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# Everyday life on the medieval Silk road: VDSRS<sup>1</sup> excavations at Arpa, Armenia

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## Introduction

The contemporary term the ‘Silk Road’ refers to multiple centuries of movement, exchange and mutual development that tied together the cities, towns and route networks of Eurasia. During the high medieval period (AD 12th -15th centuries), the routes of the ‘Silk Road’ linked cities in China to the Mediterranean, and passed through Central Asia and the Caucasus. The phenomenon of the medieval Silk Road is important to historical narratives within the Republic of Armenia: longstanding models of the rise of cities and kingdoms in Armenia argue that these settlements, such as Dvin and Ani, were linked into networks of trade between East and West. Medieval material culture within Armenia in many ways demonstrates the intersection of multiple cultures: in architecture, ceramic, glass, numismatic and other realms. Within the medieval Silk Road networks of the south Caucasus, the region of Vayots Dzor is centrally located, and in the medieval period served as a junction point in north-south and east-west routes of travel (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup>

The aim of the present study is to investigate the influence of the Silk Road phenomenon and local life in Armenia, through the study of material culture of Vayots Dzor in the 12th-15th century. This research, focused on Arpa settlement, has generated important results, providing new datasets on both everyday life and engagement with largescale phenomena. Arpa provides us with a view into the everyday life of people situated at a key point in both local political and social landscape, and along the route of travel. Our discussion of the results of a first season of excavation demonstrates the potential for continuing research into the medieval past of Vayots Dzor at both the site and landscape scales.

## A historical and geographical background of medieval settlement of Arpa

The medieval settlement of Arpa is located 0.5 km to the North-East of the contemporary village of Areni (Figure 2). The ruins of the settlement are situated on a natural terrace, defined to the south by sheer limestone cliffs and to the northeast by the Arpa River. Currently, the greater part of the river terrace is used as a modern cemetery for the village of Areni. The S. Astvatsatsin church (built in 1321 AD by

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<sup>1</sup> VDSRS stands for Vayots Dzor Silk Road Survey.

<sup>2</sup> See more detailed in Babajanyan, Franklin 2018 (forthcoming).

the architect Momik) and a surrounding cemetery with khachkars and gravestones of different periods are still preserved at the north-western edge of the platform, marking the existence of medieval settlement at the site.<sup>1</sup> The modern cemetery is invasive into the medieval village: as they dig new burial sites Areni villagers routinely find structures, architectural spolia, pottery and other medieval artifacts.

The valley of the Arpa river, and the broad valley around Areni village, in particular, have been inhabited since prehistoric periods. In the course of archaeological investigations in the territories of the middle streams of the Arpa river, Areni-I cave was excavated and cultural layers of chalcolithic (4300-3400 BC) through medieval periods (4th -18th centuries AD) were recorded.<sup>2</sup> Though the cave site is currently 2km from the modern village of Areni, in the Middle Ages the cave habitation would have been effectively a suburb of medieval settlement of Arpa. Recent survey work has recorded Neolithic and Bronze Age sites through the western part of the Arpa valley.<sup>3</sup> Research in the past few decades as well as ongoing survey work has focused on the Iron Age landscape of Vayots Dzor, specifically the network of Urartian fortified sites and watch towers that line the valleys of the Arpa River, connecting this region in the Iron Age to the Sevan Basin and the Sharur Plain.<sup>4</sup>

The western part of Areni was inhabited in the Roman period, as evidenced by 1st century BC – 1st century AD jar burials.<sup>5</sup> Classical-period evidence from Vayots Dzor also includes a Roman altar (dated 163-164 AD) with an inscription of Emilios Valesios of the Roman legion of Apolinaris XV.<sup>6</sup> During the construction of the Areni wine factory, numerous chance finds were made, dating to the Roman period of occupation.

In historical sources information about Arpa is rare until the 12th century AD. Yeghishe (5th century AD) provides the first mention of *Arpanyal*, among the fortresses and fortified settlements listed in the context of previous and succeeded historical events of the Avarayr battle.<sup>7</sup> Researchers have preliminarily identified this *Arpanyal* with old Arpa.<sup>8</sup> Early and more precise information about an Arpa fortress was mentioned in the History of Sebeos, in the context of the suppression of the 7th century rebellion of prince Rshtuni by the Emperor Constans II (642-668), who was informed of the treachery of Rshtuni by a committee of Armenian princes and the catholicos Nerses Tayetsi:

*‘Then emperor Costandin (i.e. Constans II), also called Constantine the Bearded) cursed him (i.e. prince of Rshtuni), deprived him of his authority and ordered to for him to be replaced to the fortress of Baghesh. And he himself went to Aghtamar Island and ordered the armies of princes to go and fortify themselves in their provinces. Virk,*

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<sup>1</sup> Sixty-four inscriptions were discovered at the surrounding area of the S. Astvatsatsin church, 43 of which have dates. The early inscription dates to 1191 and the latest - 1815 (Saghumyan 1976: 54).

<sup>2</sup> Gasparyan 2014: 184-185; Smith *et al.* 2014: 233-234.

<sup>3</sup> Kristine Martirosyan-Olshansky, personal communication.

<sup>4</sup> See Melkonyan *et al.* 2010; Earley-Spadoni 2015; Hammer 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Ter-Martirosov 1996: 2-8.

<sup>6</sup> Ter-Martirosov 1989: 178-179.

<sup>7</sup> Yeghishe 1892: 64.

<sup>8</sup> Sargsyan, Khachatryan 1986: 13. This viewpoint should be corroborated by additional historical sources.

*Aghvank and Syunik were unified with him and went and were fortified in their provinces by his order. But Teodoros of the Vahevuni family conquered the fortress of Arpa and his son Grigor who was the son-in-law of the prince of Rshtuni, and Varaz Nerseh Dashtkarin took up positions outside. And they captured treasures because all treasures of the churches, princes and merchants of the province were there'.<sup>1</sup>*

Arpa settlement is situated at an important strategic junction, sitting astride the canyon road from the Sharur plain into Vayots Dzor. In the medieval period Arpa was a crossroad of caravan trade routes (Figure 1/1). This overlapping strategic importance explains the listing of multiple nearby fortresses (Hrasekaber, Dayeki Kar etc.) in medieval sources, which describe them as located on the surrounding hills overlooking the settlement. The still-unlocated Arpa fortress mentioned by Sebeos was perhaps one of these fortified posts.

The historical evidence about Arpa and Vayots Dzor in general is tied to the Orbelyan princely house (early 13th century to mid 15th century AD): the core of this history is contained in the 13th century History of Syunik of Step'anos Orbelyan, a member of the same ruling family. The high middle ages in Vayots Dzor coincides with the period of Orbelyan administration, and is one of the most visible periods of the region's history in terms of its effect on the built landscape. For this reason, as well as due to their dominance in the historical and epigraphic record, our work at Arpa is framed (at the outset) by the timeline of the Orbelyans and their contemporaries.

At the end of the 12th century, over a period of a few years, combined Armenian-Georgian armies united Armenia under the Zakaryans. Vayots Dzor was then ruled by the Proshyan and Orbelyan princely families. The latter had a leading role not only in Vayots Dzor but also in the political, economic, cultural and religious life of Armenia.<sup>2</sup> After the Mongol invasions (AD 1230s), unlike Zakaryan princes, the Orbelyans took a flexible, pragmatic political stance in relationships with the Mongols and received *inju* status,<sup>3</sup> which further conserved their sociopolitical autonomy. The integration of the Orbelyans and of Vayots Dzor within the global system of the Mongol government is visible in the role that they played in state-controlled international trade and cultural policies.

The autonomous territory of first Smbat (r. 1253-1273), and then Tarsayich Orbelyan (r. 1273-1290) extended from Bargushat Mountains to Garni, Bjni and Dvin.<sup>4</sup> After the death of Tarsayich the Orbelyan princely family was separated into three branches: Orbelyan/Burtelyan<sup>5</sup> (with a seat at Yegheghis), Liparityan (Hors) and Jalalyan (Chiva); nonetheless, they managed to maintain internal independence until the

<sup>1</sup> Sebeos 1913: 226-227. Translation informed by Thomson 1999: 138.

<sup>2</sup> Sargsyan, Khachatryan 1986: 27.

<sup>3</sup> Prince Smbat twice, in 1251 and 1256, traveled to Karakorum to receive *inju* status from Möngke khan. As a result he was liberated from the rule of Georgian kingdom and the former authority of the Zakaryans. See Step'anos Orbelyan 1910: 414; Shahnazaryan 2014: 294-295.

<sup>4</sup> Step'anos Orbelyan 1910: 416-417.

<sup>5</sup> The branch was named after Burtel the Great (r. 1300-1348), the grandson of Tarsayich Orbelyan.

last quarter of the 14th century. Following a long-standing medieval political tradition in Armenia, the Orbelyans deployed their local authority in widespread construction projects. They built and restored fortresses, public buildings (caravanserais, markets, bridges, residential houses), production facilities (mills, oil mills, wine presses), and religious edifices as well as educational institutions (churches and monasteries with adjacent schools and universities). In the 13th-14th centuries Vayots Dzor was a dense centre of education and literacy in the Caucasus, featuring some of the most famous universities (Gladzor and Hermon) and more than as well as centres of literacy at Tsakhats kar, Arates, Shativank, and Verin Noravank (to name only a few examples). Irrigation projects also allowed the cultivation of large tracts of the Arpa and Yeghegis River valleys, as habitation spread onto now-deserted mountainsides.<sup>1</sup> The Orbelyans ruled in Vayots Dzor until the middle of the 15th century; in the wake of waves of invasions by first Timurlan, and then the Kara Koyunlu and Ak Koyunlu Turkoman tribes, they left their territories in Vayots Dzor and moved to Georgia.<sup>2</sup>

The epigraphic record attests to the relationship in the medieval period between Arpa and the nearby monastic centre at Noravank. The extensive inscriptions on buildings at Noravank record the lives and doings of noble men and women who were contemporary with the Orbelyans, and who lived at Arpa. Individuals like Mahevan,<sup>3</sup> the grandson of Senekerim (from Baghk/Syunik kingdom), and Amira,<sup>4</sup> the grandson of George and the noblemen of the Akhtamaryan family<sup>5</sup> appear in historical and epigraphic sources which describe their endowment of lands, orchards and other buildings (mills, oil presses etc.) to the Noravank monastery. Among these noble inhabitants of Arpa, the Akhtamaryan princes are particularly remarkable. According to Step'anos Orbelyan, '...the offspring of the Akhtamaryan family lived in Arpa village from ancient times and endowed (i.e. to Noravank monastery) an upper part of their own orchard in Dayeki kar'.<sup>6</sup> They were established at Arpa before the Orbelyans, possibly in the mid of the 12th century and played a significant role in the struggle with the Seljuks.<sup>7</sup> According to the epigraphic data from Areni village, prince Akhtamar was a regent of Vayots Dzor. *In the year 640 [1191CE] I, Akhtamar, servant of God and special regent of the gavar (i.e. 'region'), built a house of prayer and erected a cross (i.e. khachkar) to the memory of my honorable parent Grigor. Remember me in Christ*'.<sup>8</sup> Using epigraphic sources it is possible to compile five generations of the Akhtamaryan noble family, but the historical background and the emergence of this princely house is a question which will be developed in future work. Pertinent to this report it is important to note that we

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<sup>1</sup> Franklin, Babajanyan 2018: 133.

<sup>2</sup> Grigoryan 1981: 254-260.

<sup>3</sup> Barxudaryan 1967: 242.

<sup>4</sup> Barxudaryan 1967: 220.

<sup>5</sup> Barxudaryan 1967: 223, 246.

<sup>6</sup> Step'anos Orbelyan 1910: 367-368.

<sup>7</sup> Step'anos Orbelyan 1910: 350.

<sup>8</sup> Saghumyan 1976: 55.

can trace the earliest and last dated mentions (1191 and 1331)<sup>1</sup> of this noble family who lived in Arpa and had property there.

Arpa village was an important crossroad of the caravan trade route which came from Araxes valley and bifurcated at the crossing of the Arpa River. From Arpa one road led north toward the Vardenyants mountain pass and continued along the southeastern edge of Lake Sevan towards and eastward towards Partav; the other led east to Syunik. According to Step'anos Orbelyan, the bishop Sargis (1265-1287) of Noravank monastery built a four-arched bridge by order of Tarsayich Orbelyan which was admired by all who saw it.<sup>2</sup> During survey in 2015, the VDSRS located a collapsed pier of this bridge 1km to the north of the medieval settlement of Arpa, at the point of the medieval river crossing.<sup>3</sup> According to the historical and epigraphic sources, Arpa became a seat of government of the Orbelyans for a short time.<sup>4</sup> According to Step'anos Orbelyan, *'Tarsayich after numerous pious and significant works, fulfilled his lifespan, died in his palace at Arpa, and was taken to Noravank, accompanied with crowds and solemn procession, and was buried in the familial cemetery in the Noravank monastery, built by his own hands, close to his brother Smbat, in 1290'.<sup>5</sup>*

The earliest modern accounts of Arpa and the landscape of surrounding Vayots Dzor are found in accounts written by travelers and historical geographers from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The historian Ghevond Alishan related the history of the Orbelyans, and transcribed dated inscriptions from the khatchkars and church at Arpa in 1893.<sup>6</sup> Arpa was described by a number of travelers in their notes, including archbishop Sarkis Jalalyants,<sup>7</sup> ethnographer Yervand Lalayan<sup>8</sup> and doctor Kajberuni.<sup>9</sup> The latter writer travelled through Vayots Dzor in the late 19th century: observing the ruins of an oil mill and dwellings, he noted medieval Arpa as the historical location of the palace of Tarsayich Orbelyan.<sup>10</sup> Through the end of the 19th and over the first half of the 20th centuries, villagers from Areni (renamed during the Soviet period) used the stones of ruined medieval edifices in the construction of their houses. While working at Arpa and living at Areni, we observed grave markers from the Arpa cemetery within the walls of the club<sup>11</sup> in the old quarter of Areni.

<sup>1</sup> Matevosyan 2017: 169-170.

<sup>2</sup> Step'anos Orbelyan 1910: 429-430.

<sup>3</sup> About methods and results of survey more detailed see in Franklin, Babajanyan 2018: 131-145.

<sup>4</sup> As a seat of government of Orbelyans Arpa was for a short time, during the last quarter of the 13th century and the first quarter of the 14th century. Probably, because of the earthquake in 1321 (according the inscription on the S. Astvatsatsin church (Barxudaryan 1967: 29), they moved it again to Yeghegis.

<sup>5</sup> Step'anos Orbelyan 1910: 430.

<sup>6</sup> Alishan 1893: 181-183.

<sup>7</sup> Jalalyants 2016: 329-404.

<sup>8</sup> Lalayan 1904: 259-261.

<sup>9</sup> Kajberuni 2003: 90-99.

<sup>10</sup> Kajberuni 2003: 90.

<sup>11</sup> These clubs were 'House of Culture' used as an institution of cultural activities in villages in

After surveying the site of medieval Arpa in 2015, the VDSRS began test excavations in multiple areas of the site in 2016. The results of this work have provided interesting data informing on daily life at this important local site, as well as significant comparative data for developing our understanding of the patterns of social and economic interactions and political relationships across the highlands in the high middle ages.

### Excavations at the site of Arpa

The remains of Arpa settlement cover an area of approx. 8 ha. The ruined medieval settlement is situated on a terrace over the river, where the contemporary cemetery of Areni village has since slowly encroached from around the church in the northwest (Figure 2). From the south the settlement has been partially covered by landslides from the overhanging cliffs running from east to west (towards the contemporary village). These two factors have damaged the contexts of the site, though the standing walls of dwellings and other structures are clearly visible in certain places. VDSRS opened four soundings of 5x5m between the modern cemetery and the leading edge of the landslides to ascertain the stratigraphy and chronology of the site.<sup>1</sup>

The first sondage (AS1)<sup>2</sup> was situated close to a round stone structure on the highest level of the terrace, overlooking the settlement. Though this sondage was opened with the intent to potentially find fortification or occupation contexts, the entirety of nearly 2m of matrix within the unit consisted only in landslide deposits. Mixed within the rocks and sand in a single landslide event, we uncovered the poorly preserved bones of four human skeletons: two children and two adults, one of them a female of 25-40 years old<sup>3</sup> (Figure 6/1). Only one of the skeletons that of the female, was laid out in an extended position: the others were compressed between fallen rocks. These individuals either had been caught in a landslide and killed, or had been interred in graves disturbed by a subsequent landslide. There were no associated cultural materials, and in general no cultural material within the deposits of this unit. The excavations of AS1 were halted as continued digging through unstable rock deposits became unsafe, and yielded no materials.

The centre of the investigations then shifted, and VDSRS opened three test excavations located in an area of visible preserved architecture in the middle of the settlement: in this area well-preserved living contexts, dating from the late 13th to the end of the 14th centuries, were recovered.

In units AS2 and AS4 we uncovered the corners of two medieval dwellings (Figures 3-4). Overall, we observed two general constructional techniques in use in the medieval structures at Arpa. One wall type was built with two faces (*midis*) containing a rubble and soil core. The second type is single-faced: these walls were frequently curved and built from local travertine limestone dressed with yellow clay. Architectural spolia (bases of columns, gravestones and basalt ashlar) were also used in the walls,

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Soviet and post-Soviet periods. The club in Areni is still used for events and assemblies.

<sup>1</sup> We thank Davit Davtyan for his participation to the excavations.

<sup>2</sup> AS stands for Arpa Settlement.

<sup>3</sup> We thank Levon Aghikyan for the study of the anthropological material.

providing evidence for the practice of rebuilding of collapsed monumental structures into houses. It is possible that even the historically-attested palace of Tarsayich, recorded in the History of Step'anos Orbelyan, or the houses of Akhatamaryan and Mahevanyan noble families, were re-utilized in this way through the later high medieval period. Structures at Arpa sat atop bowed terrace walls, which is consistent with the unstable, sloping ground and seismic setting. The excavated spaces represent ordinary dwellings with clay ovens (*tonirs*) of different sizes, storage pits, and beaten clay floors (Figure 6/2). The floor in Unit AS2 featured an inset clay oven; inside this small oven a nearly intact pitcher was found, as well as the remains of a long iron instrument buried in the ash, perhaps originally used for retrieving items from the heat (see below). In unit AS4 we uncovered a roughly rectangular structure in the form of a shallow basin built from smooth clay matrix, perhaps intended for the working of bread or pastry: next to this basin was a small clay stove set above the floor (Figure 7/1). Macrobotanical data collected from these feature contexts will yield smaller-scale images of the activities carried out within these spaces. Within the rooms, tamped earth floors of yellow clay were laid upon the landslide deposits of jumbled travertine rocks, flattened with a cushioning layer of charcoal and sand. In the southwestern corner of the unit AS2, we uncovered a bell-shaped pit dug into the stone matrix and lined with clay. The pit reached 2.37 m in depth and, though framed in stones set into the floor, was uncovered and filled with a refuse of animal bones and ceramic sherds. The pit, almost certainly used for food storage, was still dry, and cooled by the passage of air through the loose limestone sediment. This type of food storage, depending on season, served as a rubbish wells.<sup>1</sup>

AS5 was the last unit excavated in the 2016 season (Figure 5). It aims to clarify interconnections between dwelling complexes. The unit contained a series of parallel walls, arranged as a graded cascade to create a terrace for structures of higher level, and to stabilize the surface between living structures (Figure 7/2). This unit and the curved retaining wall uncovered in AS4 demonstrate the investment of the people at Arpa in the maintenance of their homes against the challenges presented by their location.

To clarify relationships between cultural layers and construction phases small test pits (1x1 m) were excavated through the living surfaces in AS2, AS4 and AS5. In every location we encountered the rocky layer of landslides, which both prevented further investigation and also demonstrated the technique of medieval villagers in building their homes on top of (and intrusive into) this shifting matrix. Within the test pit in unit AS2, three fragmented but whole large burnished redware jugs were found mixed within collapsed matrix (see discussion below). These jugs were situated underneath the western wall and beneath the floor, suggesting the re/building of this structure atop earlier collapsed living contexts. Future excavations at Arpa will focus in part on investigating the longer sequence of human occupation at this site.

### **Artifactual Evidence**

The excavation season at Arpa in 2016 unearthed a rich assemblage of cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Ghafadaryan 1952: 53-54.



materials; these were dominated by ceramics, but also include metal and glass artifacts, and faunal and archaeobotanical remains. In the following sections we will provide a general summary of the categories of artifacts found: all await intensive and comparative study.

### **Pottery**

The assessment of ceramic material is based on comparisons with assemblages from other medieval sites in Armenia, and contemporary sites in the Caucasus and Near East (Figure 8/1). The ceramic corpus at Arpa mainly dates to the 13th-14th centuries. Based on technological characteristics it is divided into two groups: unglazed and glazed (clay and fritware fabrics).

**Unglazed ceramic:** A large bulk of the pottery finds consists of unglazed ceramics, specifically wares of medium to coarse red fabric of local production (Figures 9-10). The buff fabric is much less common and not greatly represented (2.3% of the sherd total). The assemblage is characterized by a preponderance of closed shapes, corresponding to daily domestic use, mainly employed for storage (big and small jars, jugs) and cooking (pots, basins, colanders, frying pans). The vessels used for serving and consumption of food and liquid (pitchers, bowls, dishes, trays, cups) were fine-medium to medium in quality. One other form of utilitarian wares found is oil lamps; both glazed and unglazed fragments were found at Arpa.

**Storage vessels:** Within this assemblage, jars and jugs, made fine-medium to coarse red and more less buff fabrics in various form and size are the better represented wares. A predominant shape is a thin-walled jar having an everted flanged rim, a short neck and a convex tapered body with a wheel-grooved interior and flat base (Figures 9/1-4; 11/13). One flat handle is attached under the rim or merged immediately with rim. Thick-walled jars or pithoi with a spherical body and everted pronounced flat rim adorned with fingerprint decoration are represented by a few examples (Figure 9/5-6). The surfaces of jars and jugs are frequently coated with a slip varying in color from cream to white to greenish-gray; this slip also has a functional significance, preventing the leakage of liquid contents. Jars usually bear combed wave, incised motifs and tool impressed designs.

The jugs are characterized by a globular to ovoid body, straight or slightly everted neck and rims of various forms, sometimes having a spout for pouring (Figure 11/12).

**Cooking pots:** The most representative shapes of utilitarian vessels are cooking pots and large jars. Most of fragments were identified by fired traces as well as by the complete burning. Pots with slightly everted and troughed rim, spherical body and flat base are most common (Figure 11/11). Cooking vessels include as well various shallow pans with low vertical walls and flat base with rounded transition. These vessels were used mainly for stewing or simmering (but not boiling) of food.

**Lids:** The shapes and sizes of lids depend on their associated vessels. The largest, which may have covered large jars, are coarse to medium quality, flat and usually have a handle. Lids, corresponding pots (dimensions 10-40 cm) are mainly disc-shaped with straight, everted or fingerprint edges, having raised knobs (Figures 9/11-13; 12/9-10).

**Open vessels** include large and shallow basins. Their profiles are characterized by a flat base, oblique or slightly rounded walls and plain round or pronounced, wide flattened-round rims. Occasionally the top of the rim is adorned with engraved waves. Some basins have a short spout for pouring liquid (Figures 10/10-11; 11/14-18).

**Colanders:** This vessel category includes medium to coarse fabric wares of different forms (jars, basins, and bowls) with perforations on the bases and walls. Ceramic colanders used to strain liquids and prepare dairy products (Figure 9/14).

**Tablewares** present vessels for serving food and drink. Predominant in this assemblage and typical of the medieval Near East, are bowls with an average rim diameter of 10-15cm. The most common profiles of bowls are hemispherical or carinated, having footed base usually of ring-form (flat footed base was less common) and an inverted plain round or rounded flared rim (Figures 10/1-5, 12-18; 11/1-8). Some bowls bear engraved or stamped marks on the external side of the base. Stamped marks are more typical of glazed bowls in the medieval Caucasus. These signs consider to be a 'signature' of a potter, a ceramic workshop or a customer; however, these possibilities need to be corroborated by more archaeological evidences and quantitative and comparative analysis (Figures 10/17-18; 12/23-26).<sup>1</sup>

**Pitchers,** used for serving and consumption of drinking, are fine-medium to medium fabric in quality red or buff fabric, covered with a cream slip or red burnishing. The assemblage includes a group of flat bases which could correspond to drinking jugs, bottles or ewers (Figure 9/7-10). The pitchers are characterized by a narrow neck and rims of different form, including a typical trilobed form. Their profiles are globular to ovoid.

In the Arpa pottery assemblage a unique cylindrical cup having a little spout was found inside a big red burnished jug. Its inner base was covered with white-pinkish residue, considered being wine remnant (Figure 10/6).<sup>2</sup>

**Oil-lamps** make up a small percentage of the ceramic assemblage. Oil lamps from Arpa are bowl-shaped and leaf-shaped, made both on potter's wheel and by hand (Figure 10/7-8). The oil lamps are partly covered by fired traces, especially on the nib where wick burned.

A single fragment of a smoking pipe presents the chamber (bowl), decorated with a punctate dote design (Figure 8/2<sub>13</sub>). A small portion of the hollow opening is preserved, which connected the bowl to the mouthpiece. This smoking pipe was found in the mixed upper fill layers and corresponds to the 15th-17th centuries,<sup>3</sup> leading us to suppose that the occupation at Arpa continued into the early modern period.

Among the unglazed pottery the constructional ceramic is represented by a single fragment of a pipe and a shard of roof tile (solen).

Unglazed pottery was decorated through various methods: slip coating, red-

<sup>1</sup> Petrosyan 1988: 76-79; Yakobson 1959: 288-300, Fig. 9.

<sup>2</sup> The residue analysis is in process, carrying out in the 'Centre of Excellence in Applied Biosciences', Yerevan State University.

<sup>3</sup> Babajanyan, Mirijanyan 2013: 145, Tab. 5/2b; Babajanyan 2015: Tab. 10-12; Simonyan *et al.* 2015: Tab. 11.

burnishing, red painting, engraving, tool impressed decoration, fingerprint and applique ornaments.

The analysis and classification of Arpa pottery reveals the specific type of ceramic which is preeminent to the Vayots Dzor region, which we have informally termed 'Middle Urartian'<sup>1</sup> or 'Vayots Dzor style ceramic' (Figure 11).<sup>2</sup> In the 2015 and 2016 seasons VDSRS recorded this type of pottery at all medieval sites in Vayots Dzor region.<sup>3</sup> Vayots Dzor style ceramic is a bright red burnished ware which was produced in medieval period (12th -15th centuries)<sup>4</sup> but surface treatment resembles the pottery of the Urartian or Classical periods. In most cases, this type of ceramic is made of fine-medium to coarse leaner red fabrics with a grey core, showing that these vessels were not thoroughly fired. Although red burnished ceramic was widespread in the medieval sites in the other regions of Armenia, the Vayots Dzor style is characterized by different typological and qualitative features (Figure 11).<sup>5</sup>

**Glazed ceramic** comprise 6.9 % of the unearthed ceramic material (clayey glazed – 6.6% of the total assemblage; fritware – 0.3%). The fabrics of the clayey glazed pottery are mainly of good quality, being fine and fine to medium reddish, pink and buff fabrics. We can distinguish fragments of footed bowls, dishes, saltcellars and leaf-shape oil lamps. The profiles of the glazed bowls are carinated, rounded and with oblique to very open walls and straight or everted T-shape rims (Figure 12).

Based on technical characteristics, the glazed pottery was chronologically divided into three periods: A) 12th-13th centuries, B) mid 13th to 14th centuries, and C) late 14th to 15th centuries.

*Group A.* Glazed ceramic typical of the 12th-13th centuries continues to be in use at Arpa as well in the 13th-14th centuries but constitutes a small percentage of the recorded glazed pottery. The most common type was a set of monochrome glazed (green, yellow, turquoise, purple), and sgraffito-decorated bowls, having parallels with the ceramic production at medieval sites in Armenia, Georgia and the territories of contemporary Azerbaijan.<sup>6</sup> The splatter-painted and splash-sgraffito-decorated (polychrome painted) bowls were less numerous among recorded fragments (Figure 12/1-8).

*Group B.* The best represented material closely corresponds to the mid 13th to the 14th centuries. This material features monochrome and polychrome painting (black, green, purple dyes) under transparent alkaline glaze, most often various tints of blue-

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<sup>1</sup> Urartu was an empire located at the territory of Armenian highland in the 9th-6th centuries BC.

<sup>2</sup> This is result of our preliminary observation which need more comprehensive study.

<sup>3</sup> Babajanyan, Franklin 2018: Fig. 3.

<sup>4</sup> This date is based on radiocarbon analysis associated with sherds of this type recovered in Areni-1 cave (a suburb of Arpa settlement) this group dates to the 14th-15th centuries (Boris Gasparyan, personal communication). Our date range is narrowed by the ceramic assemblages associated with the Vayots Dzor style at Arpa and at survey sites in Vayots Dzor.

<sup>5</sup> Kalantaryan *et al.* 2009: Pl. XLIV-XLV; Babajanyan 2015: 107, Tab. 1/1-3, 5-7; Melkonyan *et al.* 2017: Figs 14/1, 20, 21.

<sup>6</sup> Kalantaryan *et al.* 2009: 118-119, Pl. 28-31; Melkonyan *et al.* 2017; Figs 15/1, 2, 10, 11, see also Mitsishvili 1969: Figs XIII-XVII, LIV; Yakobson 1959: 278-282.

turquoise (Figure 12/9-16, 20-26). We observed both simple vegetal and geometrical ornaments as well as rich designs covering the entire surface of vessels. The glazed pottery of this period discovered at Arpa and other Armenian sites was influenced by Iranian and Central Asian ceramic centres; this is consonant with the political situation in this period, though the mechanisms and social perceptions of ceramic style exchange remain to be more fully explored.<sup>1</sup>

A small group of slip-painted wares unearthed at Arpa dates to the mid of the 13th century. Glazed ceramic with this decoration was discovered in Armenian medieval sites<sup>2</sup> but was more prevalent to Egypt and Byzantine Empire.<sup>3</sup>

The presence of fritwares was also noted (Figure 12/16-17). The proportion of fritwares dating to the 12th-13th centuries is relatively low, compared with materials from the later period. A single, small fragment of bowl was found, decorated in *lustre*. This type of fritwares was typical of the 12th-14th centuries and is considered to be an import from Kashan in Iran.<sup>4</sup>

*Group C.* The ceramic of the late 14th to the 15th centuries is best represented by the 'blue and white ware' type (Figure 12/17-19). The pottery recovered is mainly of fritware fabric.<sup>5</sup> The most representative shape is a footed small bowl with curved rounded walls and troughed rim, characterises both imported wares, as well as their imitations. Vegetal and animal ornaments, made in cobalt painting on a white background, are typical of this group and were widespread in the countries of the Near East and Central Asia.<sup>6</sup>

Thanks to study of the ceramic we may observe that the settlement was occupied from late 12th to the 15th centuries AD. The ceramic material is characterized by a preponderance of locally-produced wares, and we can also distinguish (especially in the glazed pottery) both imported vessels. This corroborates that the settlement was actively integrated in the cultural phenomenon of larger regional exchange in fine ceramics, part of the broader relationships of exchange and influence that constituted the medieval Silk Road.

### ***Metal artifacts***

Metal artifacts from Arpa are very rare (Figure 8/2<sub>1-9</sub>). The assemblage of poorly-preserved metal artifacts includes several flat-headed iron nails, fragments of animal shoe, a fragment of a knife blade, an iron ring and the very poorly preserved remains of a scraper found in a clay oven (AS2). This fragment may represent a dough hook or scraper, used to retrieve cooking bread from off the sides of *tonirs*. This type of pastry

<sup>1</sup> Sayko 1969: 45; Vakturskaya 1959: Fig. 34/1; Koval 2010: Figs 31-32; Melkonyan *et al.* 2017: Figs 15/12-16, 18-20.

<sup>2</sup> Babajanyan 2014: 115, Tab. 1/3-4; Melkonyan *et al.* 2017: Fig. 15/17.

<sup>3</sup> Kverfeldt 1947: 38, 80.

<sup>4</sup> Zhamkochyan 1981: 111.

<sup>5</sup> Clayey fabric have been also observed.

<sup>6</sup> Lane 1957: 29; Daiber 2006: 317, Pl. 16-a-j; Koval 2010: Figs 30, 55; Vakturskaya 1959: Fig. 42/1; Babajanyan 2014: 118-119, Tab. 2/1-5.

scraper was common in the medieval Armenian sites.<sup>1</sup> Among the small finds a pendant with an attached small loop is unique. It was hollow, made of thin bronze tin and bears sgraffito decoration. Pendants were a common item in medieval jewelry,<sup>2</sup> but exact parallels with the Arpa sample have not yet been found.

### ***Glass finds***

This assemblage consists of flat splinters of blue, green-turquoise, and transparent glasses and several fragments of blue and black bangles of round, flat, triangular and convoluted profiles, corresponding to the 12th-14th centuries<sup>3</sup> (Figure 8/2<sub>11</sub>). A unique fragment of a black shallow cup or saltcellar was adorned with an applique belt of modeled ornaments, typical of the 12th-13th centuries<sup>4</sup> (Figure 8/2<sub>12</sub>).

### ***Small finds***

Two beads were recovered at Arpa. One made from paste and had round form, another is cylindrical, made from fritware, prevalent in medieval sites of Armenia (Figure 8/2<sub>10</sub>).

Two spherical spindle whorls made from clay and decorated in dot design were found (Figure 8/2<sub>14,15</sub>). These items widely were used in textile craft to weight the spindle used to spin wool into yarn. Unfortunately, archaeological remains of textile are not preserved in the conditions at Arpa,<sup>5</sup> but indirect evidence such as these tools and Armenian and foreign historical sources provide evidence for developed carpet making and weaving production in medieval Armenia.<sup>6</sup> The Armenian textile production met the demands of local market and was also an important export in the high middle ages.

### ***Faunal and archaeobotanical material***

Faunal and botanical material was collected from secure floor, pit, and feature contexts at Arpa.<sup>7</sup> The assemblage of analyzed faunal material from Arpa was relatively small, with a total NISP of 538, and the study indicates that the majority was mammals (mainly sheep/goat, followed by cattle). The assemblage includes also bones of beasts of prey and other ruminants, as well as fishes, birds and a single mollusk (Table 1). The assemblage had very low levels of butchery (1.5%, n=8), gnawing (0.3%, n=2) and burning (2.6%, n=14).

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<sup>1</sup> Petrosyan 1988: Tab. 16/9; Sargsyan 1990: Tab. 2/11; Babajanyan 2017: 332, Tab. 4/2.

<sup>2</sup> Hakobyan 1981: 67-68; Hakobyan 2008: 29, Tab. XVI/6.

<sup>3</sup> Janpoladyan 1974: 21-22, Fig. 129.

<sup>4</sup> Janpoladyan 1974: 19, 60, Figs 31-32; Melkonyan *et al.* 2017: Fig. 16/15.

<sup>5</sup> Due to microecological conditions rare, well preserved medieval textile remains were found in Areni-1 cave, near Arpa settlement. See Gasparyan 2014: 186, Fig. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Arakelyan 1958: 276-277.

<sup>7</sup> Standard soil sample volumes were floated in the field by K. Franklin and macrobotanical samples were sent for analysis to the Ohio State University. Faunal data were recovered directly during excavation (this material was not recovered from screened sediments; heavy fraction from floated samples was used as index of rates of data recovery). The faunal material was analyzed by Dr. Hannah Chazin at Stanford University.

	NISP*	%	DZ**	%
Bos	41	7.6%	18.5	24.4%
Ovis/Capra	85	15.8%	28.5	37.5%
Cervid	4	0.7%	3	4.0%
Sus	3	0.6%	0	0.0%
Canid	1	0.2%	1	1.3%
Rodent	8	1.5%	0	0.0%
Large Artiodactyl	1	0.2%	0.5	0.7%
Medium Artiodactyl	3	0.6%	1	1.3%
Medium Carnivore	4	0.7%	0.2	0.3%
Small Carnivore	2	0.4%	0	0.0%
Large Mammal	95	17.7%	0	0.0%
Medium Mammal	100	18.6%	9	11.9%
Small Mammal	24	4.5%	5.2	6.9%
Large Bird	1	0.2%	2	2.6%
Medium Bird	7	1.3%	7	9.2%
Fish	2	0.4%		
Mollusca	1	0.2%		
Indeterminate	156	29.0%	0	0.0%

\* Number of Identified Specimens Present

\*\* Diagnostic Zones

Table 1. Representation of Taxa and Body Size Classes in the Arpa Assemblage

If we compare this pattern of recovered animal species to that from a contemporary site, the 13th century caravan inn or *karavanatun* at Arai-Bazarjugh,<sup>1</sup> we yield an interesting result: the *karavanatun* assemblage contained the same dominance of Bos and Ovis/Capra, and ratio of sheep/goat to cattle bones. Though zoo-archaeological studies of medieval contexts in the Caucasus are still relatively rare, this pattern is also generally consonant with findings from contemporary sites in eastern Anatolia and the Levant, where an approximate 2:1 ratio of ovicaprid to cattle remains is found also (though the low count of pig remains at Arpa is anomalous).<sup>2</sup> The incidence of burning in this assemblage is also similar to that at the Arai-Bazarjugh caravanserai site (the percentage at Arai-Bazarjugh was 2.32 %). Differences in these assemblages may be linked to their contexts: the bones from the caravanserai were from floor gutter trash deposits, while the bones from Arpa are primarily from pits. Still pending is a comparative analysis of

<sup>1</sup> Located in the Kasakh River valley in Aragatsotn. See Franklin 2014: 168-169.

<sup>2</sup> Bar-Oz, Raban-Gerstel 2015: 100, Tab. 1; Stein 1998: 187, Tab. 5.5; Steadman *et al.* 2017: 247 refer to this pattern as a 'distinctive rural central Anatolian' economy for the late Byzantine period (c. 1000 AD).

the ceramics and food remains from Arpa as a cuisine assemblage. Evidence for animal husbandry that comes from the ceramic rather than bone data includes evidence for dairying equipment, including the above-mentioned fragments of strainers potentially used to make cheese. Further, it is clear that due to the combination of particular external influences on glazed tablewares and the locally-specific forms of red burnished tablewares, Vayots Dzor in the medieval period had a 'locally particular style of serving and eating.

### **Summary**

This first season of research at medieval Arpa enabled us to begin to bring the medieval history of this important site, as well as of the southeastern region of Vayots Dzor, into material focus. First, we generated significant new data about the lives of people living in a village which sat astride major local and regional routes of travel and trade. Our excavations **shone light** on the lives of people who appear only as shadows in the history of Step'anos Orbelyan or the epigraphic record of the Orbelyans and Proshyans. Our preliminary data clearly show that people at Arpa, despite living in rough built houses, shored up against earthquake and landslide, participated in **some of** the same material worlds as people living in **Armenian cities, such as Dvin or Ani**. At the same time, we have evidence for them possibly interacting with the **material past of Vayots Dzor and creating a local style of material life of their own**. Studying the architecture of the living spaces at Arpa, we found people preparing food and eating in structures built from both the rough stone of the mountain cliffs as well as the dressed stones of fallen civic buildings. In this we saw an interesting parallel in the way that the **village people** of Vayots Dzor continue to live with the medieval legacy of the Orbelyans and their contemporaries, literally building medieval stones into the walls of their town, and digging into the rooms and streets of **medieval** Arpa to bury their dead. Arpa is one of **a network** of medieval sites researched by the VDSRS: we hope **in the future** to expand this vision of medieval life and contemporary significance along the river valleys and up the mountain sides of Vayots Dzor.

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## Captions

Figure 1.

1. Map showing Vayots Dzor route on the Dvin-Partav Road.
2. Map showing VDSRS recorded sites.

Figure 2.

1. Arpa settlement and S. Astvatsatsin church. general view from the South and map, on the left, showing the location of Arpa.
2. Topographic map of Arpa settlement showing excavated units.

Figure 3. Operation AS2. plan and western section.

Figure 4. Operation AS4. plan and eastern section.

Figure 5. Operation AS5. plan and eastern section.

Figure 6.

1. Operation AS1. woman skeleton. View from North-East.
2. Operation AS2. View from the North.

Figure 7.

1. Operation AS4. View from the West.
2. Operation AS5. View from the North.

Figure 8.

1. Statistic scheme of Arpa pottery.
2. Metal, glass artifacts and small finds.

Figure 9. Unglazed ceramics.

Figure 10. Unglazed ceramics.

Figure 11. Red burnished ceramics (Vayots dzor style pottery).

Figure 12. Glazed ceramics.