

ARCHAEOLOGY OF ARMENIA  
IN REGIONAL CONTEXT



National Academy of Sciences of Republic of Armenia  
Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography

# **ARCHAEOLOGY OF ARMENIA IN REGIONAL CONTEXT**

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to the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography  
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Edited by  
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# Pithos Burials of Tigranakert in Artsakh

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*Abstract.* The issues of origin, spatial distribution, chronology, cultural and ethnic affiliation of pithos burials have been subject to scholarly discussion for more than a century. Among the Late Hellenistic burial structures of Artsakh and Utik (cist, stone box, burial with oval chamber, pit grave etc.) the pithos burials became predominant at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. In this regard, the study of the Late Hellenistic burial structures, ritual and inventory of Tigranakert, as one of the largest towns of the region, becomes particularly important. The currently studied Late Hellenistic necropolis of Tigranakert of Artsakh extends over a plain, at a distance of one and half kilometers to the north-east of the town. A stone box and six pithos burials have been excavated and studied. A single pithos burial was also unearthed within the fortified quarter, not far from the northern fortification wall. The overall picture of the burial data of Tigranakert is supplemented with burial materials excavated in the vicinity of the town and at numerous ancient settlements of Artsakh and Utik. The pithoi and burials have no similar orientation relative to the geographic cardinal directions. The pithoi were placed in a horizontal position and are oriented from the north-west to south-east or vice versa—from the north-east to south-west with some deviations, with a pitcher-shaped vessel (oenochoe, spouted pithos, flask) placed adjacent to its bottom or rim. This is a materialization of the ritual, which can be found in the sites, spread over the steppes of Artsakh and Utik up till the Kura river. The traces of fire and fragments of grindstones are also related to the burial rite. Three burial pithoi of Tigranakert and Martakert are particularly noteworthy. Their bodies are decorated with the scenes of hunt and ritual procession painted with reddish-brown pigment. The burial inventory consists of different vessels, examples of individual weapon, numerous pieces of jewelry, including pendants and beads made of various stones, paste, glass, silver and gold. The coins (seven Parthian coins of 70–50's BC) and glass seals set into metallic rings with Hellenistic iconography are characteristic of Tigranakert burials.

*Keywords:* Artsakh, Utik, Tigranakert, Hellenistic period, pithos burials, coins, gems.

## Introduction

In Late Hellenistic period<sup>1</sup> the pithos burials were spread in the Near East, Mediterranean and considerable part of Asia Minor, as well as Armenian Highland and Transcaucasia up till the Kura river. These burials acquired local peculiarities in different regions (Martirosyan 1974, 50–55; Tiratsyan 2010, 36–48; Khachatryan 1975; 1981; Alekperov 1960; Kaziyev 1953, 5–35; 1960; Golubkina 1956, 73–87; 1961, 21–36; Vaidov 1965; Goshgarly 2005; Huseynova 2014; Osmanov 2006, 93–97; Asadov 2010, 91–97; Noneshvili 1992; Akopyan 1987, 15–17).

The archaeological investigation of every classical city can be considered holistic, when it is pos-

sible to study the fortress-town quarters-necropolis system simultaneously. Understanding the importance of the ritual and cultural role of ancient necropolis of Tigranakert in research and clarification of issues of structural and cultural unity of the town, the archaeological expedition have carried out systematic survey investigations in the surroundings of the town aimed at discovery of traces of Late Hellenistic burials. Hence, it was discovered in 2010, and the results of archaeological investigation are presented in this article.

## The Eastern Necropolis. The First and Second Pithos Burials

In 2010, while digging a defensive trench in the plain that stretches at a distance of 1,5 km to the north-east of the town, fragments of the Late Hellenistic pithos, glass beads and a painted flask were discovered (Fig. 1) For this reason, the excavations were car-

<sup>1</sup> The Late Hellenistic period in this case includes the timespan from the early 1st century BC to the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.



Fig. 1. Painted flask, eastern necropolis, 2010 (© The Archive of Tigranakert Project).

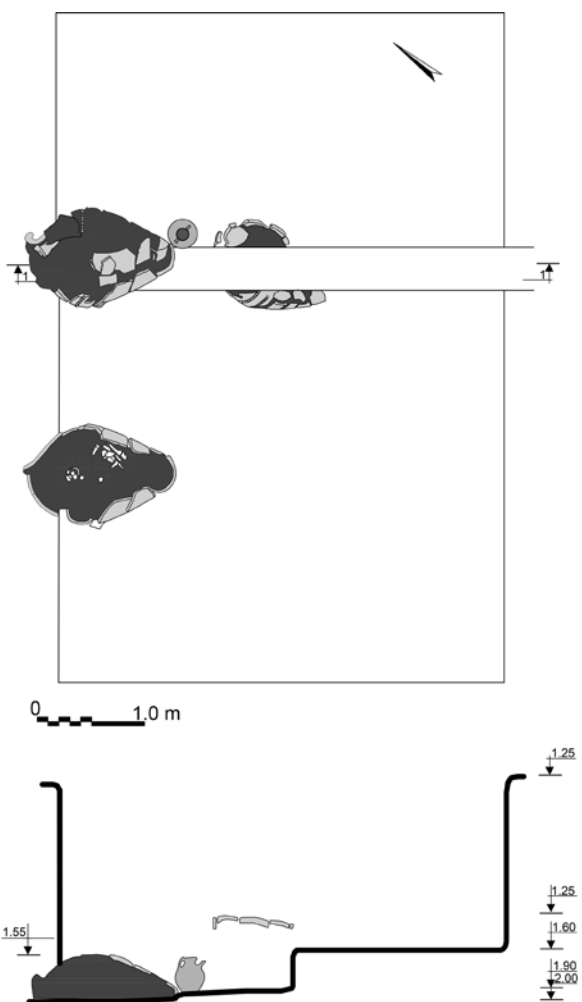


Fig. 2. The first and second pithos burials, eastern necropolis, 2010 (© The Archive of Tigranakert Project).

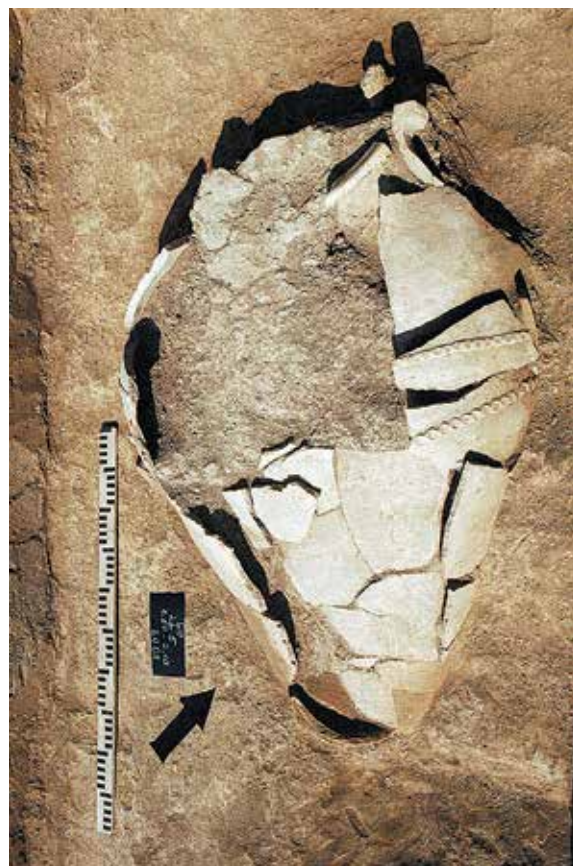


Fig. 3. The second pithos burial (© The Archive of Tigranakert Project).



Fig. 4. One-handed painted pitcher with spout, the second pithos burial (© The Archive of Tigranakert Project).

ried out at the same location. In the separated area (6.00×4.00 m<sup>2</sup>) two pithos burials were unearthed in the clayey layer, at a depth of 2.00 m. They were discovered in a single row, at a distance of 0.35 m from each other (Fig.2). Only separate fragments of the first burial were preserved, without any other accom-

panying materials. The second pithos burial, although smashed and cracked, but potentially restorable, was placed in horizontal position, oriented from north-west to south-east<sup>2</sup>, with a gradient of 26° to the east

2 By orientation of pithos burial is meant direction of the pithos from the rim to its bottom.



Fig. 5. Glass beads, covered with golden foil, the second pithos burial (© The Archive of Tigranakert Project).

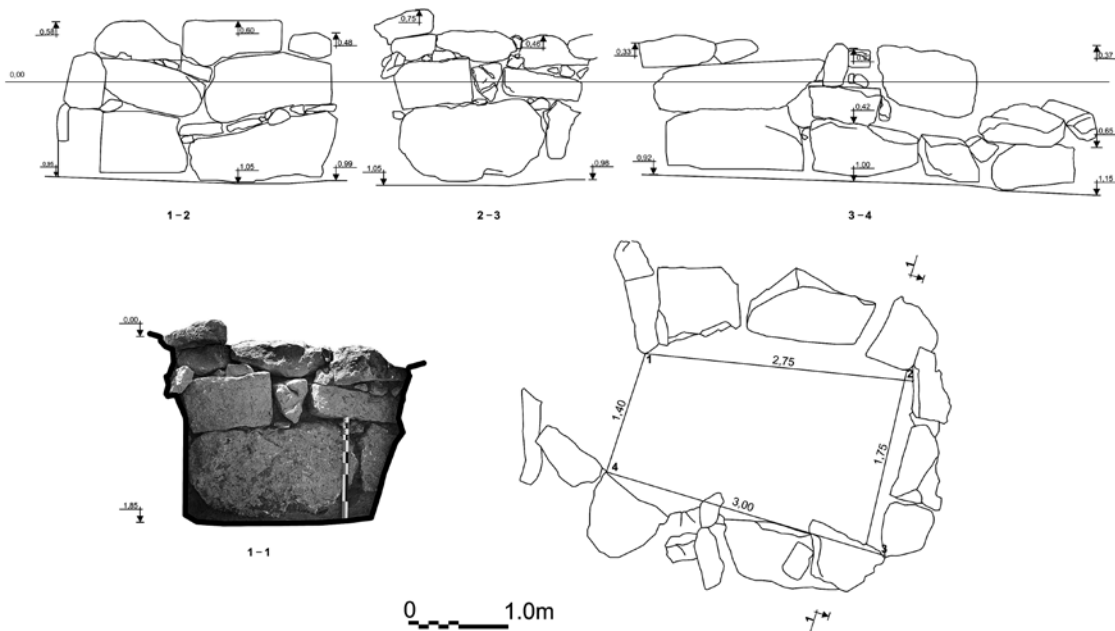


Fig. 6. Stone box burial, eastern necropolis, 2016 (© The Archive of Tigranakert Project).

(height–1.20 m, rim diameter–0.44 m, bottom diameter–0.20 m, Fig. 3). The body is ovoid and bears two relief, rope horizontal decorative bands in its widest part. The flared rim is flat. Its edge is decorated with a wavy band. Between two pithoi, a single-handled elaborately decorated pitcher with spout was discovered, leaning against the bottom of the second pithos (Fig. 4). The examples almost identical to the spouted pitcher are known from both Hadrut region and Martakert (both are accidental finds, out of their archaeological context and, most probably, were a part of inventory of pithos burials), as well as among materials of pithos burials and settlements on the right bank of the Kura river (Trever 1959, 157–177; Kazyev 1960, 21, tabs 6–11; Rzayev 1964, 26–28, figs 21, 63, 68; Eminli 2010, 301–303, figs 1–3).

Several dozens of similar examples of pottery, potentially restorable and fragmented, decorated or plain

were discovered in the Fortified and the First Late Hellenistic quarters of Tigranakert. The colours of ceramics varied from reddish, light ochraceous to dark yellowish-brown. It testifies that this type of spouted vessels was widely used, and, probably, these were ceramics product of Tigranakert (Gabrielyan 2017, 53–58).

Similarly, the abovementioned painted flask, most probably, was placed leaning against the first pithos. Only the fragments of skull, ribs and upper extremities of the deceased individual's skeleton were preserved. The skull was unearthed near the shoulder of the pithos, pointing with its parietal part to the vessel's rim and facing westwards. The bones of the deceased supposedly belonged to a male individual. Two silver coins were found in the mouth and between the ribs of the dead person. A bronze mirror with a handle, iron rings, a necklace made up of cornelian, glass paste, bronze beads, glass beads covered with gold foil





Fig. 7. Stone box burial, the chamber part with the secondary burial (© The Archive of Tigranakert Project).



Fig. 8. Parthian drachmae (one belongs to an unknown king, 80–70 BC, three belong to Orodes II, 57–38 BC), stone box burial (© The Archive of Tigranakert Project)

(Fig. 5) were discovered on his chest. After cleaning the coins, it became apparent that these are very well preserved Parthian drachmae of the kings Mithradates III (57–54 BC) and Orodes II (57–38 BC).

### The Eastern Necropolis. Stone Box Burial

One stone box burial was also discovered and excavated in the eastern necropolis in 2016. It is a large structure built of large rough hewn blocks laid in three rows horizontally. The burial is oriented approximately from the north to south, with an entrance at the northern side (the inner sizes of the burial chamber: 2.75 m × 3.0 m., depth: 1.85 m, Fig. 6). The chamber floor was formed of the clayey soil.



Fig. 9. Seal with an image of a bird, light milky paste, stone box burial (© The Archive of Tigranakert Project).

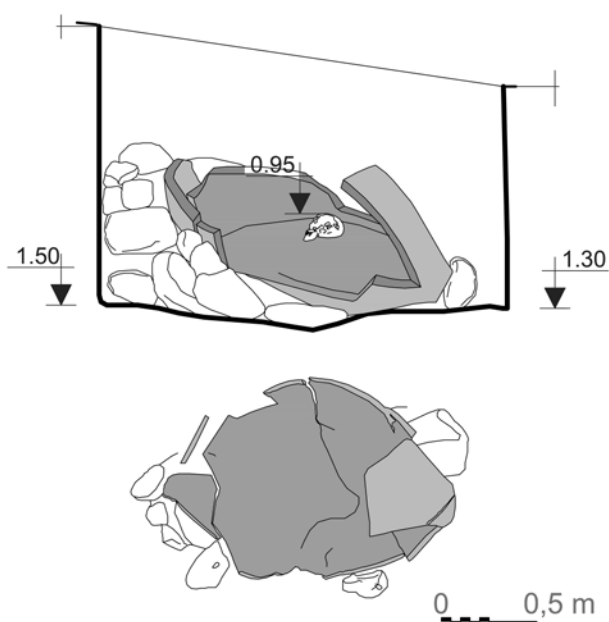


Fig. 10. The third pithos burial, Fortified quarter, 2017 (© The Archive of Tigranakert Project).

Seven individuals were buried in the tomb, two of which (no. 2 and no. 3) were unearthed in situ (depth: 1.30–1.36 m). The skull of one deceased was found near the burial entrance, meanwhile the other skeletons—near the southern wall of the burial (Fig. 7). As demonstrated by the results of excavation, here was a secondary burial: older human remains were accumulated in the southern part of the chamber. Four skeletons inside the burial were placed across the chamber. Judging by position of the skeletons, the deceased were buried on their left or right side, in a fetal position and oriented from the north-east to the south–west.

The burial inventory consists of a bronze crescent-shaped medallion near the left rib bones of the de-

ceased no. 2, four Parthian drachmae found under the skull no. 3 and with the replaced bones of the deceased individuals (one belongs to an unknown king, (Selwood, type 30), 80–70 BC, three belong to Orodes II, Fig. 8), a fine leaf-shaped bronze pendant, a string-like object and a light milky paste seal with an image of a bird (Fig. 9). There are two vessels: a well-preserved pitcher with a horizontal handle and three red painted horizontal lines, engirding the widest part of the body, as well as a painted Late Hellenistic bowl in pieces. Judging from the findings, the burials can be dated back to the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

### Fortified Quarter. The Third Pithos Burial

In 2017 one pithos burial distinguished by its burial inventory and some characteristics of ritual was unearthed in the northwestern corner of the Fortified quarter of Tigranakert, within the fortification wall. The pithos burial that was placed in horizontal position at a depth of 1.15–1.20 m below the mountain slope level is oriented from the north-east to south-west (Fig. 10). The fragmented pithos (height: 1.30 m, width<sup>3</sup>–1.10 m, bottom diameter: 0.18 m) had a flat bottom, a swollen body decorated with two bands of relief rope ornaments. The rim has not been preserved.

In the central part of the pithos a poorly preserved skull leaning against the western wall and skeletal remains were discovered. The research demonstrated that the deceased was laid transversely across the pithos, on the right side, in a fetal position, facing south-westwards, with his arms folded across his chest. Previously, the deceased was laid lengthwise on his right or left side, in a crouched position, with his legs flexed in the pithos burials discovered in series of ancient settlements (Tchankatagh, Haterk, Martakert, Stepanakert, Artashat, Garni, Agarak, Karchaghbyur etc., Safaryan 2011, 170–186; Khachatryan 1981, 6–30).

Similar pattern can be observed in case of pithos burials excavated in Tigranakert in 2010 and 2018. Four skeletons of the Late Hellenistic stone box burial of Tigranakert (2016) were also laid transversely across the chamber. It can be assumed that we are dealing with a new form of inhumation.

The study of the burial area revealed another new phenomenon that can be found in Tigranakert for the first time. Prior to placement of pithos, the area of burial was covered with lime mortar (thickness–1.0 cm),



Fig. 11. Golden pendants, the third pithos burial  
(© The Archive of Tigranakert Project).



Fig. 12. Iron scissors, the third pithos burial  
(© The Archive of Tigranakert Project).

3 By width it is meant the diameter of the widest part of the body.

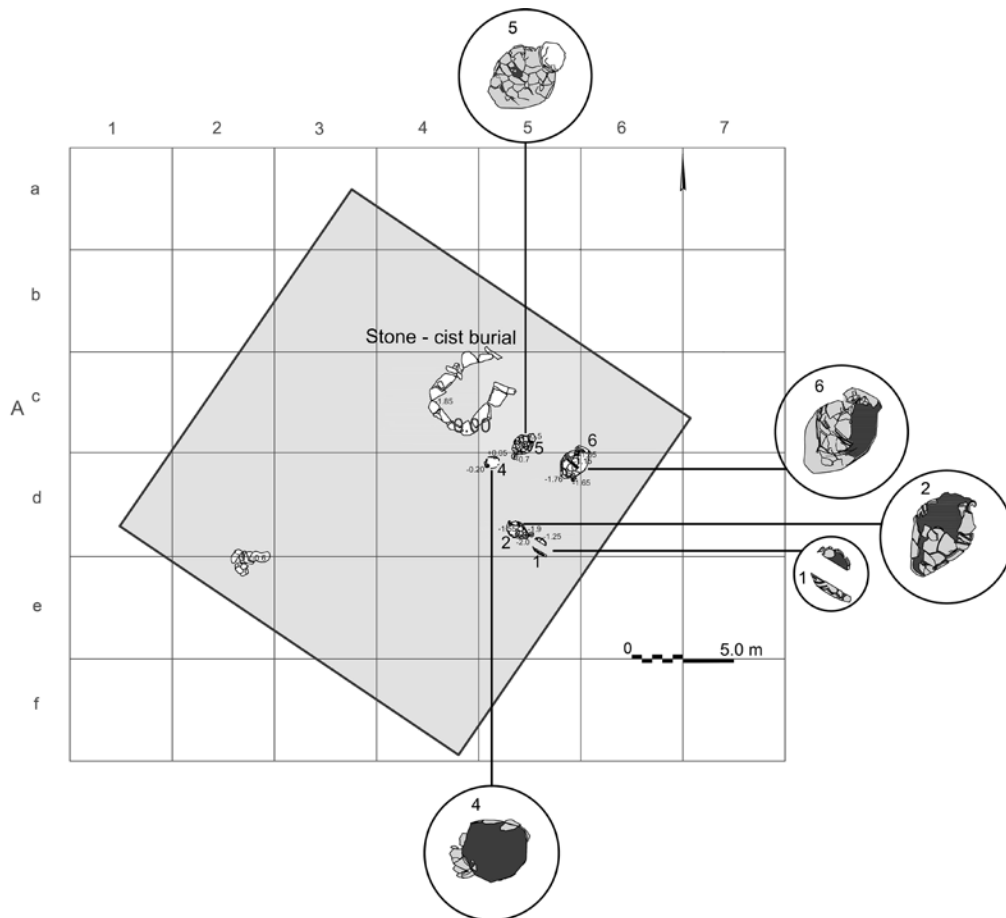


Fig. 13. The fourth, fifth, sixth pithos burials, eastern necropolis, 2018 (© The Archive of Tigranakert Project).

and then was further strengthened with stones put in circle. The preserved traces of fire on the plastered surface, such as the ashes, the pieces of burnt wood, probably vine, suggest that we are dealing with evidences of fire consecration of the area previous to (which must have been held right before) the placement of pithos.

A part of materials accompanying the deceased individual was discovered outside the vessel, in the adjacent area, another part—inside the pithos. Three pieces of a bronze mirror, fragments of bronze earring or small bracelet, iron worn item (probably, a spear), a wide-mouthed one-handed pot refer to the first group.

The glass, paste, cornelian, bone beads and two golden pendants (Fig. 11) were found in the pithos. The latter are made up of a tubes with grooved ornamentation and two crescent-shaped foils, hanging from them, a bronze needle-shaped item, a very plain iron scissors with flat handle (length: 16.0 cm, blade length: 8.3 cm, the width of the flat handle: 2.0 cm, Fig. 12). It is very similar to the finds from Tchankatagh of Artsakh, the southeastern necropolis of Artashat and Agarak burials (Safaryan 2011, pl. 1/7; Khachatryan 1981, 70).

The same kind of scissors are also known from other Late Hellenistic burials of the South Caucasus (Aghayani, Mingeaur, Garni etc., see Khachatryan 1981, 70; Noneshvili 1992, 101; Golubkina 1956, 74–86). Zh. Khachatryan dated those back to the 1–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD (Khachatryan 1981, 70). A small one-handed oenochoe-shaped pitcher was found to the east of the pithos, leaning with its rim against the pithos. The pitcher was made very carelessly, without decoration and engobe that is characteristic of pottery of 2–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD.

### The Eastern Necropolis. The Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Pithos Burials

In 2018 systematic excavations were launched within the eastern necropolis. For this purpose a 400 m<sup>2</sup> area was separated, in which the previously studied burials (first and second pithos burials, stone box burial) were located. Excavations of its northern section have been productive. Three new pithos burials were discovered at a distance of 2.5 m from the previous pithos burials (Figs 13, 14). The distance between those pithoi was 2.50 m, but they were placed at different depths.

The fourth burial<sup>4</sup> was found at a depth of 0.30 m from the surface and oriented from south-west to north-east. The skeleton was placed upside down, with his head pointing to the pithos bottom. Other bone remains have been poorly preserved.

The pithos was fragmented as it was buried near the surface and damaged in result of operation of heavy machinery. Its walls are light yellowish.

The traces of painted ornamentation are hardly visible on separate salinized sherds. Inside the vessel cornelian beads (13 pieces) and small circular earrings (2 pieces) were found mixed with bone remains. The most remarkable item is the pithos. After its cleaning and restoration (height: 0.80 m, width–0.60 m) it became apparent that the deceased was buried not in a common pithos, but in an amphora-shaped pithos with two large handles, wide mouth and flat, flaring rim (Fig. 15). Such use of amphorae in the Late Hellenistic period was not an innovation neither in Armenia (Khachatryan 1982, 22, 32, il. 47/4, tabs 5/3, 18/4), nor in the Hellenistic oecumene (Greece, Crete, Cyprus, Rhodes, the Mediterranean and the Black sea cities, Childe 1927, 33, 77, 103, 127; Kuftin 1950, 74; Belov 1950, 275–276).

The surfaces of the vessel's handles and rim were painted red, the junction of the neck and body was accentuated with two red lines and finger pressed convex band. The body of the vessel is decorated with similar four red bands from its upper part to the middle.

Two upper bands are decorated with geometric designs, the middle one– with human and animal figures, meanwhile the lower–with row of arches. A scene of “deer hunting” is depicted in the third band. The action takes place on either side of a branchy tree. The mounted and unmounted hunters armed with spears, arrows and bows follow the deers accompanied by their dogs.

The ornamentation on a fragment of pithos found recently at Nargiztepe<sup>5</sup> (Fig. 16) is almost identical to the iconography of the vessel from Tigranakert. The hunt scene in this case is depicted in circle: it seems like the participants are walking around the tree. The landscape scene of the second frieze is noteworthy, with triangular mountains and images of the sun and the moon between them. The third frieze shows a simi-



Fig. 14. The fourth, fifth, sixth pithos burials (© The Archive of Tigranakert Project).

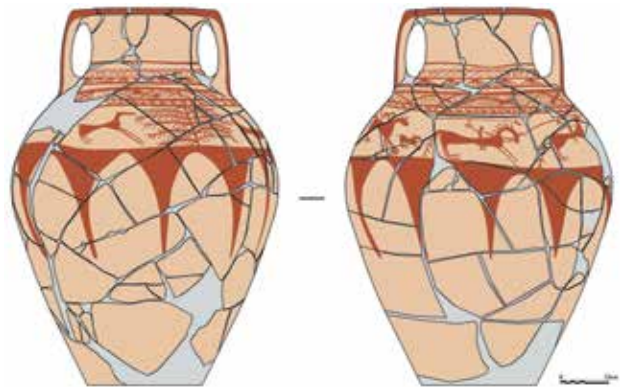


Fig. 15. Painted pithos burial, fourth burial (© The Archive of Tigranakert Project).

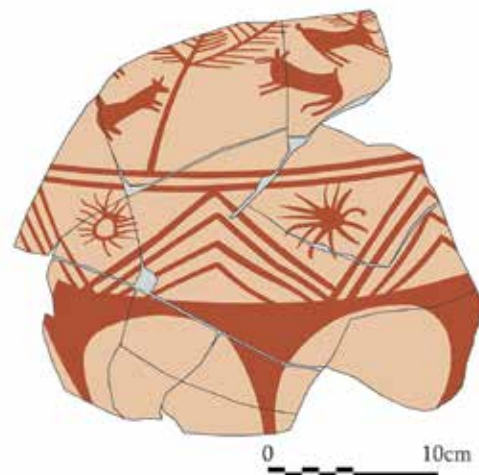


Fig. 16. A fragment of a painted pithos, Nargiztepe (©: <http://dostoyanieplaneti.ru/5710-Nargiztepe>; drawing: The Archive of Tigranakert Project).

4 Numbering is given according to the sequence of the deceased individuals found in the burial.

5 The site of Nargiztepe is located around 30 km to the south-east of Tigranakert, in the territory of Martuni of Artsakh occupied by Azeri people, immediately adjacent to the defense line.



Fig. 17. Iron and bronze rings, the fifth pithos burial  
(© The Archive of Tigranakert Project).



Fig. 18. Beads and pendants, the sixth pithos burial  
(© The Archive of Tigranakert Project).



Fig. 19. Glass gem with an image of two angels,  
the sixth pithos burial  
(© The Archive of Tigranakert Project).

lar row of arches (Fig. 4). The scenes with images of people and animals have been also preserved on two pithoi of the Late Hellenistic burials discovered in Martakert in 2013. One presents a ritual procession (on Martakert burials, see below, Fig. 21).

Thus, three-four painted burial vessels have been discovered from Tigranakert and surrounding territory. It is not excluded that these vessels were specially

made for burial. It is noteworthy that in the abundant ceramic material unearthed from the town territories of Tigranakert only several insignificant fragments of similar vessels were found.

The fifth pithos burial was opened in the same trench, at a depth of 0.60 m, with orientation from the north-east to the south-west. The pithos was a middle sized, pear-shaped, light orange vessel (height: 0.92 m, width: 0.83 m) with a low neck and wide flat rim that had been used for household purposes and for burial ritual in the region. Below the rim is a rope relief band.

The mouth of the pithos was covered with flat stone. The skeleton was poorly preserved. Judging from the teeth of the one part of jaw, the deceased was apparently a mature individual. The finds include a Parthian drachma (probably of Orodes II), glass paste beads (54 beads) and fragments of bronze and iron rings (5 pieces, Fig. 17).

Two rings had paste gem: one gem obviously bears an image of Cupid (winged angel). A double-handled vessel with spherical body was opened leaning against the near-bottom part of the pithos vertically (height: 0.30 m, width: 0.27 m). This kind of spherical vessels were the transformed forms of flasks commonly used in transitional trade in the Hellenistic period. They appear in the Late Hellenistic period and date back to 2–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD (Khachatryan 1981, 123).

The sixth burial was within an orange pithos (height: 1.60 m, width: 0.95 m) buried at a depth of 1.20–1.50 m. It was oriented parallel to the previous one- from the north-east to south-west. Two skeletons were discovered in the pithos, buried on their left side, on top of each another, with flexed extremities. The mouth of the pithos was covered with a piece of body of another pithos, which indicates that the deceased was laid after the rim of the vessel had been removed (Kocharyan 1991, 23–31). Like in previous case, an oinochoe type pitcher (height: 0.25 m, width: 0.27 m) was found near the bottom of the pithos. A necklace was found on the chest of the lower skeleton, made up of glass, coloured paste and cornelian beads, agate and bronze bell-shaped pendants (Fig. 18). A blade of a small dagger and fragments of handle were unearthed near the thigh of the deceased, as well as a glass paste seal with an image of two angels (Fig. 19). Glass paste intaglios were widespread in the Late Hellenistic world, especially in 2–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC. During this period among the deities of the Graeco-Roman pantheon, Eros-Amor-Cupidon and his attendants were particularly celebrated. Cupidon was depicted both alone and accompanied with butterflies, dolphins and

other angels, riding a hippocampus or on the boat. The examples from Tigranakert with images of angels are also dated to the abovementioned period and are reminiscent of the materials of the Western museums and private collections (Guiraud 1988, 124–129, pl. 22/336A–345A, 23/346–361A, 24/362A–381A; Dimitrova-Milcheva 1980, 63–67, 135–149).

Fine pieces of copper foil in a very worn condition were also found in the burial, which can refer to the mirrors usually placed in the Late Hellenistic burials. Three bronze rings with oval-rhomboid bezels were on the phalanges of skeletons, with traces of paste gem. The rounded bezel of the fourth iron ring was inlaid with a glass seal with an image of a boat with one sail (Fig. 20). Gemstones with an image of a galley and glass paste intaglios are known from the territory of France. The examples that are similar to an item from Tigranakert are dated back to 1<sup>st</sup> century BC–1<sup>st</sup> century AD (Guiraud 1988, 152–153, pl. 38/552A–557A). Two glass paste seals kept in the British Museum are also reminiscent to our find. Both are considered Roman and refer to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC ([https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_1814-0704-2665](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1814-0704-2665)).

The study of the burial materials suggests that we are dealing with a burial of a married couple. The necklace belonged to a woman, meanwhile the dagger belonged to a man.

### Pithos Burials in Artsakh-Utik Region

It is important to note that the Late Hellenistic pithos burials within the territory of Artsakh and Utik are the most widespread and archaeologically documented types of burials. Thus, in 1939 three pithos burials were studied by J. Hummel in the southwestern part of Stepanakert (Hummel, manuscript). In 1954, during excavation of the Middle Bronze Age settlement Uzerlik Tepe, K. Kushnaryova discovered eight Hellenistic burials, four of which were pithos burials (Kushnaryeva 1959, 389–428). In 1964, pithos burials were discovered in course of construction activities at the southern limit of Stepanakert. A silver denarius of Emperor Augustus was found in one pithos<sup>6</sup>.

In 1998, a necropolis with pithos burials was discovered accidentally in a place named “Meghraker”, at a distance of 2 km to the south-west from Tchankatagh village of Martakert region, which occupies an area of around 600 m<sup>2</sup> (Safaryan 2011, 179–186). Exploratory



Fig. 20. A glass gem with an image of sailing ship, the sixth pithos burial  
(© The Archive of Tigranakert Project).

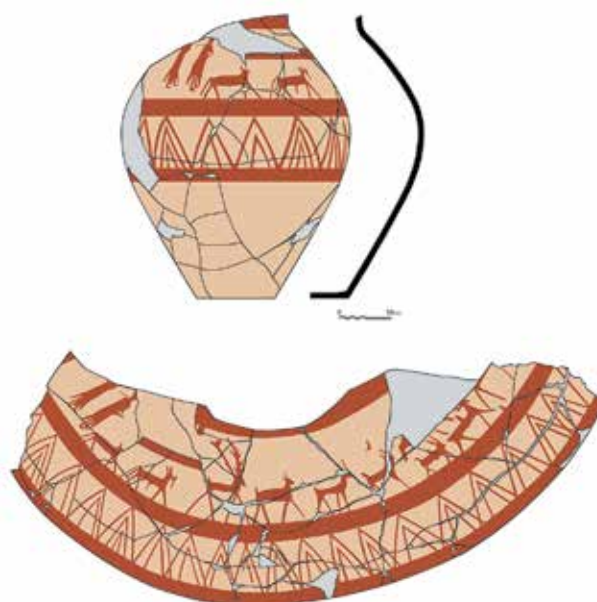


Fig. 21. Painted pithos, Martakert, 2013  
(© The Archive of Tigranakert Project).

archaeological excavations demonstrated that pithoi are oriented from east to west. The deceased were laid in the pithos in a crouched position, with their heads to the east. The maximum height of the pithoi reaches 1.65 m, the maximum width: 1.00 m. The mouths are covered with small slabs.

In 2006, in the area “Purtchaghak” of Haterk village (Martakert region), in the course of the Trghi river diversion into the Sarsang water reservoir, pithos and pit burials were discovered. The fragments of pithoi, pots, bowls, iron spearheads, jewelry were collected. It is impossible to find out the sizes of pithoi, but these bear ornamentation similar to decoration of pithoi found in Tchankatagh (Safaryan 2012, 487–498).

In 2007, the pithos burials were recorded in the village Arajadzor of Martakert region, within the terri-

<sup>6</sup> The coin is kept in the Artsakh Museum of History and Regional Studies.

tory named “Papen Kal”. The pieces of pithoi, bronze bracelets and a red painted pot were collected.

Two pithos burials were documented in 2011, in course of earthworks at the southwestern limit of Stepanakert (the sizes of pithoi: the height of the first pithos is 1.35 m, the width: 1.05 m, the height of the second pithos is 1.45 m, the width: 1.06 m (Safaryan 2012, 491–492).

Two pithos burials were studied in 2013 by our expedition. These pithoi were discovered and considerably damaged during construction of a canal in Martakert. They were found in horizontal position. Although the burial inventory was abundant, it was found by the locals out of the context. On the body of one burial pithos (only separate fragments of the pithos are preserved, the diameter of the rim is 0.38 m, diameter of the bottom: 0.17 m) a rider oriented to the left is depicted. Above it are depicted uncertain images, which, like the rider, are painted with red stiff pigment. The images are poorly preserved, but it can be seen that the rider holds a bridle in his hand. Most probably, he had a weapon in his second hand. An image of deer, moving to the left is depicted on the shoulder of the same pithos. The parts of its body and branching antlers are portrayed accurately. On the burial pithos, most probably, is depicted a scene of hunt. A fragmented wide red painted plate and a painted pan are particularly noteworthy.

Among materials accompanying the pithos burial, a small elaborately decorated pithos is worthy to note (the height of the preserved part is 0.57 m, diameter of the bottom: 0.15 m). Its yellowish-brown spherical body has been restored up to its neck. The vessel shoulders below the neck are decorated with two ornamental bands. The first band illustrates the rhythmical sequence of people and deers (Fig. 21).

At the end of the row consisting of nine animals, two human figures dressed in shin-length fur clothes are depicted. At the bottom edge of the garment are extremities of the animal furs. Between the latter the naked legs of human figures can be seen. The third figure from the end is a walking stag that is distinguished by large body size and branching antlers.

All images are static. Even though an action can be mentioned here, there is no dynamics, no motion. The lack of flying spears and wounded animals, characteristic of the hunt scenes, as well as presence of human static figures, wearing long clothes allow to suggest that, nevertheless, a scene of ritual procession is depicted on the pithos<sup>7</sup>.

7 The procession of animals depicted on the painted pithos

The following band consists of inscribed red painted triangles with upward-directed vertexes that remind of a mountain landscape. The “landscape” composition illustrating triangles with pointed upwards vertexes, which includes the sky with signs of luminaries can be presumably depicted on the second band of a pithos from the burial no. 4 of Tigranakert, and on the pithos fragment found from Nargiztepe (Fig. 4 and 16), not far from Tigranakert.

The painted pithoi bearing decorative ornamentation that were discovered in other archaeological contexts, according to scholars, were used to serve beverages during celebrations. These were discovered together with plain pithoi, both in contemporary sites of Armenia (Arakelyan 1976, 74, tab. 10; Tiratsyan, Karapetyan 1985, 223, il. 6/2; Kocharyan 1991, tabs 15/3, 7, 13, 17, tab. 17/1, 2; Demirkhanyan 2010, 20, tab. 33) and from the Achaemenid and Late Hellenistic horizons of the sites in neighboring countries (Kleiss 1973, 164, 166, 168, tab 67/20; Gagoshidze 1979, tab. 14/54, 55; 16/234). Sometimes they were used as pithos burials, as in the case of pithoi from Tigranakert and Martakert.

In 2019 two necropoli with pithos burials were also recorded in Sos village of Martuni region. Pithos burials were also recorded in Karmir Shuka, Kolkhozashen and Avetaranots villages.

The pithos burials of Utik have been studied by the Azerbaijani archaeologists (Mingechaur, Galatepe, Garakobar etc., see: Alekperov 1960; Kaziyev 1953, 5–35; Kaziyev 1960; Golubkina 1956, 73–87; Golubkina 1961, 21–36; Vaidov 1965; Goshgarly 2005; Huseynova 2014; Osmanov 2006, 93–97; Asadov 2010, 91–97). Regardless of various, often conflicting or intentional historical-cultural and ethnic interpretations made by scholars, the ritual and materials of these burials are identical to the burials of Artsakh.

It should be noted that Tigranakert of Artsakh is located almost at the center of this culture, and its further research can help to address a series of issues related to the pithos burials.

## Conclusion

It is evident that the abovementioned burials of Tigranakert are a part of manifestation of the Late Hellenistic burial culture. It is testified by various burial structures within the territories of Artsakh and Utik, up till the Kura river. The Late Hellenistic burial struc-

is reminiscent of the incised images of deers on a censer from Armavir, dated back to the 6–4th centuries BC (cf. Karapetyan 1973, 71, Ill. 2, 3/3).

tures that were discovered in this region in result of excavation or accidentally are of different types (cist, stone box, burial with oval chamber, pit grave, pithos burial etc.), but at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and during the first centuries AD the pithos burials became predominant.

In the mentioned period, this type of burial became widespread through the Hellenistic world, including also Transcaucasia. Summarizing the results of previous and ongoing excavations it can be suggested that several dozens of necropolises have been recorded in Artsakh and Utik with an absolute predominance of the pithos burials.

The quantitative ratio of these six pithos burials and one stone box burial (which still constitute a small group) that have been excavated inside the Late Hellenistic necropolis and the fortress of Tigranakert, support the advanced argument. Moreover, certain local specifics can be observed in the ideological roots and ritual of the pithos burials in various regions.

The burials under discussion maintained the characteristic feature of the pithos burials of other ancient sites of that period, more specifically, the absence of identical orientation relative to the geographic cardinal directions. Nevertheless, they represent also new regional specifics: the transversal inhumation inside the pithos, creation of lime plastered platforms adjacent to the pithos burial and fire consecration of these areas, a habit of placing vessels near the bottom of pithos, canonic presence of ring-seals with glass gemstone, a common habit of putting a coin or coins with the deceased, and the most obvious feature resulting from certain cultic beliefs of the people of the region, such as use of painted vessels in the burial ritual.

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