⁸ Sharon Gerstel, "A Late Medieval Settlement at Panakton," *Hesperia* 72 (2003): 174; Sharon Gerstel, "Mapping the Boundaries of Church and Village," in *Viewing the Morea: Land and People in the Late Medieval Peloponnese*, ed. Sharon Gerstel (Washington, D.C., 2013); Gerstel, *Rural Lives*, 7–8, 30–33, 166, 174.

²⁹ Mindorashvili, "Tiseli Settlement," 502.



Figure 2—Comparison of architecture footprints of late medieval villages in Georgia: A. Tkemlara. B. Nachivchavebi. C. Sakire. D. Takhtiskaro. E. Tskhratskaro. F. Chivchavi. All plans after Heritage Protection Department of Georgia, 2003.

between three to five rooms, and a round room that was separate from the rest of the house. There were also places for cattle that had been dug into the ground. Sakire Village (see Figure 2C) was associated with the 11th–13th century Sakire fortress, and was built below the fortifications.³⁰ Additional village types included houses built from mud (e.g., Narli Dara in Georgia) and buildings with paved floors that were used to store cattle.³¹ Other structures built apart from the primary clusters of village structures suggest that certain specialized production, such as wine making, may have been distributed through space, tying the landscape of fields, buildings and other spaces together into a larger landscape of village activity.³²

³⁰ Heritage Protection Department, *Study of the Monuments*, 252–53.

³¹ Mindorashvili, “Tiseli Settlement,” 502, 506.

³² Licheli et al., *Archaeological Investigation . . . Atskuri*, 17, 20, 26.

The body of rescue research in Turkey demonstrates an interesting pattern of interpreting the medieval landscape, in that ethnic or social evolutionary logics are frequently (and tacitly) applied to explain perceived patterns in village architectural forms. Excavated villages in eastern Turkey and the Amuq (see Figure 3) are frequently described as “agglutinative” in form, implying that the lack of apparent clear distinctions between rounded “houses,” or evidence for additive construction over time, indicates a lack of town planning on the part of the village occupants.³³ At the root of analytical oppositions between planned and unplanned villages is a linked conceptual polarization between villages as pre-political communities and villages as productive units integrated within a scalar political economy.

³³ See, for example, Kenneth Frampton, “Reflections on the Autonomy of Architecture: A Critique of Contemporary Production,” in *Out of Site*, ed. Diane Ghirardo (Seattle, 1991); Martin Locock, ed., *Meaningful Architecture: Social Interpretations of Buildings* (Aldershot, UK, 1994).

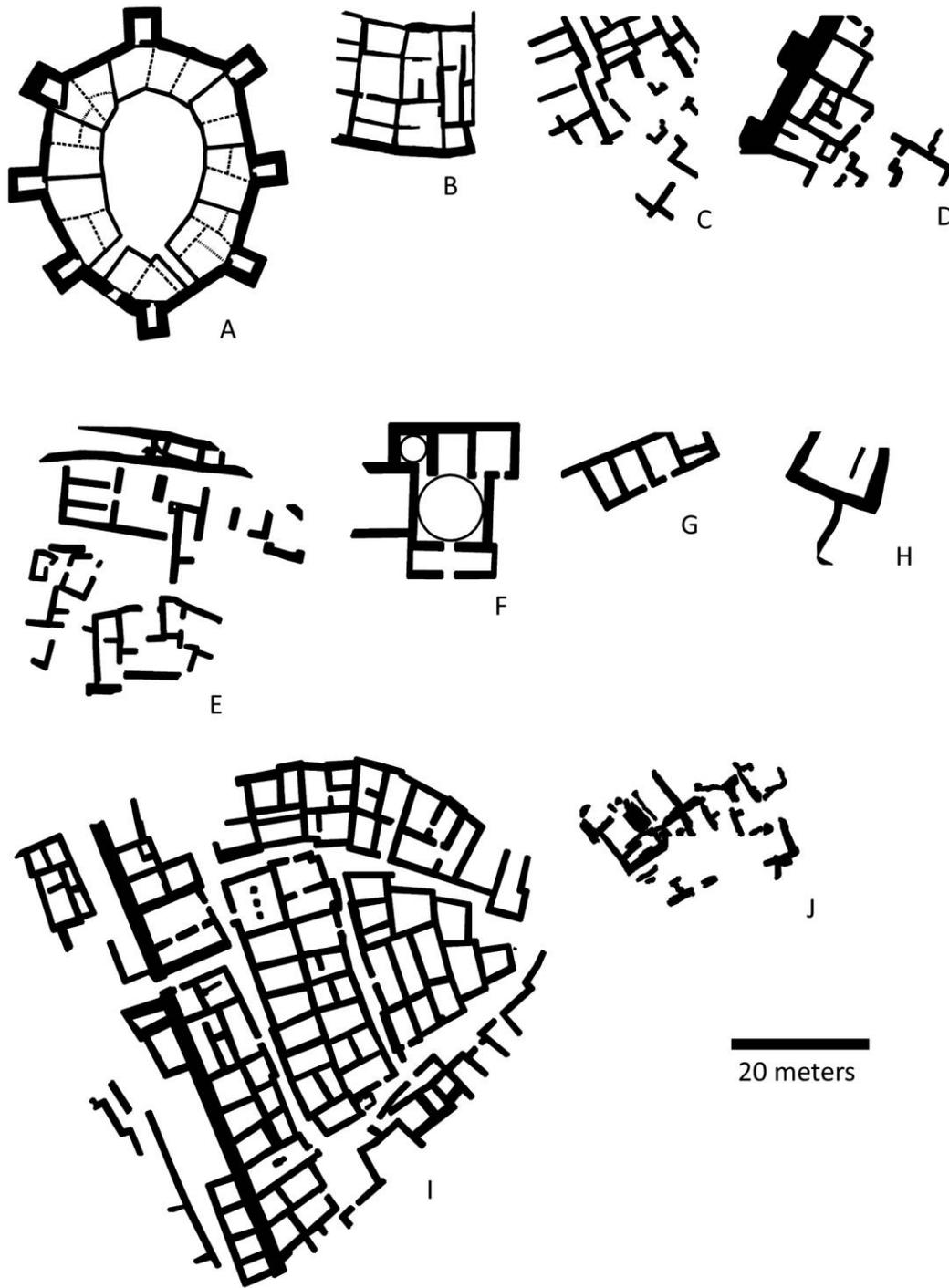


Figure 3—Comparison of Abroyi village excavated area with excavated architectural footprints of late medieval villages in Turkey: A. Taşkun fortress (after Redford, *Archaeology of the Frontier*, 69); B. Lidar 1; C. Lidar 2 (both after *ibid.*, 71–72); D. Gritille (after *ibid.*, 40–43); E. Tille Höyük (after *ibid.*, 74); F. Aşvan Kale 1 (after Mitchell, *Aşvan*, Fig. 19); G. Aşvan Kale 2 (after Mitchell, *Aşvan*, Fig. 16); H. Ambroyi; I. Chatal Hüyük (after Richard C. Haines, *Excavations in the Plain of Antioch II: The Structural Remains of the Later Phases: Chatal Hüyük, Tell al-Judaidah, and Tell Tayinat* (Chicago, 1971), pl. 28); J. Sos Höyük (after Sagona and Sagona, “Upper Levels at Sos Höyük, Erzurum,” Fig. 2).

This seemingly straightforward opposition between forms of village sociality (planned and controlled vs. agglutinative and communal/organic) is already called into question by the particulars of excavated villages. At Tille Höyük (see Figure 3E), excavators found buildings of mud brick built on stone with staircases, constructed around a courtyard that seems to have had specific activity areas. The rooms were altered through time as the complex was rebuilt and may have been dwelling houses of families.³⁴ Similar organic dwelling houses were found at Korucutepe, where the excavators found an alleyway, ovens, and buildings,³⁵ and at Sos Höyük (see Figure 3J), where excavators found rectangular stone houses with cobblestone areas and paved alleyways.³⁶ The exposure at the site of Aşvan Kale (see Figures 3F–G) was much smaller but nonetheless illuminating for our understanding of the different types of settlement that occurred in villages; the settlement seems to have incorporated both living and production spaces, thus further challenging categorical oppositions of the domestic and industrial for late medieval Anatolia. The initial phase of settlement was not well-preserved, but the subsequent settlement was marked by walls of stone and mortar 80 cm thick. The excavators found signs of pottery-making in the form of kilns; in subsequent phases, a large building (identified as a *medrese*) was built over the top of this industrial area.³⁷

The existence of orthogonal architecture or regular plans at some sites has resulted in a solidification of village formal types across the greater Anatolian and Iranian region for this period,³⁸ especially at sites presumed to have been under state control or influence. For instance, the excavations at Taşkun Kale

³⁴ John Moore, *Tille Höyük 1: The Medieval Period* (London, 1993), 19–21, 23–24, 27, 31, 42, 46, Figs. 7, 9–11.

³⁵ Maurits van Loon, *Korucutepe 2: Final Report on the Excavations of the Universities of Chicago, California (Los Angeles) and Amsterdam in the Keban Reservoir, Eastern Anatolia, 1968–1970* (Amsterdam, 1978), 42–44, Figs. 73–76.

³⁶ Liza Hopkins, *Archaeology at the North-East Anatolian Frontier, VI: An Ethnoarchaeological Study of Sos Höyük and Yigitassi Village, Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement 11* (Leuven, 2003), 83, Fig. 25.

³⁷ Stephen Mitchell, *Aşvan Kale: Keban Rescue Excavations, Eastern Anatolia I: the Hellenistic, Roman and Islamic Sites* (Oxford, 1980), 49–63.

³⁸ Michael D. Danti, *The Ilkhanid Heartland: Hasanlu Tepe (Iran) Period I*, University Museum Monograph 120 (Philadelphia, 2004), 2, 64. The author explicitly compares the site with the planned fortress of Taşkun and the earlier phase of Gritille, which was also planned.

(see Figure 3A), centered on a regular mudbrick oval “fort” with towers built on stone foundations. Yet even within this “planned” military structure, excavators noted that the population made certain choices about the placement of installations, such as ovens, in rooms. There was also a settlement outside the fortress that had an associated church and graveyard.³⁹ The juxtaposition of various building forms, placement choices, and layout strategies at these settlements—including Aşvan Kale, Tille Höyük, Taşkun Kale, and Ambroyi—suggest that the ultimate influence on site form is a complex of historically and locally particular factors rather than polar socio-evolutionary dynamics. In other words, seemingly “unplanned” or “agglutinative” villages could be and were integrated within late medieval economic structures and political systems. These type of “planned”—in the sense of orthogonal as opposed to organic or agglutinative—villages have not been documented in Azerbaijan or Georgia. There is an indication of planned villages, such as the village that apparently housed the servants who worked at Queen Tamar’s summer palace—but significantly, in this case, the categorization of “planned” refers to intentionality only, and not to the form of the structures themselves.⁴⁰

For the remainder of this article we will narrow our regional focus to the case study of the social life of the village in late medieval (1200–1500) Armenia. The question is how to develop the role of the rural village settlement in regional and even global social life in the late medieval period. As we will discuss, to do this in the Armenian context means breaking apart paradigms that maintain the village as central to ethnic memory but peripheral to social action—in not altogether absent—in the late medieval period.

Late Medieval Villages in the Republic of Armenia

The spatial pattern of archaeological research in the Republic of Armenia developed, on the one hand, out of a focus on named urban centers (itself inherited from medieval archaeology’s strong dependence on

³⁹ Roland Fletcher, “Identifying Spatial Disorder,” in *Taşkun Kale Rescue Excavations in Eastern Anatolia*, Anthony McNicoll, (Oxford, 1983), 193, 223, 226–27; Anthony McNicoll, *Taşkun Kale Rescue Excavations in Eastern Anatolia* (Oxford, 1983), 7–9, 11, 48–49, 53, 189–91.

⁴⁰ Heritage Protection Department, *Study of the Monuments*, 109. No plan of the village was reproduced there.

historical sources) and, on the other, from an operational understanding of medieval sociality derived from Marxist historical materialism and urban-centered European traditions.⁴¹ The Marxist model prescribes a historical trajectory whereby only medieval urbanism enabled the increased divisions of labor which were necessary precursors to capital accumulation; the parallel tenets of early 20th-century economic historians like Henri Pirenne stipulated that medieval market economy and urban life were inextricable and mutually dependent. Therefore, pioneering research into the nature of medieval life in Armenia (as elsewhere) was essentially a search for cities. The foundations of this tradition were laid in many ways by the investigations of Nicolai Marr in Shirak and at Ani in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Marr argued—as other scholars such as James Breasted and Franz Boas did in this period—that not only Europe, but also nations outside it, contributed to the development of world civilization, and Marr was looking for native Armenian contributions to this developmental trajectory. Marr's research was focused, in part, on a search for an essential Armenian culture which was expressed in megalithic monuments, and which reached an apex in the form of medieval urban life.⁴²

Subsequent students of medieval archaeology continued to concentrate, as Marr had, on the cities that were known from historical accounts—indeed, these historical accounts continue to be used by archaeologists to date features found at urban sites. Historians and archaeologists after Marr (such as Babken Arakelyan, Karo Ghafadaryan, and Aram Kalantarian) excavated urban sites because they believed such centers would yield evidence for cross-cultural interactions that they clearly believed could not be found in villages.⁴³ They did investigate other types of sites such

as castles (e.g., Anberd) and churches (e.g., Zvartnoc), but this was because they were important historical sites or had impressive standing architecture.⁴⁴ This research served to confirm the representations of Armenian social structure in the medieval period presented within historical accounts—specifically, the social dominance of Christian princes or *naxarars* and their military exploits, and the importance of cities as centers of economic and political life.

A combination of historical biases regarding the dynamics of social and cultural change in the medieval period have resulted in the medieval Armenian village being, paradoxically, simultaneously marginalized as an object of study and fetishized as the locus of primordial Armenian ethnoses. A longstanding approach casts the city as an alien element in Armenia; conversely, the mountain village is implicated as the natural type of aggregated settlement in the Armenian highlands. Yet after the Islamic conquest in the 7th century, the Arab settlers are thought by scholars to have been solely Muslim urban dwellers in cities.⁴⁵ This historical assumption comes, on the one hand, from accounts of Arab tribes settling in cities such as Amida, Arzn, and Np'rkert,⁴⁶ and on the other, from evidence such as the treaty between Theodore Rshtuni and the caliph Mu'awiya, in which the caliph states: “I shall not send emirs into your fortresses, nor a Tačik officer, nor a single horseman,” thus rhetorically evoking the Armenian *naxarar* aristocracy and their loyal Christian subjects as ensconced in extra-urban mountain strongholds.⁴⁷ This oppositional characterization of Armenian villagers and urban Arabs persists despite evidence such as an inscription at Zvartnoc that clearly points to the presence of Arabic speakers in the

⁴¹ Babken Arakelyan, *Kalak'nerə ev arbestnerə Hayastanum 6–13-yerrord darerum*, Vol. 1 (Yerevan, 1953); Vrazdat Harutyunyan, “L'amenagement urbain en Arménie médiévale,” *Revue des études Arméniennes* 4 (1967), 187–92; Hakob Manandyan, *The Trade and Cities of Armenia in Relation to Ancient World Trade*, trans. Nina Garsoian (Lisbon, 1965); Henri Pirenne, *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade* (Princeton, 1980).

⁴² Adam T. Smith, Ruben S. Badalyan, and Pavel Avetisyan, *The Archaeology and Geography of Ancient Transcaucasian Societies Volume I. The Foundations of Research and Regional Survey in the Tsaghkahovit, Armenia*, Oriental Institute Publications 134 (Chicago, 2009), 13–15.

⁴³ Ian Lindsay and Adam Smith, “A History of Archaeological Practices in the Republic of Armenia,” *Journal of Field Archaeology* 31 (2006): 165–84; Lori Khachadourian, “Making Nations

from the Ground Up: Traditions of Classical Archaeology in the South Caucasus,” *AJA* 112/2 (2008): 247–78; Lori Khachadourian, *Social Logics under Empire: The Armenian 'Highland Satrapy' and Achaemenid Rule, ca. 600–300 BC*. (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2008); Smith, Badalyan and Avetisyan, *Archaeology and Geography*; Adam Smith, “‘Yerevan, My Ancient Erebuni’: Archaeological Repertoires, Public Assemblages, and the Manufacture of a (Post-)Soviet Nation,” in *The Archaeology of Power and Politics in Eurasia: Regimes and Revolutions*, ed. Charles W. Hartley, G. Bike Yazicioğlu, and Adam T. Smith (Cambridge, UK, 2012), 57–77.

⁴⁴ Cf. Harutyunyan, *Anberd*.

⁴⁵ Nina G. Garsoian, “The Early-Mediaeval Armenian City: An Alien Element?” *JANES* 16–17 (1984–1985): 67–83; Robert H. Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (Chicago, 2001).

⁴⁶ Aram Ter-Ghewondyan, *The Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia*, trans. Nina Garsoian (Lisbon, 1976), 29.

⁴⁷ Walter Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (Cambridge, UK, 1995); Ter-Ghewondyan, *Arab Emirates*, 20.

countryside.⁴⁸ An implication of this historical narrative is that villagers in their “natural” Armenian environment remained Armenian and Christian, thereby preserving native Armenian culture in the face of “Islamization” efforts by the new invaders. Historians and archaeologists have imagined the early medieval Armenian landscape as populated by “alien” cities filled with foreigners, with native culture and heritage preserved in villages, monasteries, and churches. The primeval Armenian landscape has therefore been characterized as occupation on a small scale. For the 12th century and later, however, this narrative is contradicted by the narratives of the primary historical record, in which cities are the seats of Armenian culture and the exclusive locations of cultural production, conceptualized in opposition to the nomadic invaders—Seljuk Turks and Mongols—who would buffet the walls of these cities with their mounted armies. For example, the 12th century account of Matteo Urhayeci (Matthew of Edessa) describes the Armenian inhabitants of the city of Ani holding out against repeated Seljuk attempts to conquer it.⁴⁹

This latent argument for the localization of an original Armenian culture in upland villages was made more explicit in syntheses of the history of Armenian architecture. Drawing in part from the perceived genetic relationship between Armenian medieval architecture and gothic architectural forms in Europe, as argued by analysts like Ernst Herzfeld, architectural historians such as Ohannes Xalpakchyan and Anatoly Yakobson argued for the roots of “high” medieval church and civic architecture in the form of the Armenian village house.⁵⁰ This set of arguments cast medieval Armenians as a whole as active rather than passive in medieval cultural exchanges, but ironically removed agency from that medieval Armenian village and rural landscape as a locus of cultural production, in that it was relegated to a primordial past and immobilized as a non-evolving ideal.

⁴⁸ Timothy Greenwood, “A corpus of early medieval Armenian inscriptions,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004): 60, 88–89.

⁴⁹ Matteo Urhayeci, *Armenia and the Crusades, tenth to twelfth centuries: the Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, trans. Ara Dostourian (Lanham, UK, 1993).

⁵⁰ Ernst Herzfeld, *Iran in the Ancient East: archaeological studies presented in the Lowell lectures at Boston* (New York, 1988); Anatoly Yakobson, *Ocherk istorii zodchestva Armenii V–XVII vekov* (Moscow, 1950); Ohannes Xalpakchyan, *Grazhdanskoe zodchestvo Armenii (zhiliye i obschestvennye zdaniya)* (Moscow, 1971).

This phenomenon has relegated village life in medieval Armenia to a condition of stasis, with the implication that the experience and lifeways of villagers did not change from the 4th century to the present, other than in exogenous terms such as invasion or heavy taxation.⁵¹ The Islamic conquest ushered in what is believed by Armenian historians to be a time of economic deprivation and intense taxation. That approach that has been applied to the late medieval period as well, when once again the region is thought to have been in decline after the Mongol invasions, and under the heavy yoke of Ilkhanid administration. Whether framed by the feudal parameters of a historical materialist tradition (by Armenian history and archaeology) or through the focus on artists, patrons, and elite actors (by art history), the medieval village landscape has been imagined as timeless and unchanging, much in keeping with longstanding modes of imagining the medieval world generally.⁵² Armenian village life in the late medieval period is construed as a precursor to the socioeconomic developments of the urban, proto-capitalist late medieval world.

The developments in Armenia, however, reflect what was happening in other parts of the south Caucasus under the Ilkhanid administration. Armenian historians frequently refer not only to events in Armenia itself, but also in Georgia and what is now modern Azerbaijan. Indeed, from the perspective provided by archaeological data, it has been observed that medieval villages in the South Caucasus show remarkable stability in settlement despite the seeming disorder that would have been caused by the documented historic events.⁵³

Ambroyi Village and the Kasakh Valley in the Late Medieval Period

The archaeological datasets which form the core of this analysis were excavated on the eastern slope of Mt. Aragats, on the western side of the Kasakh River Valley near the contemporary village of Arai (known

⁵¹ Robert Bedrosian, “Armenia during the Seljuk and Mongol Periods,” in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York, 1997), 241–71.

⁵² Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and capitalism, 15th–18th c. Volume 1: the structures of everyday life; the limits of the possible*, trans. and revised S. Reynolds (Berkeley, 1992).

⁵³ Paul M. Taylor et al., *Past and Future Heritage in the Pipelines Corridor: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey* (Washington, D.C., 2011), 74.

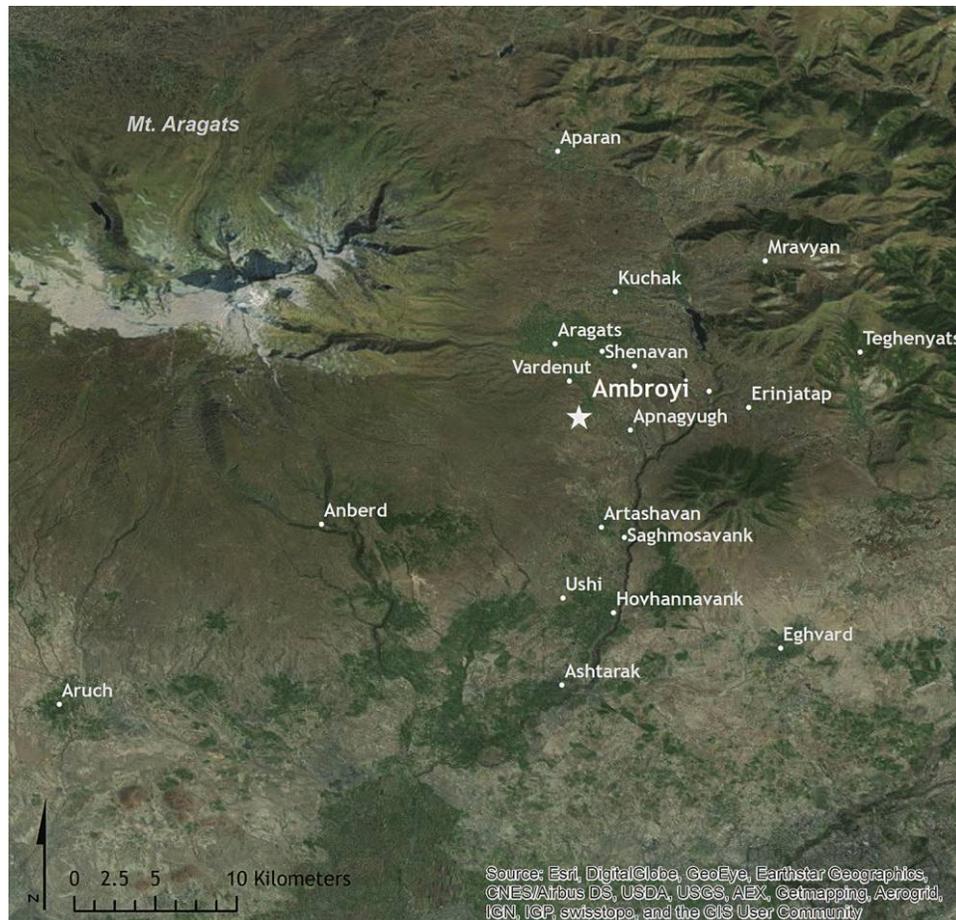


Figure 4—Map of the general research area of the Kasakh Valley and Mt. Aragats, showing the site of Ambroyi and nearby late medieval sites.

historically as Bazarjuġ, hereafter designated as Arai-Bazarjuġ). The Kasakh Valley is located on the edge of the highland plateau between the broad volcanic peak of Mt. Aragats and the curving Tsaghkunyats range (See Figure 4). The Kasakh River is fed by tributaries running out of both mountain systems, and cuts a deep canyon as it descends out of the highlands towards the Arax River valley to the south.

Ongoing research in the region has demonstrated the intensive occupation of the landscape of the Kasakh Valley and Tsaghkahovit Plain for the past several millennia; the medieval period was no exception to the pattern of active construction of its social landscape.⁵⁴ The ethnohistorical records identified the general area of ruins south of Arai-Bazarjuġ village as Ambroyi; this area of surface remains was dated to the late medieval

⁵⁴ See Smith, Badalyan and Avetisyan, *Archaeology and Geography*.

period (12th–15th cs.) using surface ceramic material collected by Kathryn Franklin in 2010.⁵⁵ The specific region of architecture investigated in 2013 and 2014 was designated Hin Bazarjuġ, or “Old Bazarjuġ.”⁵⁶ Our investigations at Ambroyi were driven by an array of questions directed at late medieval social life in the Kasakh Valley, and particularly at how people living in villages in the Kasakh were integrated into

⁵⁵ Kathryn Franklin, “*This world is an inn: Cosmopolitanism and Caravan Trade in late medieval Armenia*” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2014), 94–131.

⁵⁶ Frina Babayan, Kathryn Franklin, and Tasha Vorderstrasse, “A house in a village on the Silk Road: Preliminary Excavations at Ambroyi Village, Armenia,” *Oriental Institute Annual Report 2013–2014* (Chicago, 2014); Frina Babayan, Kathryn Franklin, and Tasha Vorderstrasse, “The Project for Medieval Archaeology of the South Caucasus (MASC): Ambroyi, Armenia,” *Oriental Institute Annual Report 2014–2015* (Chicago, 2015).

the wider worlds of Armenia, the Near East, and the Silk Road cultural ecumene. In this aim, our research departed from previous work in the Kasakh Valley focused on monastic life in late medieval monasteries, or on princely life in fortified castles on the slopes of Mt. Aragats.⁵⁷ Our excavations were also motivated by the close spatial association of the settlement remains with the Arai-Bazarjul *karavanatun* (“caravan inn”), located 500m to the east and dated to 1213. Franklin has previously argued that the *karavanatun* was a site for the mediation of long-distance travel both by localized political projects undertaken by Armenian merchant princes, as well as by local cultures of hospitality, particularly in the form of locally-provisioned road food.⁵⁸

In excavating a settlement which was initially dated to the 13th–15th centuries and spatially associated with the *karavanatun*, we were testing a number of premises put forward in Armenian medieval historiography regarding the temporality and spatiality of social life—especially economic life—in the post-Seljuk period. As will be further discussed below, we were critically interested in the argument advanced by Armenian archaeologists and historians that social life in Armenia contracted to cities or stopped altogether in the period following the 1236 Mongol invasions of the South Caucasus. As the following sections examine, travel and trade during the Ilkhanid period in Armenia not only stimulated the production and maintenance of infrastructure like road inns, but also tied villages as well as cities into regional and even larger-scale webs of shared material culture and practice.

Brief Historical Context: Armenia in the Late Medieval Period

The region of the Kasakh Valley was under Sasanian control until 591, when the Emperor Maurice received much of Persian Armenia in exchange for his assistance to the Sasanian ruler Chosroes II.⁵⁹ This changed again, however, when Phocas usurped the

Byzantine throne; Chosroes II used the usurpation as a pretense to invade Byzantine territory, reclaiming regions such as Armenia but also occupying new territory including Syria-Palestine and Egypt. The subsequent struggle eventually brought Armenia once again under Byzantine control until sometime in the mid-7th century, when it became part of the Islamic empire under the Umayyad Caliphate.⁶⁰

The Islamic conquest is generally believed in Armenia to have ushered in a time of great economic hardship and difficulties for the Armenian people, much as the later Mongol conquest of the 13th century is presumed to have effectively cut off the floruit of medieval Armenian social life. However, far from being a period of economic decline, the Islamic conquest marks the beginning of a period when there does in fact seem to have been considerable economic activity on the part of both Armenians and local Muslim officials. Local Armenian families were active in building churches and other buildings in the late 7th century in particular, and numismatic evidence points to economic connections throughout the Islamic world from as far away as Spain and Samarkand.⁶¹ The decline of the Abbasid caliphate at the end of the ninth century, however—which brought about the establishment of semi-independent kingdoms in the territory of Armenia—had a direct impact on the Kasakh Valley.⁶²

The contraction of the Abbasid caliphate and subsequent disorder between the various principalities in Armenia meant that the Kasakh Valley was once again situated within a border region, this time a zone of contest between the Shaddadid dynasty with its capital at Dvin, and other Armenian dynasties, as well as with the Byzantine Empire and the Seljuk Turks. The regional divisions in this period are manifest in the occupation and renovation of fortresses built for defense, including at Malasaberd and Ani in the Shirak Plain, and Dashtadem, Anberd, and Bjni along the

Armenian People: From Ancient Times to the Present (Costa Mesa, CA, 2012), 57–68.

⁵⁷ Frina Babayan, *Sourb Sargis Vank at Ushi* (Yerevan: Gitut'yun Hratarakčut'yun, 2005); Harutyunyan, *Anberd*; Gagik Sargsyan, “Telenyac Vanki pahunnerə (1979–1989 tt ardyunknerə),” *Patmbanasirakan handes* 3 (1990): 174–90.

⁵⁸ Franklin, “*This world is an inn*,” 149–75.

⁵⁹ James Russell, *Zoroastrian in Armenia* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), 113–52; Hewsen, *Armenia*, 43–44, 71–72, 84–88; Timothy Greenwood, “Sasanian Reflections in Armenian Sources,” *E-Sasanika* 3 (2008); George A. Bournoutian, *A Concise History of the*

⁶⁰ Ter-Ghewondyan, *Arab Emirates*; Kaegi, *Byzantium*; Hewsen, *Armenia*, 2001: 89–91, 105; James Howard-Johnston, “Armenian Historians of Heraclius: An Examination of Aims, Sources, and Working Methods of Sebeos and Movses Daskhurantsi,” in his *East Rome, Sasanian Persia and the End of Antiquity* (Aldershot, UK, 2006); Bournoutian, *Concise History*, 69–80.

⁶¹ Khatchatour Mousheghian, “Les échanges internationaux de l'Arménie aux 8^e–10^e siècles (Témoignages numismatiques),” *Revue des études arméniennes* XIII (1978–1979): 127–64.

⁶² Hewsen, *Armenia*, 109–10; Bournoutian, *Concise History*, 81–92.

southern face of Aragats and the Tsaghkunyats. The Shaddadids were eventually defeated by the Seljuks, however, and the area once again ceased to be a border region. The northern regions of Armenia were then conquered by the Georgians at the end of the 12th century under the leadership of Queen Tamar, who administered the region with the assistance of the Mkhargrdzeli (known as Zakaryan in Armenian sources) governors. The Mkhargrdzeli appointment was part of a trend already put in place in Georgia by Queen Tamar's father, Giorgi III, which was to insert officials into local regimes who were part of new families completely dependent on the royal family, rather than from old nobilities established within that same regional power base.⁶³ This trend was reduplicated at a local level in Armenia, as the Mkhargrdzelis installed local merchant princes in administrative positions within their territory. Of these, the most well-known were the Vačut'nyans, who, starting with Prince Vače, had charge of the Aragatsotn region.

The thirteenth century, however, saw the arrival of the Mongols (described by Kirakos Gandzakets'i as descending on the highlands "like a multitude of locusts"⁶⁴), who started attacking the south Caucasus beginning in the 1220s with a number of clashes, massacres, and much chaos. The decisive battle, however, was in 1236, after which the Mkhargrdzelis capitulated to the Mongols; they were followed in this by other nobles, forming a regional administrative class under later Ilkhanid rule.⁶⁵ The Mongols proceeded to conquer the rest of Armenian lands in the 1240s, which were held either by the Seljuks or by the Ayyubids. During the more than one hundred years of Mongol domination, the Armenians and the rest of the population of the south Caucasus experienced periods of benevolent, even enlightened rule, alternating with capricious benighted misrule. The years from 1236 to 1250, though not without conflict, did not witness radical changes in the governing structure of the region. According to the interpretation of some

historical sources, the Mongols did not impose formal taxes on the region until 1243, instead extracting money from the population through plunder. The Mongols apparently also confiscated land from the local nobles and redistributed it amongst their own elites (thereby, according to some, destroying the agricultural economy of Armenia). They also imposed taxes, which were determined on the basis of censuses, which Armenian historical sources describe as being extremely onerous.⁶⁶ Indeed, it is evident that by the 14th century, taxes were considered a major problem, not only for the population of Armenia, but across the South Caucasus in general. The Persian inscription of the Ilkhanid ruler Abu Sa'id on the walls of the mosque at Ani indicated that the city of Ani and its surroundings, as well as the rest of Georgia, would no longer be subject to certain taxes which even he claimed had caused considerable suffering in both the city and the countryside, leading to the abandonment of estates and the population fleeing.⁶⁷ It is interesting that the Mongols themselves acknowledged how damaging these taxes could be to the rural population of the south Caucasus.

Following ca. 1260, the vast Mongol empire broke up into four states, including the Ilkhan state under Hülegü, who ruled Persia, Mesopotamia, and Armenia. Central Armenia was organized by the Ilkhans into a province of Greater Armenia with a number of semi-autonomous principalities. The Mongols had a number of bases of support within Armenian society, including the church (many Mongol generals and their wives were Nestorians in the 13th century) and

⁶⁶ Robert Bedrosian, *The Turco-Mongol Invasions and the Lords of Armenia in the 13–14th Centuries* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1979); Sanjian, *Historical Setting*, 9; Thomas Sinclair, "The Economy of Armenia under the Il-Khans," *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 11 (2000): 39–52; Hews, *Armenia*, 113; Bayarsaikhan Dashdondog, *The Mongols and the Armenians* (Leiden, 2011), 43–60, 71–78, 90–93, 100–120; Bournoutian, *Concise History*, 107–12; Bayarsaikhan, *Darughachi*, 221–24, 226–29.

⁶⁷ Wilhelm Barthold, "Die persische Inschrift an der Mauer der Manucehr-Moschee zu Ani," trans. and ed. Walther Hinz, *ZDMG* 101 (1951): 245–46; Ann K. Lambton, *Continuity and Change in Medieval Persia* (Albany, NY, 1988), 184, no. 121; Bayarsaikhan, *Mongols*, 116, no. 129. These types of reform were already seen earlier under the Mongol Ilkhanid ruler Ghazan (1295–1304), who under his vizier, tried to reduce taxes and took steps to reinvigorate the agricultural potential of the countryside. This included resettling the population in agricultural lands that had previously been abandoned, as well as protecting peasants against nomads. See Thomas Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge, UK, 2004), 75, 116.

⁶³ Hews, *Armenia*, 112, 124–33.

⁶⁴ Cited in Avedis Krikor Sanjian, "The Historical Setting," in *Armenian Gospel Iconography: Tradition of the Glajor Gospel*, ed. Thomas F. Mathews and Avedis Krikor Sanjian (Washington, D.C., 1991), 9.

⁶⁵ Artashes Šahnazaryan, "Zakaryan Hayastann Ilkhanutyan Arajin Shrjanum," *Patma-Banasirakan Handes* 1 (2011): 129–40; Bayarsaikhan Dashdondog, "Darughachi in Armenia," in *The Mongols' Middle East: Continuity and Transformation in Ilkhanid Iran*, ed. Bruno De Nicola and Charles Melville (Leiden, 2016): 219.

the merchants, officials, and aristocracy involved in trade between Iran, the Black Sea, and the Far East.⁶⁸ During this period, maritime trade expanded, as the Italian states of Genoa and Venice founded trading centers along the north shore of the Black Sea as well as in the Crimea, thanks to Mongol conquests. The cities of Tabriz and Sultanieh in Iranian Azerbaijan were also major trading centers where Genoese and Venetian merchants had their offices.⁶⁹ The Mongols taxed commercial transactions and it appears that they earned a large amount of revenue from this form of taxation.⁷⁰ Co-optation of allegiance was furthered by intermarriage between the Mongols (or officials in the Ilkhanid administration in Iran) and the Caucasian nobility.

The situation, however, became destabilized in the 1330s and 1340s with internecine warfare, as various nobles vied for the Ilkhanid throne.⁷¹ At the same time as this intermittent warfare, plague epidemics reached the region in 1346; Armenia and other regions in the south Caucasus, such as Georgia, were “covered with dead bodies.”⁷² Despite the bleak record left by Armenian historians (many of whom, like Kirakos Gandzakert’ci, were captive under the Ilkhanids), archaeological evidence makes it clear that social life could and did continue in the medieval period. Further, Tomoko Masuya suggests, based on archaeological evidence, that the Mongols themselves had

a complicated settlement system, as indicated by the fact that they categorized their cities according to function, including not only settlements from which the Mongols administered their empire, and pleasure palaces for hunting and feasting, but also small, walled “agricultural centers” or “villages where peasants lived.”⁷³ Archaeological data on the landscapes of late medieval Eurasia thus suggest a more complicated image of regional social life than that presented in historical sources.

While villages are seldom described directly or named in the historical record, they were categorically invoked as constituting part of social landscapes and political strategies: for instance, villages were integrated into the *iqṭāʿ* system, or served as part of the wider resource base of cities and towns. Historical and, more concretely, epigraphic evidence from late medieval Armenia and Anatolia indicates that villages as productive entities were important not only as components within an overall landscape of production and economy, but also as participants in the performative aspects of political economy which tied together rural production and authority situated in towns and cities. The textual record thus also provides a basis for a critical deconstruction of the direct and determinative correlation between village form and village function. Writing of the agricultural landscape of late Seljuk Anatolia, Nicholas Trépanier observed that, as defined within *waqf* documents which oversaw the donations of villages (and other properties) to mosques, madrasas, caravanserais, and other institutions, what was donated was not the land or the built fabric of the village, but the incomes and goods that were produced there. In that context, “village” was thus a social category of production, rather than a locale or a kind of culture opposed to “urban.”⁷⁴ To give a more concrete example, the presumed link between the constructed layout of “the village” and the village as an emic entity of economic production and social order is troubled

⁶⁸ Thomas Allsen, “Economic Ties,” in *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia*, 41–50; Bayarsaikhan, *Mongols*, 73–74, 95; Bournoutian, *Concise History*, 112.

⁶⁹ Nicola di Cosmo, “Mongols and Merchants on the Black Sea Frontier in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: Convergences and Conflicts,” in *Mongols, Turks, and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, ed. Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (Leiden, 2005); Nicola di Cosmo, “Black Sea Emporia and the Mongol Empire: A Reassessment of the Pax Mongolica,” *JESHO* 53 (2010): 83–108; Michel Balard, “The Black Sea and International Trade of the XIVth and XVth Centuries,” in *Proceedings of the 22nd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Sofia, 22–27 August, 2011, Volume I: Plenary Papers* (Sofia, 2011, 441–50); Patrick Wing, “‘Rich in Goods and Abounding in Wealth’: The Ilkhanid and Post-Ilkhanid Ruling Elite and Politics of Commercial Life at Tabriz, 1250–1400,” in *Politics, Patronage, and the Transmission of Knowledge 13th–15th Century Tabriz*, ed. Judith Pfeiffer (Leiden, 2014), 301–20.

⁷⁰ Bayarsaikhan, *Darughbachi*, 229–30.

⁷¹ Hews, *Armenia*, 142.

⁷² Justus Friedrich Carl Hecker, *Black Death: Account of the Deadly Pestilence of the Fourteenth Century* (New York, 1885), 21. See also David M. Lang, “Georgia under Giorgi the Brilliant (1314–1346),” *BSOAS* 17 (1955): 74.

⁷³ Tomoko Masuya, *The Ilkhanid Phase of Takht-i Sulaimān* (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1997), 166–78. As MacEvitt has noted for Crusader period Edessa (modern Urfa), however, European terms used by the Crusaders to describe the land tenure situation in eastern Anatolia and northern Syria do not necessarily mean that land tenure was identical in both places. Rather, the Crusaders were describing what they saw in the closest equivalent terms and the same may be true of the Mongols. See Christopher MacEvitt, *The Crusades and the Christian World of the East: Rough Tolerance* (Philadelphia, 2008).

⁷⁴ Nicholas Trépanier, *Foodways and Daily Life in medieval Anatolia* (Austin, 2014), 31.

by textual evidence for a village in the Ahlat region in 1231, when that site was under the control of the Ayyubids. A woman in the region sold one-thirtieth of a village, referred to as part of an “agricultural estate” (*bayt agricole*), consisting of a house and its accompanying irrigated and non-irrigated lands, pastures, and barns. This suggests, fascinatingly, that the concept of “village” in this period was oriented around practices and products, containing not just built spaces (the houses of villagers) but also the landscapes where variously mobile activities supportive of village life were carried out.⁷⁵

Our understanding of the village as a landscape of activities extending beyond a walled or fortified site is supported also by increasing applications of remote sensing and satellite imagery. To cite a prominent example, Philippe Dangles and Nicolas Proteau have recently argued based on satellite imagery that the historically-attested village site of Malasberd extended 16 hectares beyond the fortress and church of the same name, and that the village included a number of multi-functional buildings such as caravanserai and baths.⁷⁶ Similar work was undertaken at Mren by Samvel Karapetian, who deployed satellite imagery to complicate the landscape surrounding that famous 7th century church by demonstrating the extent of village architectural traces.⁷⁷ A task of historical archaeology is thus to fill in the critical place in social topography occupied by villages, both as the physical context for extra-urban life and as a component within regional strategies of political economy.

Dating from at least the 7th century and continuing through the Seljuk period into the 13th century, a central part of authoritative pious practice in Armenia consisted of making donations of renovations, vestments, or estates to monasteries and churches, and of recording those donations in prominent architectural inscriptions.⁷⁸ This follows similar traditions in Byzantium, where entire villages could also be donated to

churches or monasteries, as well as traditions of pious care on the part of rulers from the Turkish Islamic tradition.⁷⁹ A central function of such inscriptions—which could be located inside the churches themselves, as well as in *gavits* (narthexes) or on the outside of buildings—was to tie the productive activities of properties and agricultural lands (usually referred to as “gardens” [*ayginer*] owned by a prince or lord) with that pious actor’s ability to endow religious spaces (churches) and performances (masses) in perpetuity.

The famous endowment inscription of the merchant-prince Tigran Honenc’ at Ani is the quintessential example of the role of villages as participants within this late medieval Armenian pious political economy.⁸⁰ Carved across an impressive swath of the east wall of the church of St. Gregory in Ani, the inscription of Honenc’ (dated to 1215) details his donation to the adjoining monastery of villages and parts of villages, as well as the products of rural agricultural production locales such as threshing floors, fish traps, and olive presses. The villages donated by Honenc’, located primarily within the plains of Shirak and Kars, were integral to the cohesion of the late medieval landscape and to the self-construction of political actors in Armenia. Contemporary with Tigran Honenc’, aspiring nobles in the Kasakh Valley undertook equivalent donations to monasteries in their domain. In the first decade of the 13th century, the prince Vaçe Vačutyan donated lands in rural areas (described as “gardens,” *aygi*) to the monastery of Ushi and revenues to the monastery of Hovhannevanck: both of these monasteries are located alongside the main roads between Ashtarak and Aparan.⁸¹ In the year 1216, a certain Vahram recorded the donation

⁷⁵ M. C. Bartusis, *Land and Privilege in Byzantium: The Institution of Pronoia* (Cambridge, UK, 2013), 182. For a discussion of princely donations and care in the medieval Turko-Islamic tradition, see Yusuf Khass Hajib, *Wisdom of Royal Glory: a Turko-Islamic mirror for princes*, trans. with an introduction by Robert Dankoff (Chicago, 1983).

⁸⁰ Jean-Pierre Mahe, “Le testament de Tigran Honents: la fortune d’un marchand arménien d’Ani aux XIIe–XIIIe siècles,” *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (2001): 1319–42; Kathryn Franklin, “Assembling Subjects: Cosmopolitanism in Late Medieval Armenia,” in *Incomplete Archaeologies: Assembling Knowledge in the past and present*, ed. Emily Miller Bonney, Kathryn Franklin, and James A. Johnson (Oxford, 2016).

⁸¹ Karapet Ghafadaryan, *Hovhannevanck’o yev nra ardzanagrut’yunnero* (Yerevan, 1948), 82; Frina Babayan, *Sourb Sargis Vank at Ushi* (Yerevan, 2005); Franklin “*This world is an inn*,” 87–89.

⁷⁶ Dominique Sourdel and Janine Sourdel-Thomine, “Un acte de vente arabe portant sur la région d’Ahlat au VIIe/XIIIe siècle,” *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 6 (1972): 52–57.

⁷⁷ Philippe Dangles and Nicolas Proteau, “Observations sur quelques fortresses de la région d’Ani,” *Revue des études arméniennes* 30 (2005–2007): 278–79.

⁷⁸ Samvel Karapetian, “Mren and its Monuments,” *Vardzk 7* (2014): 39–40.

⁷⁹ Greenwood, “Corpus of early medieval Armenian inscriptions”; Christina Maranci, “Building Churches in Armenia: Art at the Borders of Empire and the Edge of the Canon,” *Art Bulletin* 88 (2006): 656; Franklin, “*This world is an inn*,” 69–93.

to Hovhannevanak of various proceeds and expenses for construction, but also a “garden of Dprevan.”⁸² A few decades later, in 1244, Kurd Vačutyān (son to Vače) donated the villages of Parpi, Karbi, and Os-hakan, as well as “three hostels” to the monastery of Astvac’nkal, located within the Kasakh canyon east of Ambroyi.⁸³ All three of the villages mentioned in Kurd’s inscription were located on the shoulder of Mt. Aragats south of Ambroyi, indicating that this relatively small region of Aragatsotn was fertile ground not only for agriculture, but for supporting projects of social production as well. In late medieval Georgia, there are frequent references in the written sources to the donations of fields and vineyards to monasteries by different nobles.⁸⁴ Gerstel documents various Byzantine endowment inscriptions, including an early 14th century one that lists a monastery being endowed with a variety of valuable rural resources, including fields and vineyards.⁸⁵

The name by which Ambroyi was known in the medieval period is still undiscovered, and thus the donation of the village to a local monastic foundation, if such was the case, cannot yet be confirmed. If the village known as Ambroyi *did* serve as part of an endowment, it might not necessarily have been donated to a monastery. There is also evidence in Armenia and Seljuk Anatolia (as well as elsewhere, in Central Asia and the Levant) for a parallel tradition of donating estates and incomes to caravanserais; likewise, there is evidence for *karavanatn’ner* serving a similar function to churches in late medieval Armenian society as locales for the performance of pious, hospitable authority.⁸⁶ It is thus distinctly possible that the village at Ambroyi may have been attached through ties of socioeconomic practice to the nearby caravan inn. As will be discussed below, this possibility is further supported by the material

evidence found in excavations at the Arai-Bazarjugh *karavanatun* as well as at Ambroyi.

Excavation Results: the Material Traces of Activities at Ambroyi

The excavation seasons of 2013–2014 at Ambroyi revealed important information about the Armenian village in the medieval period, and generated datasets that inform our primary research questions regarding both the continuation and nature of village-scale production of different kinds in the years of Mongol power in Armenia. These excavations focused on a sector in the southwest corner of the preserved settlement identified from both satellite imagery and ground-truthing. The excavations opened internal architectural spaces, both rooms and courtyards, with accompanying installations (see Figure 5). The excavated architecture was constructed from undressed field stone, mud brick, and excavated bedrock, and consisted of rectangular rooms exceeding 5m wide and enclosed in 90cm-thick double-faced stone walls. Intriguingly, trenches HB1 (see Figure 6) and HB2 revealed a room containing pits, paved floors, and an ornamented *tonir*-oven and associated stone platform. This space was enclosed within double-faced walls at right angles which were laid on top of the carved clay bedrock. However, at some point during the occupation of the site, a destruction event led to the partial infilling of the southern space (around the decorated *tonir*) and the construction of a secondary, rougher wall of stones and clay on top of the leveled fill. Thus Ambroyi demonstrates the use of both “agglutinative” and what would be called “planned” architectural styles, suggesting that these categories are not effective when used to categorize whole settlements.

Excavation units to the north included a courtyard filled with round clay ovens and different types of pits, and a narrow adjoining room that was paved with stone slabs and a bell-shaped pit in the middle (HB3; see Figure 7). The area with the many ovens and pits seemed to have been some sort of production area (HB4; see Figure 8) that included ovens built on top of and inside other ovens after they ceased to be used (see Figure 9), as well as another oven with an elaborate flue system.⁸⁷ In addition, a number of

⁸² Ghafadaryan, *Hovhannevanak’z*, 81. Note: not to be confused with the current town of Dprevan near Aruč (e.g., see reference in Garegin Tumanyan, “Aruči dambaranadašt nos. 7 yev 9. dambanatmberi yev taghman masin arnčvoť voroš harceri šurj,” *Patmbanasirakan bandes* 2–3 [2009]: 236–48).

⁸³ A. Avagyan, *Vimakan arđzanagrut’yunneri baraknutyun* (Yerevan, 1978), 251; Franklin “*This world is an inn*,” 188.

⁸⁴ Mindorashvili, “Tiseli Settlement,” 506.

⁸⁵ Gerstel, “Mapping the Boundaries,” 339–41.

⁸⁶ Vrazdat Harutyunyan, *Karavanat’ners yev kamurjners mij-nadar Hayastanum* (Yerevan, 1960); Kurt Erdmann, *Das Anatolische karavansaray des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1961); Katia Cytryn-Silverman, *The road inns (Khans) in Bilad al-Sham*. BAR International Series 2130 (2010); Franklin “*This world is an inn*,” 40–68.

⁸⁷ A similarly complicated flue system was found at the site of Hasanlu, near Lake Urmia in Iran, but it is of a different design. See Danti, *Ilkhanid Heartland*, Fig. 8. See also Masuya, *Takht-I*

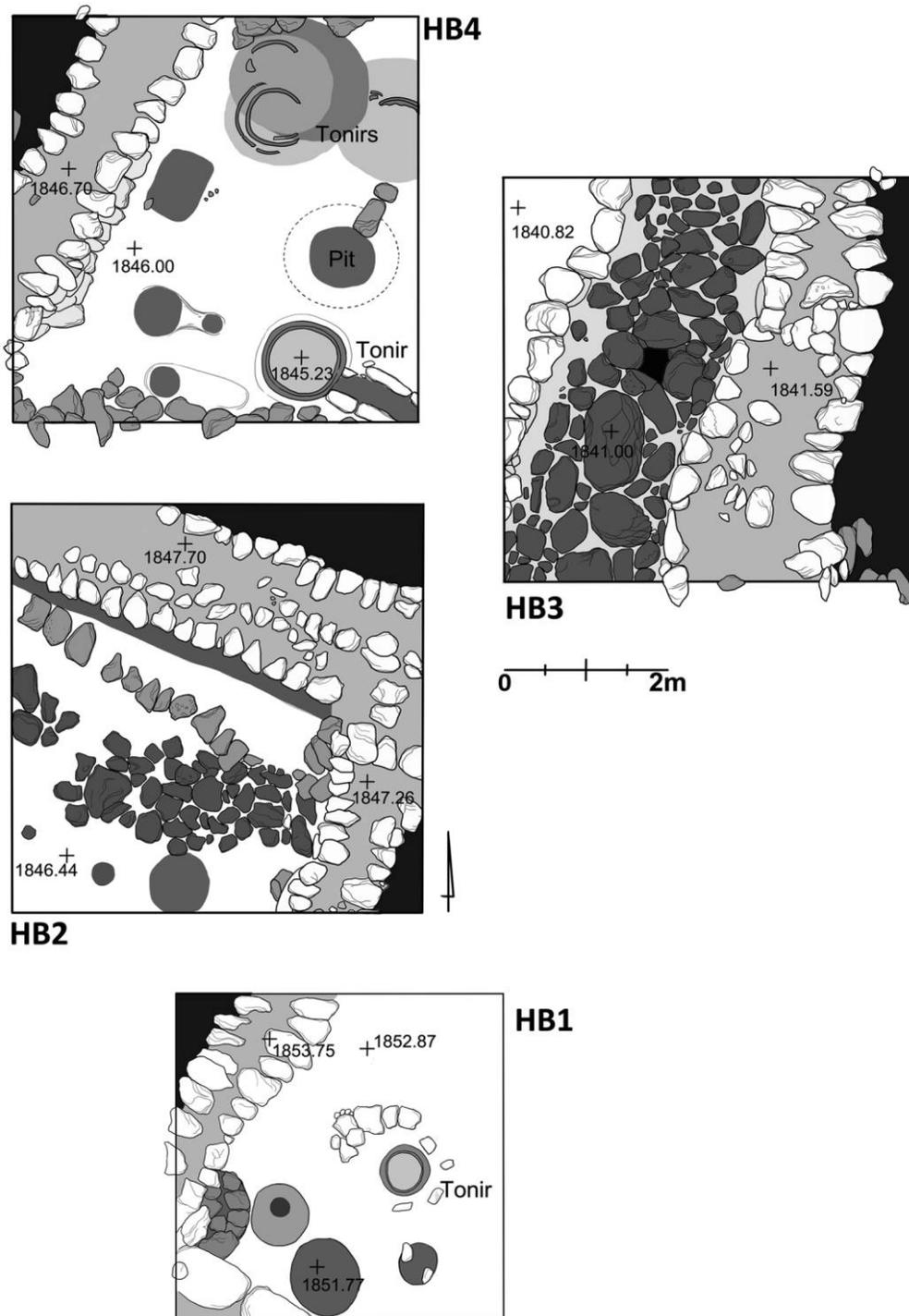


Figure 5—Plan of the completed excavations at Ambroyi. Note locations of *tonir*-ovens.

different pits were built into the floor around these ovens, including a deep bell-shaped storage pit, as well as numerous shallow pits that could have been used

Suleiman, 145, for the pottery kilns at Takht-i Suleiman, also located in what is now northeast Iran.

for processing and preparing foodstuffs for cooking, or wet and dry materials for other production.

Ovens built in a conical shape from coarse clay, like those found at Ambroyi, are found frequently in both rural and urban archaeological contexts in eastern Anatolia, from sites dating over very long periods. The



Figure 6—The decorated *tonir*-oven, situated on a stone platform, excavated in Unit HB1.

ovens at Ambroyi were nested within each other (see Figure 9), a feature also seen at Tille Höyük and Korucutepe, as well as in Azerbaijan, where ovens were renovated by inserting another clay lining within the original broken one.⁸⁸ Large numbers of ovens have been attested in village contexts in Azerbaijan,⁸⁹ but have not been excavated as frequently in the Georgian villages, although the excavators of the medieval village of Tiseli noted that every context that they de-

finied as a house had a hearth and oven.⁹⁰ At Atskuri, dated to the 11th-13th centuries, excavators found the remains of a wine cellar and ovens that they thought served a ritual purpose.⁹¹ Ethnographic evidence from eastern Anatolia suggests that ovens were often constructed by hand in the village and this was assumed to have been the case in medieval villages in Azerbaijan. Every household had its own oven; they were frequently built by village women. The ovens, though sometimes the same size and shape as a large ceramic vessel, were not fired in a kiln but were instead hand-built and fired in place. Ovens were replaced when they became too damaged by the heat or if the baking

⁸⁸ Van Loon, *Korucutepe 2*, 42–44, Figs. 73–76; Moore, *Tille Höyük*, 47; Bakhtiyar, *Fakhrali*, 10; Dostiyev et al., *Hajjalili III*, 8.

⁸⁹ Bakhtiyar, *Fakhrali*, 8, 10; Dostiyev et al., *Girag Kasaman*, 12–13, 21; Hajafov et al., *Dasbulag*, 7–8, 10; Dostiyev et al., *Hajjalili III*, 5, 7–8.

⁹⁰ Mindorashvili, “Tiseli Settlement,” 506.

⁹¹ Licheli et al., *Archaeological Investigation . . . Atskuri*, 17.



Figure 7—A view of the Ambroyi excavations toward the east, showing the excavated paved work area and mouth of the bell-shaped pit in HB3.

area was moved.⁹² As is suggested by the observed nesting of successive oven features, the maintenance of *tonir*-ovens took some effort. A 12th century mar-

ket inspector's manual from Syria written by Abd al-Rahman b. Nasr al-Shayzari⁹³ described some of the

⁹² Hopkins, *Ethnoarchaeological Study*, 55–57.

⁹³ 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Shayzarī, *The Book of the Islamic Market Inspector: Nihāyat al-Rutba fī Ṭalab al-Ḥisba* (*The utmost authority*



Figure 8—A plan view of the activity floor excavated in unit HB4, photographed from the west.

steps that were taken to keep ovens in good repair in a more urban context. If ovens were used for bread baking, the chimneys of the oven had to be kept clean of burnt seeds, cinders, and scattered sand so that they would not stick to the bottom of the bread.⁹⁴ After bread was baked in an oven, the oven-keeper was enjoined to use water from a clean container to rinse the oven of any debris which would give it a stale smell. Regular washings were prescribed for both the oven and tools associated with baking, such as the board used to transport dough: all of this cleaning added to the wear and tear of the baking process itself, and to eventual deterioration of the low-fired clay ovens. The ovens at Ambroyi, whether they were actually used for bread-baking or for the production of other

foodstuffs, were the subject of similar amounts of care and maintenance in the course of their use-lives, repair, and replacement.

Though we found a few small pieces of pottery slag in the fills at Ambroyi, we did not find extensive evidence for production of ceramics at this locale (though ceramics were certainly produced at Ambroyi or nearby). Given their size and similarity to ovens found in other sites in eastern Anatolia, the *tonirs* in excavated parts of Ambroyi were probably primarily used to prepare food: this suggests that, for the sake of convenience, the pits associated with the *tonir*-ovens may have been used for the storage and processing of grains. At the village of Tille Höyük, excavators found signs that some of the pits were used in smelting,⁹⁵ and this has also been observed at village sites in

in the pursuit of Hisba), trans. and introduction by R. P. Buckley, *JSS Supplement 9* (Oxford, 1999).

⁹⁴ al-Shayzari, *Nihāyat*.

⁹⁵ Moore, *Tille Höyük*, Figs. 10–11.



Figure 9—A detail view of the nested *tonir*-ovens in the HB4 activity floor.

Azerbaijan,⁹⁶ but this does not appear to have been the case at Ambroyi. The current lack of archaeobotanical evidence for Ambroyi means that it is not possible at this point to discuss whether or not these ovens were used to bake bread, or whether they might have been used in the production of other foodstuffs. The 10th century cookbook of Ibn Warraq provides an indication of how ovens were used in the production of food dishes. This includes dishes that were cooked in pots on trivets in ovens, as well as cookies, cakes, and other foods.⁹⁷ Another possibility is that cooking pots could be placed over the opening at the top of the oven. It is clear from ethnographic parallels that *tonir*-ovens such as those found at Ambroyi could

⁹⁶ Dostiyev et al., *Girag Kasaman*, 18; Dostiyev et al., *Hajjalili III*, 6, 9, 14.

⁹⁷ al-Muzaffar ibn Naṣr ibn Sayyār al-Warrāq, *Annals of the Caliphs' Kitchens: Ibn al-Sayyār al-Warrāq's 10th Century Baghdadi Cookbook*, trans. Nawal Nasrallah (Leiden, 2007).

be used to prepare other foodstuffs besides bread.⁹⁸ While the similarity of the largest oven equipped with a complex flue to contemporary *tonirs* at Korucutepe indicates that this single installation at least was used for bread making,⁹⁹ the diversity of oven forms both in the main activity area and in various excavated contexts suggests a multiplicity of productive processes in this area of the Ambroyi site. In Azerbaijan, excavators frequently found areas that they termed “activity areas” for individuals of the village, often associated with ovens and other types of production.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Noor Mulder-Heymans, “Archaeology, Experimental Archaeology and Ethnoarchaeology on Bread Ovens in Syria,” *Civilisations* 49 (2002): 2–22; Cynthia Shafer-Elliott, *Food in Ancient Judah: Domestic Cooking in the Time of the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield, 2013), 129–30.

⁹⁹ van Loon, *Korucutepe* 2, 42–44, Figs. 73–76.

¹⁰⁰ Bakhtiyar, *Fakhrāli*, 8–9; Dostiyev et al., *Girag Kasaman*, 12–21.

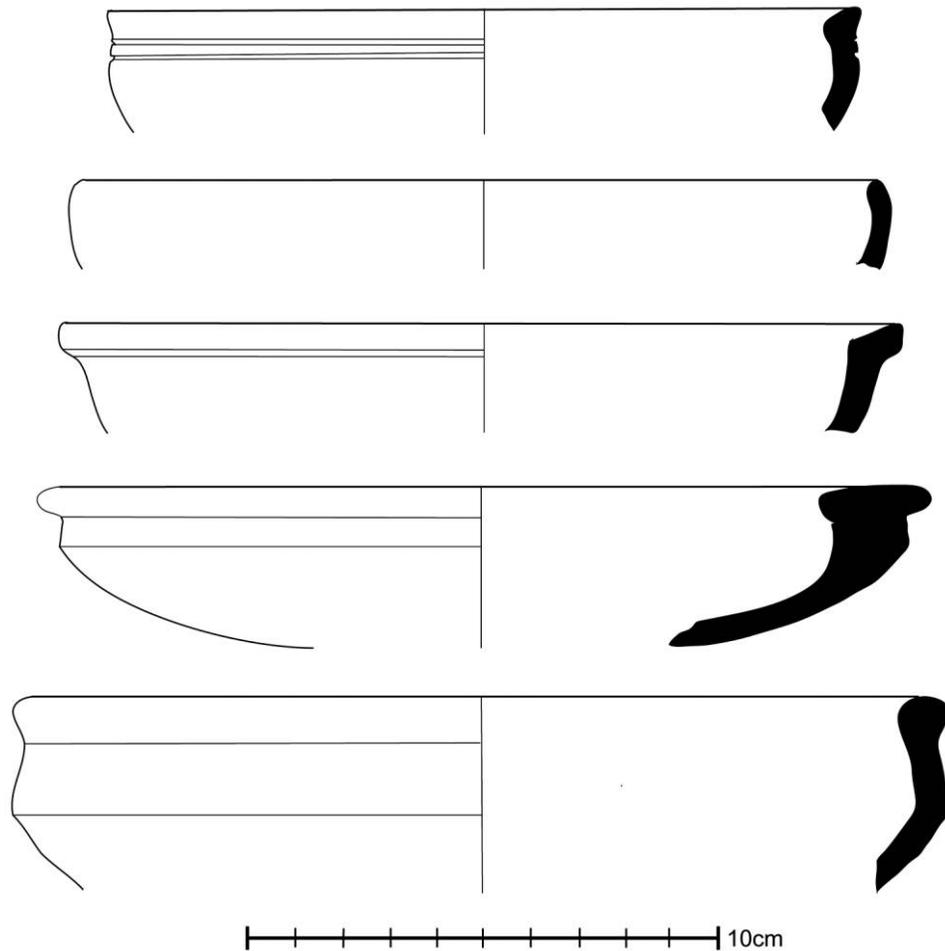


Figure 10—Profiles of the red-slipped red ware bowl forms excavated from Ambroyi.

Another question which cannot yet be answered definitively is whether the ovens found in this courtyard were used by one family or residential group, or whether they were used for communal cooking and other activities. A related question is whether the solitary, decorated oven in the southernmost excavated room (Unit HB1) was used for different purposes than the more densely-crowded, “utilitarian” ovens in the room to the north. Comparanda for the ovens found at Ambroyi are present in the archaeological record from the wider medieval Near East, as well as attested in recent ethnographic accounts of the same region.¹⁰¹ At the 8th–10th century village of Girag Kasaman in Azerbaijan, the excavators suggested that the number

of ovens they found in one particular activity area suggested the structure had been a bakery.¹⁰² At the contemporary village of Sos Höyük, however, every household had its own oven built by women.¹⁰³ The number and variety of ovens, pits, and other features excavated in the activity area at Ambroyi suggests that multiple people may have used this installation simultaneously—and there is no reason to presume that it was a family group. The complex spatial relationship between the oven installations and other excavated spaces supports the problematization of the category of “house” as a productive unit in the medieval village in Anatolia and the south Caucasus, as discussed above based on historical evidence. Further excava-

¹⁰¹ Mulder-Heymans, “Archaeology”; Shafer-Elliott, *Food in Ancient Judah*, 124.

¹⁰² Dostiyev et al., *Girag Kasaman*, 12.

¹⁰³ Hopkins, *Ethnoarchaeological Study*, 55–57.

tions at the village could help to clarify the spatial understanding of shared activity spaces and the social relationships associated with activities carried out by inhabitants at Ambroyi. Additionally, the image of ongoing and busy production activity within this space is supported by the small finds, which suggest a continuing hustle and bustle around the ovens. The finds of bracelet fragments in the courtyards could indicate that the majority of the fragments were lost during work, such as baking, without the opportunity to retrieve them,¹⁰⁴ while the presence of a spindle whorl suggests that the courtyard was also the setting for activities related to the spinning and weaving of textiles, probably of wool. Similar finds of large numbers of bracelets, as well as spindle whorls, are attested in other village contexts throughout the south Caucasus both contemporary with and also dating earlier than Ambroyi.¹⁰⁵

Co-extensive with the preparation area associated with the ovens, a dedicated storage area was discovered. This was a narrow section of a room, which was paved. Initially it appeared to be some sort of alleyway or thoroughfare; further excavations, however, revealed a bell-shaped storage pit in the middle of the room that had a rather heavy stone cover. The neck of the storage pit was lined with roughly corbelled stones. A similar storage pit was found at Gritille, though without a cover,¹⁰⁶ and others are attested in Georgia and Azerbaijan.¹⁰⁷ Georgian archaeologists¹⁰⁸ and Scott Redford have suggested (and we also have speculated) that such bell-shaped pits were constructed to hold grain,¹⁰⁹ while the archaeologists at the village of Dashbulag in Azerbaijan suggested they were to hold food products in general.¹¹⁰ Although the pit at

Ambroyi was flooded at the time of excavation, this was a result of shifting groundwater flows since the medieval period. An almost identical pit was recently found by Franklin and Astghik Babajanyan in a contemporary village space in the Vayoc' Dzor region: the bell shaped pit in this context was clearly used for cold storage. While Redford has suggested that these pits were used to store grain to conceal them from tax collectors, there is no evidence to support that idea in this instance. It seems more likely that the pit was used to store grain or other supplies—perhaps those that needed to be kept cool—as they were needed.

Considered analytically, the ceramic assemblage from Ambroyi effectively addresses several questions related to the medieval village as a locus of social life in the late medieval period. A brief examination of the ceramic material recovered from the excavations, all of which dated between the 12th and 15th centuries, indicates both active material production at the local level, as well as participation in patterns of eating that are visible in urban and monastic contexts.¹¹¹

The ceramic assemblage at Ambroyi is dominated by red wares (red clay fabric with variable mica, chaff and white stone inclusions) which are generally untreated, or smoothed and covered with a red slip; the slip might then be left smooth, or burnished to a gloss. The assemblage also contains a number of red-bodied glazed wares as well as white wares, both of which types are distinguished by their relative fineness and lack of inclusions. Occasional finds of wasters and ceramic slag suggest the possibility that ceramics were produced on site, but so far confirmed production contexts have not been found for this part of the Kaskh Valley.¹¹² Ceramic slag has also been found at the 8th–11th century Hajialili III village in Azerbaijan, suggesting the ceramics were made in that village as well.¹¹³

The rims of red-slipped red wares are similar in form: late medieval types include a round-rimmed globular form, and a flattened rim (“T”-shaped), carinated bowl form. These two forms are also marked

¹⁰⁴ Yoko Shindo, “Islamic Glass Bracelets found in the Red Sea Region,” *Annales du 13e congrès de l’association internationale pour l’histoire du verre* (Lochem, 1996); Boulogne, “Village Life”; Margreet Steiner, “An Analysis of the Islamic Glass Bracelets found at Tell Abu Sarbut,” in *Sacred and Sweet: Studies in the Material Culture of Tell Deir ‘Alla and Tell Abu Sarbut*, ed. Margreet Steiner and Eveline van der Steen (Leuven, 2008), 1–2, 7.

¹⁰⁵ Bakhtiyar, *Fakhrli*, 12; Dostiyev et al., *Girag Kasaman*, 40; Hajafov et al., *Dashbulag*, 22; Mindorashvili, “Tiseli Settlement,” 505. Glass bracelets are far more frequent finds than glass vessels, which seem to be rarer in village contexts.

¹⁰⁶ Scott Redford, *The Archaeology of the Frontier in the Medieval Near East: Excavations at Gritille, Turkey* (Philadelphia, 1998), 68.

¹⁰⁷ Hajafov et al., *Dashbulag*, 12, 14.

¹⁰⁸ Teimraz Chikovani, “Kharo-marts’vleulis mitsisk’vesha sats’avi,” *Dziebani* 13–14 (2004): 155–59.

¹⁰⁹ Redford, *Archaeology of the Frontier*.

¹¹⁰ Hajafov et al., *Dashbulag*, 14.

¹¹¹ For an extensive discussion of late medieval Armenian ceramics and their chronology, see Astghik Babajanyan, *Hayastani XIV–XVII dd. Xecelena* (Atenaxosut’yun, <<Hnagitut’yun>> PhD. diss., Yerevan Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, 2015).

¹¹² Colleagues at the Institute of Archaeology have encountered late medieval ceramic production contexts at the site of Yeghvard, but these have not been extensively published (Simon Hmayakyan, pers. comm.).

¹¹³ Dostiyev et al., *Hajialili III*, 26, 46–47.

by patterns of red slip (called “red paint” within Armenian archaeology): round-rim bowls are frequently brushed with a stripe of red slip, usually unburnished, on the inside and outside of the rim. Flat-rimmed bowls are fully slipped and burnished, or brushed with red slip and burnished just on the top of the rim (see Figure 10). Red ware flat-rim bowls are basically uniform in their rim thickness, and in this dimension are basically similar to glazed bowls, indicating a possible formal consistency across bowl production, and supporting the existence of a late medieval “table bowl set” assemblage in Armenia. But unlike the other rims recovered at Ambroyi (white and glazed), red-slipped wares were also found in a range of thicker forms, consistent with red-slipped red ware serving not only as table-ware but also for cooking, storage, and production. The diameter of jar and pot rims clustered around the 10–15cm and the 17–22cm ranges, with an especial parity in the dimensions of straight-rimmed cooking jars and carinated red-ware bowls. The narrow overlap in rim sizes is especially manifest in red-slipped red wares, indicating a general standardization in the habitus of producing wheel-thrown rims for both bowls and hand-built pots, as well as perhaps the production of fitted lids for cooking and storage vessels. These patterns indicate the consistency of a material tradition which tied together not just the production and eating spaces within the village, but also the village and other spaces within the Kasakh Valley.

The red-slipped red wares at Ambroyi have explicit comparanda at 12th–14th century sites elsewhere in the Kasakh Valley and in adjoining valleys of the Armenian highlands, specifically the sites of Telenyac³ Vank and Ušii Vank in the Kasakh Valley, and Yelegis in Vayoc² Dzor.¹¹⁴ They can be compared to material uncovered in both urban and village sites in Georgia and Azerbaijan (as well as in Iran; see the cover image of this issue),¹¹⁵ pointing to a continuity of red-slipped red wares throughout the south Caucasus in the early and later medieval periods. The plainware ceramic assemblage from Ambroyi also bears striking similarities

¹¹⁴ Sargsyan, “Telenyac,” 170; Redford, *Archaeology of the Frontier*; Aram Kalantaryan et al., *Armenia in the Cultural Context of East and West. Ceramics and Glass (4th–14th centuries)* (Yerevan, 2009); Antonio Sagona, “Sos Höyük: An ancient settlement near Erzurum,” in *Geleceğe Armağan: Arkeolojik, Kültürel ve Estetik Yansımaları*, ed. Mehmet Işık, Erhat Mutlugün, and Mine Artu (Erzurum, 2010), 42–49.

¹¹⁵ Bakhtiyar, *Fakhralı*, 10; Dostiyev et al., *Girag Kasaman*, 32; Hajafov et al., *Dashbulag*, 16–19.

to the contemporary material recovered at Sos Höyük in Turkey, including a set of nearly complete unglazed red-slipped wares found stacked together in the corner niche of a room at that site: that assemblage included large mouthed cooking pots and a trefoil jug, in addition to pot lids and platters of different sizes, and gives a possible suggestion of the “typical ceramic kitchen equipment” for the period and region.¹¹⁶ Interestingly, the forms and sizes of red-slipped red ware bowls and cooking jars found in the Ambroyi village contexts are also directly comparable to the ceramic assemblage from the adjacent Arai-Bazarjuł caravanse-*rai*—where they were found, significantly, in contexts not directly associated with cooking.¹¹⁷ This corroborates a primary inference raised by our earlier research, which is that the cook-wares used at the Arai-Bazarjuł *karavanatun* were made in local village workshops and provisioned to the inn, probably in combination with local foodstuffs.¹¹⁸ The close interaction of the village and the nearby road inn should not be considered surprising, given the importance of both village and *karavanatun* in the regional political economy; indeed, the ceramic correlation seems to confirm the dependent relationship between endowments like caravanserai with nearby villages, as indicated by the historical record discussed earlier.

Other aspects of the ceramic assemblage indicate wider connections and material interaction, in terms of ceramic style and culinary practice, on the part of the inhabitants of Ambroyi. Red ware and glazed pottery were uncovered in both seasons, all of which dated to the late medieval period (ca. 12th–15th cs., though more detailed chronologies are pending).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Antonio Sagona, Claudia Sagona, and Hilmi Özkorucuklu, “Excavations at Sos Höyük 1994: First Preliminary Report,” *Anatolian Studies* 45 (1995): 200, pl. XXVIII.

¹¹⁷ Kathryn Franklin, “A House for Trade, A Space for Politics: Excavations at the Arai-Bazarjuł Late Medieval Caravanatun, Armenia,” *Anatolica* 40 (2014): 1–21.

¹¹⁸ Franklin “*This world is an inn*,” 165–71.

¹¹⁹ See Danti, *Ilkhanid Heartland*, 22–23, where it is mentioned that red-slipped wares constitute the bulk of the assemblage, followed by simple glazed wares. This small site, however, consists of a larger percentage of luxury glazed wares than at Ambroyi. See also Hopkins, *Ethnoarchaeological Study*, 94–95, and A. Sagona and C. Sagona, “Upper Levels at Sos Höyük, Erzurum: A Reinterpretation of the 1987 Campaign,” *Anatolia Antiqua* 11 (2003): 103, who discusses the cooking pot wares from Sos Höyük, which were overwhelmingly orange- to brown-slipped, and interpreted as cooking pot wares. At other eastern Anatolian sites, the unglazed pots were largely red or orange wares, but more decorated glazed pottery was attested, see Ömür Bakirer, “Medieval Pottery and Baked

Polychrome splashware sgraffiato ceramics, recovered primarily from the occupation space opened in operations HB2 and HB1, have comparanda from the long-term excavations in the 13th–14th cs. urban contexts at Dvin (in the Ararat Plain),¹²⁰ as well as other sites in Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan.¹²¹ This points to Ambroyi as being integrated into the so-called sgraffiato-*koine* which includes not only the south Caucasus, but also Central Asia and the eastern Mediterranean, cutting across both political and cultural boundaries.¹²² Fragments of two monochrome glazed “saltcellars” were also recovered, which are similar to examples found in the Shirak Plain dated to the 13th c.

There were a few stone paste pieces also recovered from the site, pointing to the presence of a small number of luxury wares associated with the same period. This pattern is seen elsewhere in some of the rural contexts in the south Caucasus.¹²³ The presence of glazed, sgraffiato, and otherwise “luxury” ceramics at a village site like Ambroyi is perhaps surprising, but only in the context of the longstanding assumption that villages in late medieval Armenia (and elsewhere) were non-participants in the regimes of taste and exchange which have long been exclusively associated with urban centers.¹²⁴ More specifically, to presume that villagers made and/or used only “plain” or “quodidarian” wares presumes that village life was exclusively the realm of the mundane or the unexceptional, the non-cosmopolitan—and this is a recapitulation of the assumption, discussed above, that “culture” was an exclusive privilege of the urban center. The patterns of ceramic finds observed in Ambroyi were very similar to those documented in the villages excavated on

the BTC pipeline in Georgia and Azerbaijan, further suggesting that Ambroyi’s material culture was part of a region-wide pattern of production and practice.

Discussion

The historical and epigraphic data from late medieval Armenia, Seljuk eastern Anatolia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan suggest that the village was not a remote undeveloped place during this period, but was critical to the overall productive landscape that supported politics and religious practice. The excavated spaces at Ambroyi then are a particular place, a concrete demonstration of the active production ongoing within villages, as well as the common material cultures shared between villagers and city dwellers. The excavations at Ambroyi, though by no means exhaustive, provide datasets that allow us to interrogate the late medieval village as a social locality, and its role in a wider late medieval social landscape. These critical conversations, in turn, integrate traditions of scholarship on medieval history in the Near East (and in the Republic of Armenia in particular), as well as frameworks for interpreting the materiality of village life in Near Eastern and medieval archaeology.

We see great potential for dismantling the presumption, informed by simplistic readings of late medieval primary sources, that social life in rural areas contracted or stagnated during the Ilkhanid period. While Armenians living in places like the Kasakh Valley may have been aware that the centers of their wider social world had shifted, they nonetheless continued to participate in institutions which framed that world in ways that made sense to them. This phenomenon is indicated as much by historical sources such as William of Rubruck’s 1255 encounter with the latter Mkhargrdzeli princes in Armenia, as by the ongoing occupation and activity at urban sites as well as villages like Ambroyi.¹²⁵

The exploration of activity areas and architectural spaces at Ambroyi prompted us to rethink a subtle presumed correlation between the physical form of medieval village sites and their integration into larger systems of political economy. Specifically, Ambroyi’s architecture shows a combination of what would generally be glossed as “planned” forms (orthogonal

Clay Objects,” in *Korucutepe 3: Final Report of the Excavations of the University of Chicago, California (Los Angeles) and Amsterdam*, ed. Maurits van Loon (Amsterdam, 1980); Mitchell, *Asvan*, 72–77; Moore, *Tille Höyük*, 71–74.

¹²⁰ Frina Babayan, *Mijnadaryan Hayastani gelarvestakan xeceleni zardadzeverə* (Yerevan, 1981); Kalantarian et al., *Dvin IV*.

¹²¹ Hajafov et al., *Dasbulag*, 21, 24 (where archaeologists suggested that at least some of the pottery was produced in the nearby town of Ganja and sent to the village); Mindorashvili, “Tiseli Settlement,” 505.

¹²² Vorderstrasse, *Al-Mina*, 118.

¹²³ A few stonepaste ceramics, thought to be imported from Iran, were found at Atskuri wine cellar. See Licheli et al, *Archaeological Investigation . . . Atskuri*, 25.

¹²⁴ This is in contrast to sites such as Sos Höyük, where no glazed pottery was found, and it was concluded that the site was relatively isolated. See Hopkins, *Ethnoarchaeological Study*, 149.

¹²⁵ William of Rubruck. *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: his journey to the court of the Great Khan Mongke, 1253–1255*, trans. P. Jackson (Indianapolis, 1990).

walls) as well as more “organic” utilizations and adaptations of space. While architecture and power were profoundly linked within traditions of politics in the medieval Caucasus, Anatolia, and the Iranian world, it does not necessarily follow that village spaces must show signs of overt top-down site planning in order for the activities occurring within the village and the lives of its inhabitants to be caught up in local- and large-scale projects of political economy. This phenomenon is attested at Ambroyi through material datasets which indicate similarities in consumption and production regimes between the village, neighboring monastic sites (Telenyac’ and Uši), and sites associated with the projects of the local Vačut’yan princes.

Specifically, we think it is highly likely that the village inhabitants provisioned the Arai-Bazarjuł *karanatun*, and that this caravan inn would have been coterminous with, if not contained within, the village. This relationship between village and road inn does not imply a one-sided relationship of supply and service; rather, the proximity of the village to the road enabled the participation of the villagers in localized networks of exchange, such that they consumed ceramics and personal adornments similarly to their contemporary urban neighbors in cities of the Ara-

rat and Shirak plains. Further work on the sociality of this period and its manifestations in the material record may probe the mobility of villagers at sites like Ambroyi, asking whether in the course of activities like transhumance or routine travel, the villagers acted within local and larger-scale networks of communication, exchange, and social interaction. These critical engagements, in turn, re-calibrate the views of scholarship on medieval history in the Near East (and particularly in the Republic of Armenia), and of frameworks for interpreting the materiality of village life in Near Eastern and medieval archaeology.

In these preliminary results, we see our work at Ambroyi as part of a developing trend in archaeologies of the medieval Near East, which apply critical readings of both text and material datasets in order to construct a more challenging and rich image of social life in this complex period. An integrated analysis of villages as part of a social landscape which also included urban centers, towns and road networks is, we maintain, crucial to developing medieval archaeology in the Near East as more than a handmaiden either to history or to teleological narratives of emergent modernity.