

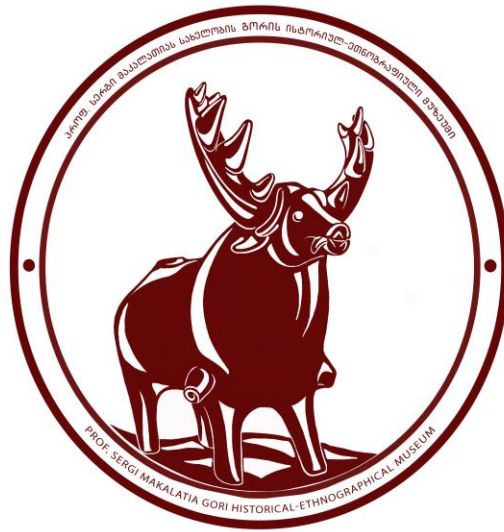
PROF. SERGI MAKALATIA
GORI
HISTORICAL-ETHNOGRAPHICAL MUSEUM

STUDIES IN CAUCASIAN ARCHAEOLOGY



Prof. Sergi Makalatia
Gori
Historical-Ethnographical Museum

Studies in Caucasian Archaeology



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New Data on Anthropomorphic Stelae from the South-East Caucasus: Preliminary Reflections

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ABSTRACT

The artistic treatment of stone in South Caucasian region is known for millennia (menhirs, vishap stelae, phallic and anthropomorphic stelae, etc.). This assemblage could be followed until medieval period. During this long time, all forms of stelae changed morphologically, typologically and semantically, but, most probably, had certain ideological similarities. This article refers to a special kind of anthropomorphic stone stelae from South-East Caucasian region (historical Artsakh and Utik), problems of their chronology, iconography and ideology. These are flat and prolonged slabs, approximately rectangular in section, as a rule divided into three parts by two horizontal lines: the head, the body and the part below the waist. The stelae are 30-60 cm wide, 120-140 cm high and up to 20 cm thick. There are seventeen stelae of this type known in the mentioned region. The study of these stelae enables us to gain preliminary idea on beliefs, ideology and history of the people who created them. It is possible that the stelae depicted the dead or heroes, soldiers or high-ranked males. They “immortalized” the memory of the deceased and were objects of memorial ceremonies devoted to them. These stelae demonstrate clear links to similar stelae from European steppe regions including the Northern Caucasus, Black Sea basin, Crimea of the Late Iron Age (VII-VI cc. BC) as well as to those from Zagros and Taurus regions dating to the Early Iron Age (late II and early I millennium BC). Mentioned comparisons create terminus post and ante quem for dating the stelae under consideration.

The artistic treatment of stone in South Caucasian region is known for millennia (menhirs, vishap stelae, phallic and anthropomorphic stelae, etc.). This assemblage could be followed until medieval period. During this long time, all forms of stelae changed morphologically, typologically and semantically, but, most probably, had certain ideological similarities. This article refers to a special kind of anthropomorphic stone stelae from South-East Caucasian region (historical Artsakh and Utik), problems of their chronology, iconography and ideology. These are flat and prolonged slabs, approximately rectangular in section, as a rule divided into three parts by two horizontal lines: the head, the body and the part below the waist. The stelae are 30-60 cm wide, 120-140 cm high and up to 20 cm thick. There are seventeen stelae of this type known in the mentioned re-

gion [for stelae 1-8, 11-12 cf. also Yeranyan A, 2012: 168-172; Yeranyan B, 2013: 110-114]. Observed seventeen stelae are situated infield or prairie fairly compact area of Artsakh. The studied area is situated in the right bank of Kura river, occupying the eastern part of Artsakh steppe (Fig. XVIII).

Stela 1. The stela is well preserved from the frontal side. Its width is 60 cm, the height -130 cm. The head is rounded, with circular relief eyes. It has a T-shaped nose and no mouth. The hands are relief curved and folded across the chest. There are three grooves on each hand that were, most probably, bracelets. The stela is poorly preserved from the reverse side. Long loose hairs are depicted on its back. A dagger is fastened on the waist, which has two parallel lines on the blade. The handle was probably poorly preserved or did not bear depictions (Fig. I).

Stela 2. This stela is not well preserved from the frontal side (width – 45 cm, length – 105 cm). The head is rounded, the relief eyes and T-shaped nose are curved on the face. The mouth is depicted as a narrow groove. The arms are folded across the chest with the fingers reaching the mouth. There are three grooves on each wrist. The reverse side of the stela is well preserved, with a depiction of long loose hairs (Fig. II).

Stela 3. This example is well preserved from the frontal side (width – 65 cm, length – 140 cm). The head is semi-circular, the relief eyes and T-shaped nose are curved on the face. The mouth is depicted as a bowed groove. The relief arms are folded across the chest. Two prolonged hollows were formed because of the surface curving between the arms. There are three grooves on each wrist. The reverse side of the stela is well preserved, with long loose hairs carved on it (Fig. III).

Stela 4. The frontal part is not well preserved. The stela is comparably small (width – 33 cm, height – 97 cm). The head is rounded, the eyes and T-shaped nose are carved, the mouth is not depicted or is not preserved. The hands are not preserved, but the fingers were visible. Judging by the orientation of the fingers it can be assumed that the hands were depicted in the same position as the others. The reverse side of the stela is poorly preserved and only waist long hairs are visible (Fig. IV).

Stela 5. It is not preserved well from the frontal side (50 cm wide, 120 cm long). The head is rounded. The relief-carved eyes are circular. The nose is not preserved, but most probably, it was depicted by means of the same technique. The arms are folded across the chest. There are two grooves on each wrist. The reverse side of the stela is not preserved well. The waist long hairs can be seen on the reverse as well as two parallel grooves that probably depict the dagger or the sword blade fastened on the belt (Fig. V).

Stela 6. The frontal side of the stela (60 cm wide, 120 cm high) is well-preserved. The head is semi-circular, the eyes and T-shaped nose are carved. The mouth is depicted as a wide hollow. The relief image of hands, folded across the chest, is poorly preserved. The upward-oriented fingers are barely outlined. There are three grooves depicted on each wrist. The reverse side of the stela is in a good condition. The long loose hairs are

carved on its back. A dagger or a sword in a scabbard is fastened on the waist. It is around 60 cm long and the blade has a handle with a rounded end. Six parallel grooves are visible on the middle transversal part of the blade. These were probably decorations of the scabbard. The leather belt, to which the sword may have been attached, is not visible (Fig. VIa., Fig. VIb).

Stela 7. The frontal side of the stone stela is well-preserved (width – 65 cm, height – 125 cm). The head is semi-circular, the eyes and T-shaped nose are relief carved, and the mouth is carved in double bows. The arms are folded across the chest and two prolonged grooves were formed as a result of surface carving between the arms. Three grooves are depicted on each wrist. The back of the stela is well-preserved. There were waist long hairs on its back and a sword fastened on the belt (50 cm long). In the middle part of the sword blade there is a longitudinal groove and five transversal parallel grooves, which were intended to fasten the sword to the belt. The handle of the sword narrows in its junction part, but the handle end is widening (Fig. VII a., Fig. VII b).

Stela 8. This stela is broken from the mid side. It had been damaged, probably, before it arrived to the museum. The arms are folded across the chest. Judging by the preserved part, this stela was narrower than the previous ones. The fingers, oriented upwards, are visible, and the arms are relief-carved. There are no traces remained on the reverse side of the sculpture (Fig. VIII).

Stelae 9, 10. The location where these two stelae were found is unknown. Currently they are near Aghdam. The first stela is 130 cm high and 59 cm wide. The second one is 160 cm high and 90 cm wide. Both feature similar techniques of depiction. The heads of both stelae are oval shaped, and an U-shaped hollow is curved on the face which probably represents the nose. Relief hands are folded across the chest. Two prolonged hollows were formed because of curving of the space between the hands. Three grooves are again depicted on each wrist (Fig. IX-X).

Stelae 11, 12. These monuments are currently exhibited in the regional historical museum. According to the present data, they were discovered and moved to the museum from the territory of Seysulan village. Nevertheless, their original place of erection and environment is unknown. The first stela is 170 cm high and 65 cm wide. The second stela is smaller than the first, though it is broken in the middle. It is 50 cm wide and the height of the preserved part is 57 cm (the part lower than the wrists is preserved). The technique of depiction is very similar. The T-shaped nose and eyes are carved on the face. The mouth of the first stela is a rounded hollow, the arms are folded across the chest and the fingers are oriented upwards (Fig. XI-XII).

Stelae 13, 14, 15. This group of stelae was found near the village Nor Haykajur, within the territory of medieval cemetery. These were not well preserved, secondary to be utilized later. The first one was broken and only one-third of the original stela was preserved. It was laid face down, the back was decorated with relief carvings, most

probably representing hairs. A fragment of arms and lower part was preserved on the frontal side of the monument. Judging by the preserved part, the arms were again depicted upwards. The height of the preserved part of the stela is 80 cm, the width is 50 cm. The second stela was half buried in the ground, consisted of three parts. Only the head was visible, the lower part of the body was broken. The hands were again oriented upwards. There were no traces of images on the reverse side. The height of the stela is 70 cm, the width – 45 cm. The third stela was located 30 m away from the previous one. It was found face down and did not bear any traces of depiction on the reverse. The stela had two parts from the frontal side; the eyes and the nose were hardly accentuated. The dimensions of the stela are: height – 140 cm, width – 60 cm (Fig. XIII-XV).

Stelae 16, 17. Discovery of the next two stelae is especially noteworthy. The first one was found 70 m to the east from the early medieval church in Gyavurkala. This monument was discovered by H. Petrosyan and L. Kirakosyan during the archaeological survey, from the bottom of a military trench. During excavation it became apparent that the stela was placed on an early medieval stone box burial. It was oriented from east to west, which means that it was reutilized and used as material for building. The U-shaped nose and upward oriented fingers were depicted on the frontal side. The lower part of the stela was broken. The reverse surface was not decorated. The width of the stela is 44 cm, the preserved height – 60 cm. Another anthropomorphic stela was found in the slab floor of the second early medieval church in Tigranakert. The monument was tripartite and entirely preserved. It was smoothed on both sides and did not bear any depiction. Judging by the belt grooves of the stela, it was lain down on its back. Thus, it is possible that the stela initially had depictions, but decomposed, after it was placed inside the slab floor. The dimensions of the stela are: height – 110 cm, width – 50 cm (Fig. XVI-XVII).

Despite the fact that monumental sculpture is widespread, has a long history and appears separately in each ethno-cultural group, we are using the data about similar anthropomorphic stelae in the region to discuss the ideology of the stelae under discussion, to reconstruct their importance and ethno-cultural environment as well as to interpret them.

These anthropomorphic sculptures are similar to the stone anthropomorphic sculptures from European steppe regions including the Northern Caucasus, Black Sea basin, Crimea, which are known in Russian literature under the name “Scythian”. As a rule, they represent the warrior (probably an ancestor) and were placed on burials. Currently, there are 160 stelae of that type [Yanin, 2006: 307]. The studied stelae are, most probably, closer to the Northern Caucasian group in terms of their chronology and depiction technique. 77 % of those stelae from the Northern Caucasus are dated to the VII-VI cc. BC [Olkhovskiy et al. 1994: 41, Markovin, 2003: 153]. Olkhovskij notes, that the anthropomorphic columns, smoothed slabs and sculptures preceded the “Scythian” monuments. The stone anthropomorphic sculptures probably correspond to the smoothed

sculpture type. He also notes, that the position of folded arms oriented to the face is a “Scythian” tradition [Olkhovskiy et al. 1994: 77], which prevails in the case of our stelae. These stelae are quite different and underwent morphological and even ideological evolution during approximately three hundred years of their history. According to P. Schultz, this evolution process starts with the menhirs and anthropomorphic monuments and continues through to these stelae, and then to the torso. In the latter case, the depiction of the head was emphasized [Shulc, 1967: 227]. He considered it possible that the “Scythian” monuments were linked to the Bronze Age anthropomorphic stelae and defined eight spatial groups of them [Olkhovskiy et al. 1994: 10, see also Shulc, 1967: 329]. “Scythian” monuments were gravestones as well as cultic symbols that were placed on the top of kurgans and in the centers of sanctuaries. It is not accidental that in the steppe territories of Artsakh (where the stone stelae were found), on the left bank of Khachenaget river, around 15 kurgans were situated, which were probably connected with the studied stelae.

This kind of stelae we meet also in neighboring regions to the south since the end of the II millennium BC. Particularly anthropomorphic stelae have been found in Hakkari [Sevin, 2005: 163-166], Iranian Azerbaijan [Burney, 1979: 155-159, Piller, 2010: 54-55]. The Iranian stelae were first described during Meskinsahr survey in 1978 by Charles Burney. He mentioned that the most remarkable discovery were over one hundred stelae in four groups, set up in rows. Although these are of differing sizes and quality of carving, they share a common and distinctive character, with their crudely rendered faces, hands, belts and daggers or swords. Hands rather than hairs are shown on either side of the face; and in the belt, set diagonally, is a small weapon, normally resembling a dagger in its scabbard, which in some examples has a curved point. The function of these stelae remains very uncertain: memorials for slain warriors, friends or foes, seem most likely. They do not appear to be directly associated with burials, even though some graves lie very close. These stelae, as well as many graves, lie scattered across the hillside just outside the settlement and defenses of Arjaq Qaleh. Some stelae were reused in the defense structures, proving the late date of them. The Iron II period (early first millennium BC) seems the likeliest for these remarkable stelae, the general connections of which to nomadic peoples of northern steppes is beyond doubt [Burney, 1979: 156]. Ch. Piller notes, that during recent Iranian research in the region some bronze daggers have been found in a number of graves around the stelae. Typologically, these weapons have good comparisons in Northern Iran, especially with the materials excavated by de Morgan in the Talesh region. According to recent studies on the chronology of this area, a date around 1000 BC seems possible for these weapons. This, in turn, indicates that the stelae could at least partially date to the later 2nd millennium BC [Piller, 2010: 54-55]. In Meskinshahr worked also an Iranian expedition under the direction of Ali Reza Hojabri Nowbari from Tarbiat Modarres University Tehran. He engaged in clearing some of the

tombs outside the settlement area. The tombs are mostly chamber tombs of considerable size, no doubt aimed at accommodating multiple burials.

By clearing an area below the saddle, Nobari was able until June 2004 to expose two long rows of anthropomorphic stelae facing each other, thereby forming a corridor of about 1,5 m width. In the following 2004 summer season he uncovered more stelae, approaching the number to over 400 [Azarnoush et al. 2005: 216-217].

The study of anthropomorphic stelae from Artsakh enables us to gain preliminary idea on beliefs, ideology and history of the people who created them. It is possible that the stelae depicted the dead or heroes, soldiers or high-ranked males. They “immortalized” the memory of the deceased and were objects of memorial ceremonies devoted to them. These stelae demonstrate clear links to similar stelae from European steppe regions including the Northern Caucasus, Black Sea basin, Crimea of the Late Iron Age (VII-VI centuries BC) as well as to those from Zagros and Taurus regions dating to the Early Iron Age (late II and early I millennium BC). Mentioned comparisons create *terminus post and ante quem* for dating the stelae under consideration.

**ანთროპომორფული სტელეზი სამხრეთ-აღმოსავლეთი
კავკასიიდან:
ახალი მონაცემები და წინასწარული მოსაზრებები**

ნუღეჰ იერანიანი

რეზიუმე

ქვის მხატვრულ დამუშავებას სამხრეთ კავკასიაში ათასწლოვანი ისტორია აქვს (მენჰირები, ვეშაპები, ფალოსის და ანთროპომორფული სტელეზი) ამ ტენდენციას შეგვიზღია თვალი გავადევნოთ შუა საუკუნეებამდე. ხანგრძლივი პერიოდის განმავლობაში, ქვის ქანდაკებების ფორმები იცვლებოდა მორფოლოგიურად, ტიპოლოგიურად და სისტემატურად, თუმცა, სავარაუდოდ გარკვეული კანონზომიერებით. ამ სტატიაში განვიხილავთ ანთროპომორფული ქვის ქანდაკებების განსაკუთრებულ ტიპს, სამხრეთ-აღმოსავლეთ კავკასიიდან (ისტორიული არცახი და უტიქი), შევხებით მათთან დაკავშირებულ ქრონოლოგიულ, იკონოგრაფიულ და იდეოლოგიურ საკითხებს. ესენია, ბრტყელი და წაგრძელებული ქვის ფილები, განივკვეთში თითქმის ოთხკუთხა, ძირითადად სამ ნაწილად დაყოფილი, ორი ჰორიზონტალური ხაზის მეშვეობით, რაც ქმნის თავს, ტანს და წელის ქვედა ნაწილს. სტელეზი სიგანეში 0.3-0.6, სიმაღლეში 1.2-1.4 და სისქეში დაახლოებით 0.2 მ. აღნიშნულ რეგიონში მსგავსი ტიპის სულ ჩვიდმეტი სტელა ფიქსირდება. მათი კვლევა საშუალებას გვაძლევს გარკვეული წარმოდგენა შევიქმნათ იმ ხალხის რწმენაზე, შეხედულებებსა და ისტორიაზე, რომელმაც ეს სტელეზი დატოვეს. შესაძლებელია, რომ ეს ქვის ქანდაკებები გამოსახავდნენ მიცვალებულებს ან გმირებს, მებრძოლებს ან წარჩინებულ მამაკაცებს. ისინი “უკვდავყოფდნენ” გარდაცვლილთა ხსოვნას და გამოიყენებოდნენ მემორიალური ცერემონიების ობიექტებად. ეს სტელეზი ცხად კავშირს ავლენენ მსგავს ქვის ქანდაკებებთან, რომლებიც დასტურდება ევროპის სტეპის რეგიონებში, მათ შორის, ჩრდილოეთ კავკასიის, შავი ზღვის აუზის, ყირიმის გვიანი რკინის ხანის (ძვ.წ. VII-VI სს) ძეგლებზე და ასევე ზაგროსის და ტავროსის რეგიონებში, რომლებიც ადრეული რკინის ხანით თარიღდებიან (ძვ.წ. II-I ათასწლეულების მიჯნა). აღნიშნული შედარებები ქმნიან ე. წ. *terminus post and ante quem* სტელეზის დათარიღებისთვის, განხილვის პროცესში.

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Artsakhi qare mardakerp kotoxnery

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Martakerti qare mardakerp kotoxnery

Fig. I.



Martakert local lore museum

Fig. II.



Martakert local lore museum

Fig. III.



Martakert local lore museum

Fig. IV.



Martakert local lore museum

Fig. V.



Martakert local lore museum

Fig. VI
a



b



Martakert local lore museum, front and back sides of the stelae.

Fig. VII
a.



b.



Martakert local lore museum, front and back sides of the stelae.

Fig. VIII.



Martakert local lore museum

Fig. IX.



Aghdam region

Fig. X.



Aghdam region

Fig. XI.



Fig. XII.



Fig. XIII.



Fig. XIV.



Nor Haykajur

Fig. XV.

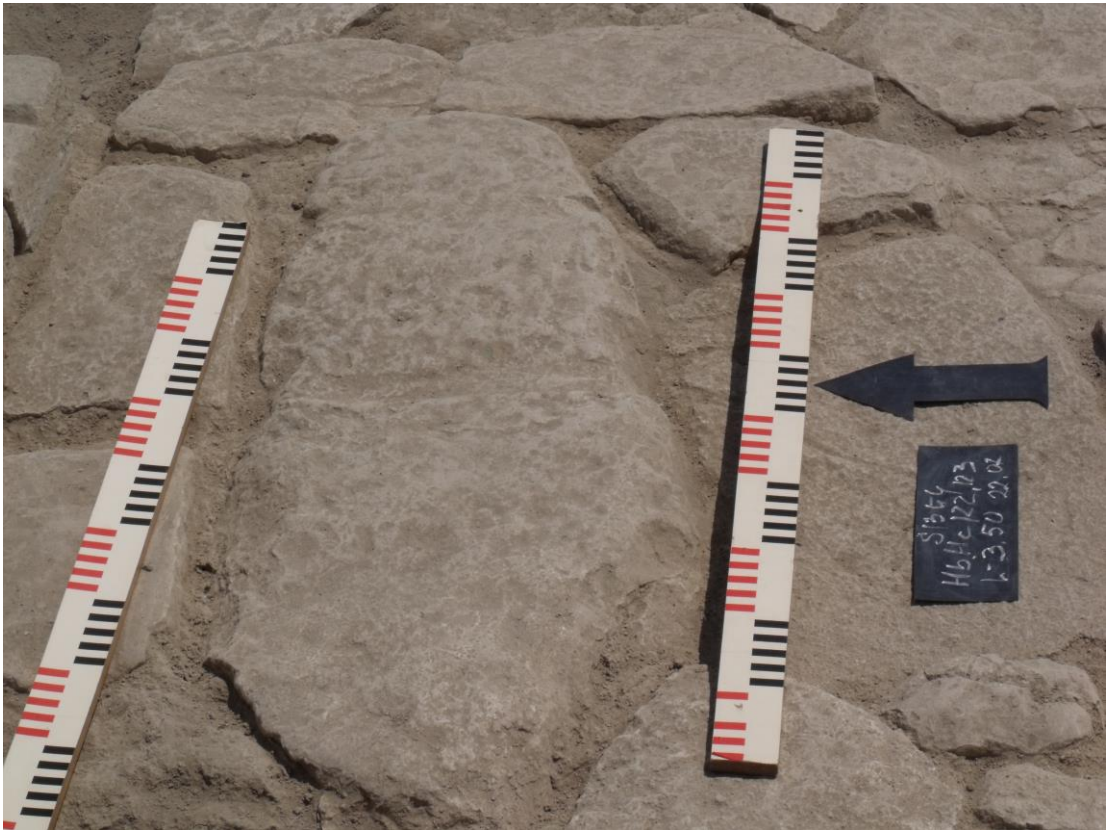


Fig. XVI.



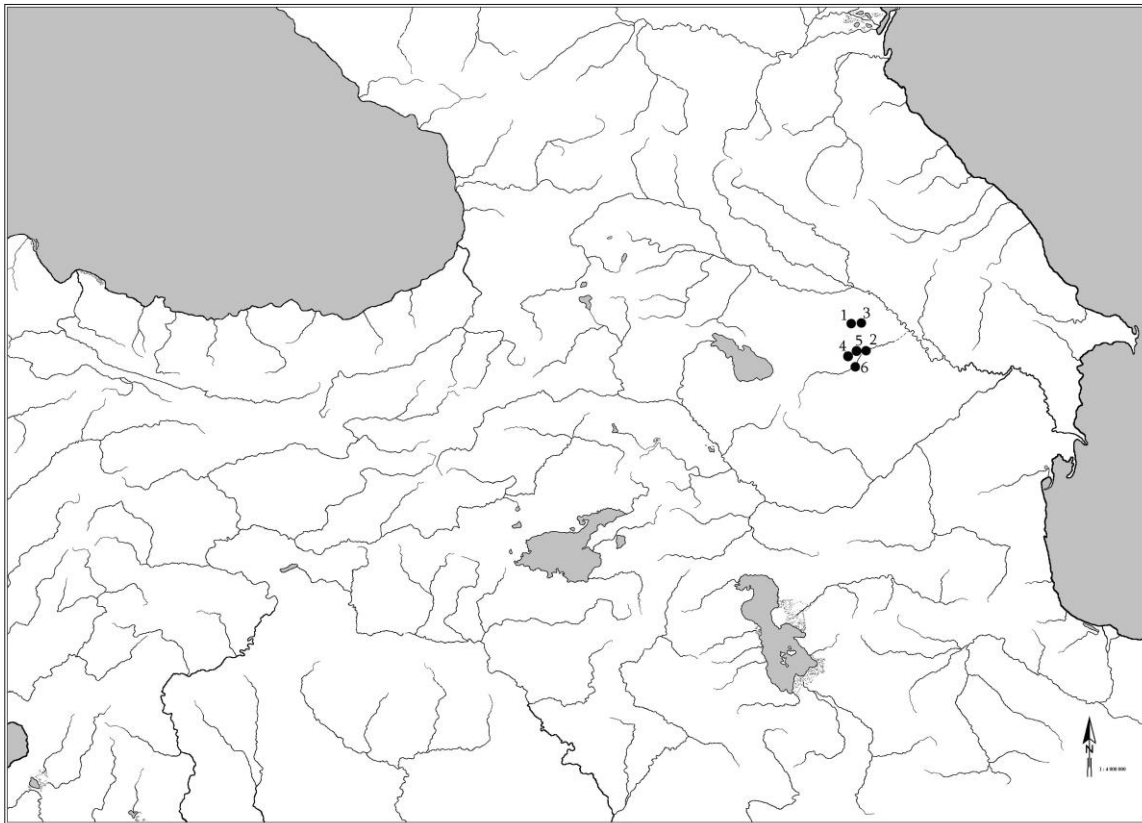
Gyavur kala

Fig. XVII.



Tigranakert

Fig. XVIII.



Distribution of anthropomorphic stelae: 1. Stelae 1-8, Bakhshun tapa (now at Martakert); 2. Stelae 9-10, Aghdam Region; 3. Stelae 11-12, Seysulan (now at Stepanakert); 4. Stelae 13-15, Nor Haykajur; 5. Stelae 16, Gyavur Kalah; 6. Stelae 17, Tigranakert (map background from E. Grekyan)