



TWELVE CAPITALS OF ARMENIA: From Van to Yerevan

By Igor Grigorian

INTRODUCTION

Armenia is one of the few countries in the world that during the course of its centuries-old history had several capitals. Numerous dynasties ruled the country; geographical, political, and economic changes required moving the royal seat from one region to another, thus moving country's capital with it. Numerous wars have been fought, some successful, some lost; for almost nine centuries Armenia Proper has lost its independence. Only two of them preserved their old glory - Vagharshapat and Yerevan, so expect more history and illustrations on these cities.

Some historians consider another two cities as capitals of Armenia. These are Tarsus and Sis, capitals of the Kingdom of Cilicia. As Cilicia was not located in Armenia Proper they should become a separate subject of research; I hope to get to its history later.



Red dots represent approximate locations of the capitals on the map.

The table below shows all 12 capital cities of Armenia, dynasties that ruled at the time (exception is Yerevan which was capital of three republics), time frame when the city was the capital and duration (in years) when it was the capital.

#	Capital City	Period/Dynasty	Time Frame	Duration, years
1	Tushpa/Van	Kingdom of Ararat/Van	832 – 590 BC	242
2	Armavir	Orontid/Yervanduni Dynasty	331 – 210 BC	121
3	Yervandashat	Orontid and Artaxiad Dynasties	210 – 176 BC	34
4	Artaxata/ Artashat	Artaxiad Dynasty	176 - 177 69 BC – 120 AD	191
5	Tigranocerta/ Tigranakert		77 – 69 BC	8
6	Vagharshapat	Arsacid/Arshakuni Dynasty	120 – 330	210
7	Dvin		336 – 428	92
8	Bagaran	Bagratid (Bagratuni) Dynasty	885 – 890	5
9	Shirakavan		890 – 929	39
10	Kars		929 – 961	32
11	Ani		961 – 1045	84
12	Yerevan	1 st Republic, Armenian SSR, 3 rd Republic	1918 – present	102

TUSHPA / VAN



Many names were given to this city – Tushpa, Biaina, Tosp, Yervandavan, Vantosp, City of Shamiram, Van, and other. It is located 2-3 km east of Lake Van, in the Tosp canton of Vaspurakan.

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Area around Lake Van played very important role in the history of ancient Armenia and Armenians. **Hayk Patriarch** (fig. 1) moved to Van after uprising to King Bel (Baal. Belu) of Babylon.



Figure 2. **Movses Khorenatsi**. Single-sided postal card issued by the USSR Ministry of Communications in 1990. Mailed from Moscow same year



Figure 4. Page from 1841 Italian magazine *Cosmorama Pittorico* about Queen Semiramis settling around Lake Van.

Hayk's great-grandson of the great-grandson **Aram**, considerably expanded the borders of his country, transforming it into a powerful state. It is believed that the word *Armenia* is derived from his name. Movses Khorenatsi (Moses of Chorene – fig.2) in his capital work *The History of Armenia* describes war between son of Aram, **Ara** the Beautiful, and Assyrian Queen Semiramis (Shamiram, Shammuramat).



Figure 1. **Hayk Patriarch**. Undivided back picture postcard. Lithograph. Publisher unknown.

After Ara's death in battle Shamiram, being in the state of deep grief, decides not to return to Assyria to stay close to his grave. She moves to the area of Lake Van and is credited with establishing the city.

Figure 3. **Ara & Shamiram**. Undivided back picture postcard circa 1900s. #1 in series. Printed in Venice, Italy, Publisher unknown, most probably printed on San Lazzaro monastery polyglot press.



However, history preserved a different name, King Sarduri I (reign around 840-825 BC), and attributes establishing the city to him. Sarduri I called the newly established city Tushpa. He expanded his Kingdom of Van (in other sources, Kingdom of Ararat, or Urartu) and moved his royal seat to Tushpa. One of his first deeds was building Temple of Shivini, God of Sun (fig. 5), devoted to goddess Tushpuea, who was portrayed holding the sun above her head.



Figure 5. **Shivini, God of Sun**. Regular stamp and overprinted in 1995 ones with new values due to change from Russian ruble to national currency - Armenian dram. Put in circulation on March 30, 1996.

Smaller than the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, city's gardens were nevertheless gorgeous, with grape vines, orchard trees and flowerbeds. It required a lot of water, and a 70-80 km long huge canal was built to supply the city with water. It was a unique structure at the time, 4.5 m wide and 1.5 m deep. Built during the reign of **Menua I** (810 – 786 BC) the canal did not hold the name of its builder; instead, the glory went again to Shamiram. The canal has been in operation for 40 centuries.

During the reigns of **Argishti I** (785 – 763 BC) and **Sarduri II** (763 – 735 BC) empires frontiers were fortified, Erbuni (present day Yerevan) was founded, and Kingdom of Van achieved its maximum expansion. It is of utmost importance that Argishti I built a city to the north-west of Van and called it Argishtikhinili, which gradually transformed into important administrative center and military base of the Northern territories.

During the reign of **Rusa I** (735 – 714 BC)

Van grew to become a huge city. In the royal court alone 5,507 people lived there. According to the royal staff list 1,113 courtiers, 3,784 officials, 152 servants, 10 winemakers and 400 other people (apparently soldiers, craftsmen, and clergymen) occupied the royal court.

During the reign of the kings that followed, Assyrian and Cimmerian attacks, as well as raids of Medes and Scythians brought to decline of Kingdom of Van.

At that same time a wing of the House of Hayk which became known as **the Orontids (the Eruanduni)** seized the power and became the rulers of Urartu. **Orontas I (Yervand I)** declared **Armavir** as a capital of his kingdom.



Fig. 6 - Commemorative bronze medal struck in 1968. Averse - Argishti I wearing helmet. Reverse (left, copy) shows Argishti I in a royal chariot.

Armavir



We mentioned earlier that Argishti I built a city on the left bank of Yeraskh River and called it Argishtikhinili. But was the choice of the location random? Moses of Chorene attributes foundation of the city to Aramais, the grandson of Hayk Nahapet who built his house on the hill at the river bank naming it Armavir; he called the river Yeraskh in the name of his grandson, Yerast.

It was one of the largest cities of the time, a prominent economic, cultural, spiritual and military center. It occupied about 1,000 hectares together with its suburbs.



Figure 7. Site of ancient Armavir

village of Nor Armavir could be the ancient fortress of Armavir. Interest in the site increased with the discovery in 1869 of cuneiform tablets, which turned out to date from the time of Argishti I and Rusa III. In 1880, excavations at the Armavir hill began, conducted by imperial Russian archaeologists ahead of the Fifth Russian Archaeological Congress at Tiflis. They continued well into Soviet times; thus, in 1962 Academy of Science of Armenian SSR initiated new round of excavations which are still continue (fig. 8).



Figure 8. General view of remains at the archaeological site of ancient Armavir



Figure 9. Partial reconstruction of Yeruanduni Armavir

Excavations revealed many interesting finds. Thus, they showed that a palace complex for kings of the Yeruanduni dynasty became a many-roomed building on the eastern slope of the hill. The Urartian temple was then reconstructed and made the king's temple of Sun and Moon. In order to fortify the entry to the temple from the north-west side, a half-rounded turret was built down the slope, the stones of which were connected with each other by iron clamps which had the form of swallow's tail (fig. 9). In the West side of the fortress between the two fortress' walls lived rather modest people, the foundations of whose houses still remain. At the southern foot of the hill on two rocky blocks Greek inscriptions, which gave an account of political matters at the end of III BC, the worship of the God of the Sun in Armavir, and the innovations of the Hellenistic world were found.



Figure 10. Gilgamesh. Postal card issued by Luvre Museum

Other interesting finds include slabs with dramatized version of Gilgamesh epos written in Elamite language, some extracts of works by Hesiod and Euripides (in Greek). These finds allows to speculate that theatrical life of Armenia originated in Armavir.

With time, and as a result of the Scythian incursions the city lost its political importance and, subjected to repeated Scythian raids, was ultimately destroyed. To the decline of Armavir contributed the decision of the last Orontid king, Orontes (Eruand) IV (ca. 212-ca.

200 B.C.) to transfer the capital to the newly founded city of Eruandashat west of Armavir, supposedly because the Araxes had altered its course (and it did. Over the centuries, the river channel has shifted to several kilometers south of the town). Thereafter, Armavir gradually declined, although it remained a city well into the Roman period.

Dirt covered once beautiful residence creating a tall hill that hid it from sight.

Armavir became unsettled in the 13th century as a result of Mongol invasions (hence the name "abandoned capital"). Centuries later, Armenians living in the northern Caucasian villages set up a new city and in 1848, the city owned the name Armavir (now in Krasnodar Krai, Russia).

Excavations of Armavir have a long history. For over a hundred years (starting in the mid-19th century) the hill attracted attention of various researchers and archeologists. But it was the Swiss traveler Frédéric DuBois de Montperreux who in 1830s first suggested that a mound near the



Figure 7. DuBois de Montpèreux



Figure 11. Euripides

YERVANDASHAT



Owing to the change of course of the river to the south Yeruand moved his capital city to his newly founded city Yeruandashat, situated by the Akhuryan and Araxes rivers confluence. He surrounded the citadel with tall walls, fortified city entry gates with solid copper doors. To avoid shortage of water he dug deep orifices to the bottom of the hill to be able to collect water from the river in case of prolonged siege.

He ruled in difficult times; his power unsteady. So being cautious of conspirators Yeruand created several traps. Twenty one centuries later prominent Armenian architect Toros Toromanyan (fig. 12) noted that ruins of the city that are still present shows not only city's impregnable location, but his care for safety as well. Although



Figure 13. Antiochus III. Real photo postcard, written on the back and probably mailed in an envelope. Edition of National Museums, France.

the walls were attached to each other the ancient way (no binding solution was used, the stones were ideally close-fitting) they were also tied with iron pivots.

All these precautions did not help, when in 222 BC power-hungry Antiochus III ascended to the throne of the Seleucid Empire. Antiochus III instigated successful revolt against Yeruandes IV by two princes of his own royal house, Zareh (Zariadres) and Artashes (Artaxias). Two tribute-paying provinces appeared in Armenia: Greater Armenia to the East of Euphrates all the way to the Caspian Sea under Artashes and the province of Sophene under Zareh. The Battle of Magnesia (190 BC) put an end to Antiochus III military expansion. The Peace of Apamea (188 BC) divested him of all his possessions in Anatolia forever, leaving him within the borders of Syria. Following Antiochus III defeat, Artashes (fig. 14) immediately seized the Armenian throne and declared himself King of the Greater Armenia (188-159 BC). Fleeing from the Romans after the defeat at Zama



Figure 12. Toros Toromanyan

and having joined Antiochus III at the times of the battles, Greek commander Hannibal fled again, sought and received hospitality at the Armenian court.. He chose the place and created the plan for new city, thus giving birth to new capital of Armenia.

As ruins of Yeruandashat lie on the bordering territory with modern Turkey excavations have not been done for many decades, and not many artifacts have been unearthed. City was completely destroyed by the army of the Persian King Shapuh in the 360s AD.

ARTASHAT



Figure 14. Artashes II the Great. Divided back postcard. Printed in Italy, publisher T.A.V.

Hannibal (fig. 15) who found refuge at Artashes' court, repaid the king by suggesting a site which was singularly well situated and beautiful, but was lying unattended. "When he had taken initial measurements for a future city he called Artaxias, he showed him this site and convinced him to build there... A large and very beautiful city grew up, to which the king gave his name and declared it the capital of Armenia" (Plutarch). Thus the next capital of Armenia was born.

The city was founded in the Vostan Armenian province of Ayrarat state,



Figure 15. Imperforated souvenir sheet from Tunisia (1995), a masterpiece by engraver Czeslaw Slania.

at the confluence of the Yerashk and Metsamor rivers, 10 km south-west of present-day Artashat, near the Khor Virap monastery. Built on the hill of Khor Virap the citadel was surrounded by tremendous battlement, two-story high. Royal castle and the notable prison (huge stone pit 6 meter deep) were originally constructed there. But the city kept expanding; people built many palaces and temples, as well as regular dwellings. Heated baths took care of sanitation needs and provide for leisure enjoyment. Steam and smoke from the fireplaces down below would raise through clay pipes and heat the walls and floors of the baths. Workshops, like that of armor and weapon forgers, iron manufacturers, luxury dressmakers, goldsmiths, potters, and glass vats and vail producers made the city an important industrial and trade post. A special district was allocated for production of red dye, Armenian Cochineal (vordan karmir in Armenian, fig. 16) which was in high demand. Famous Silk Road (fig. 17) passed through Artashat and continued to Tigranakert (see below) and Mesopotamia by the so-called Arkunakan (Royal) Road. During its pick of growth city population counted more than 150,000 residents. It was still on the rise during the times of Kings Tigran Great, although in 77 BC he moved the capital to newly built city, Tigranakert.



Figure 16. Vordan Karmir – Armenian Cochineal

After his death and destruction of Tigranakert, in 69 BC Artavazd I moved capital back to Artashat. It also became a cultural center of Armenia; an amphitheater was built and theatrical life flourished in the city. This is



Figure 17. Souvenir Sheet and magnified image of the part of the souvenir sheet (right) showing the Silk Road passing through Greater and Lesser Armenia.



also supported by the fact that during performance of the *Bacchae* of Euripides the Greek actor Jason taking up Crassus' head, sang, *"We've hunted down a mighty chase today, And from the mountain bring the noble prey"*.

Artashat was several times destroyed. The most notable one was during one of many wars with Rome, when Emperor Nero sent General Corbulo with a large army to the East to restore Roman client kings in Armenia, Sophene, and Commagene. King Tiridates I fled from the capital, and Artashat was burned to the ground. But after catastrophic defeat of the Roman Army in 62 AD, to make peace, Nero invited Tiridates I to Rome. The Roman Government bore the entire cost of the journey of the king and his retinue, both from and to their homeland. Nero also made a gift of fifty million sesterces (close to \$5mln in today's money) to Tiridates I for reconstruction of the burned capital Artaxata.

In 368, however, King of Persia Shapur II destroyed Artashat for good, although the city was not the capital of Armenia any more.

TIGRANAKERT



Tigranoceta (Greek: Τυρανόκερτα, *Tigranókerta*; Tigranakert (Armenian: Տիգրանակերտ) (also called Cholimma or Chlomaron in antiquity) was the capital of the Armenian Kingdom between 77 and 69 BCE. It bore the name of Tigranes the Great (fig. 18), who founded the city in the first century BC. There is so far no common agreement on the precise location of Tigranakert; it was either near present-day Silvan, Arzan (Arzn, in the Armenian province of Arzanene or Aghdznik), east of Diyarbakır, Turkey, or in the valley of the Garzan river where is mentioned by T.A Sinclair. It was one of four cities in historic Armenia named Tigranakert. The others were in Nakhichevan, Artsakh and Utik, the 4 cities being in the old Armenian provinces Aldznik, Goghtn, Utik, Artsakh.

In 95 BC the Crown Prince Tigran, making territorial concession of Seventy Valleys to the Parthians bought his freedom and returned to Armenia. He was crowned as Tigran II at a location of his choice that kept many



Figure 18. Tigran II the Great. Divided back postcard. Printed in Italy, publisher T.A.V.

contemporaries wandering. Only two decades later the mystery was solved - he built new capital city of Armenia Tigranakert in that same location, which, as he planned while in captivity, would be relatively in the center of his future empire. Tigran II continued the policy of gathering together the ancient Armenian lands which was started by Artashes. He reunited Sophene with the Greater Armenia, but did not incorporate Lesser Armenia; Tigran II took all transportable possessions (goods and prisoners) to Armenia, but allowed it to unite with Pontus under Mithridates VI Eupator, thus creating a buffer state between Armenia and Rome, avoiding direct confrontation. The previous capital, Artashat, was now located in the eastern corner of Tigran's large territorial possessions, and was now isolated from the main trade routes to the South and West which were extremely important at the time.

Tigran thought that power of the kingdom comes from how the capital is built and how it looked. When the Empire was at its height he started the construction of new city which became the capital of his empire. It was also supposed to show the might of Tigran II and become the center of Armenian culture and civilization.

To create the city, Tigranes forced many people out of their homes to make up the population. Armenia at this time had expanded East to the Caspian Sea, West to central Cappadocia, and South towards Judea, advancing as far as the regions surrounding what is now the Krak des Chevaliers. The city's markets were filled with traders and merchants doing business from all over the ancient world. Tigranakert quickly became a very important commercial, as well as cultural center of the Near East. The magnificent theater that was established by the Emperor, of which he was an avid devotee, conducted dramas and comedies mostly played by Greek as well as Armenian actors. Plutarch wrote that Tigranakert was "a rich and beautiful city where every common man and every man of rank studied to adorn it". The Hellenistic culture during the Artaxiad Dynasty had a strong influence and the Greek language was in fact the official language of the court. Tigran had divided Greater Armenia – the nucleus of the Empire – into four major strategic regions or viceroyalties.



Figure 19. Tigran the Great surrounded by the four accompanying kings, by the Italian artist G. Fusaro, 1885. Undivided back postcard, printed in Venice, Italy. Rarely seen.

Gnaeus Pompeius Trogus, Gallo-Roman historian from the Celtic Vocontii tribe in Narbonese Gaul who lived during the reign of the emperor Augustus, speaks of Armenia (fig. 21):

It is impossible to pass over in silence such a large kingdom, since its size, after Parthia, surpasses the size of all other kingdoms. Namely: Great Armenia stretches from Cappadocia to the Caspian Sea for eleven hundred thousand steps; its width is seven hundred thousand steps.

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Figure 20. Map of Tigran the Great Empire



Figure 21. Tigran the Great surrounded by the four accompanying kings, by the Italian artist G. Fusaro, 1885. Undivided back postcard, printed in Venice, Italy. Rarely seen.

ablaze; beautiful theater was also destroyed in the fire. An abundant quantity of gold and silver was carried to Rome as war booty. Personally, Lucullus took most of the gold and silver from the melted down statues, pots, cups, as well as precious stones, which allowed him to continue his habits of banqueting. The word *lucullan* came to mean lavish, luxurious and gourmet.

The great city would never recover from this devastating destruction (fig. 22).
Artashat once again became the capital of Armenia.



Figure 22. Ruins of Tigranacerta

TO BE CONTINUED IN DECEMBER ISSUE



TWELVE CAPITALS OF ARMENIA: From Van to Yerevan

CONTINUED FROM JUNE 2021 ISSUE

By Igor Grigorian

In the previous issue of the Journal we presented first five capitals of Armenia, Tushpa/Van, Armavir, Yervandashat, Artaxata/Artashat and Tigranocerta/ Tigranakert. In this issue we continue the chronology. First part of the Vagharshapat article is written by Anzhela Tadevosyan-Gnuni, second part is authored by Igor Grigorian.

VAGHARSHAPAT



The reader already know that after devastating destruction of Tigranakert Artashat became the capital of Armenia again. It is arguably the only city that during its history was built, destroyed, rebuilt only to be destroyed again. So in 120 AD Vagharshapat was declared capital of Armenia and carried that banner for 210 years. So what do we know about this city that survived and flourished until today?

Vagharshapat (also called the Township of Vardges, Etchmiadzin, etc.) is currently 18 km west of Yerevan (now Armavir Marz of the Republic of Armenia). The city is located practically in the center of the fertile Ararat valley (Fig. 23). The territory on which the ancient city arose and is now located has been rich in water resources since antiquity, in particular, one of the branches (now dried up) of the Kasakh River flowed through the territory of the present city. The territory of the city, like the entire Ararat valley, was covered with forests, as evidenced by paleo-zoological finds from ancient settlements. Excavations of the Teghut settlement (Fig. 24) located in the southwestern outskirts of the city show evidence that the first settlements on the territory of present-day Echmiadzin appeared in the Neolithic, at the beginning of the 4th millennium BC. During the excavations the remains of dwellings, stone, and human bones were found. Of particular interest are items made from metal, a dagger and needles.



Figure 24 - Finds at Teghut excavations

Neolithic materials were also found in the northern part of the city.

During the next period, the Early Bronze Age (second half of the 4th - first half of the 3rd millennium BC), the territory of the modern city was covered with a dense network of settlements. Not far from Echmiadzin, on the Mohrablur (Ash Hill) hill, a large settlement of the Early Bronze Age was excavated in

the center of which there was a tower-sanctuary with an obelisk towering the structure. One of the largest settlements of the Early Bronze Age was Shresh



Figure 23 - Ararat Valley

Bloor, located on the northeastern outskirts of the city. Objects typical to the Early Bronze Age were also found on the territory of the Mother Cathedral, churches of St. Hripsime and St. Gayane, as well as at Teghut.

Centuries passed, the inhabitants left their homes and burial grounds arose on the territory of the settlements. Vast graveyards were found on the territory of Teghut and Shresh Blur settlements. In the central part of the modern city, on Mesrop Mashtots Street, burials of the 2nd millennium BC were excavated. A phallic idol, symbol of fertility, was found not far from it.

The fertile Ararat valley has been the breadbasket of Armenia for centuries. Rulers of Urartu, covering the entire region with a dense network of irrigation canals. One of them originated from the Hrazdan River (Ildaruni in Urartian) and reached Zvartnots, as evidenced by the Urartian wedge-shaped inscription about the posting of a canal for irrigation of the Kualini gardens, as well as the puluse ("inscription" in Urartian – ed.) stele found under the altar of the Cathedral.

Fast forward. The next milestone in the development of the city was the founding of the city of Vardgesavan. According to the information provided by the Armenian historian of the 5th century Movses Khorenatsi (fig. 24), the city was founded during the reign of Yervand Sakavakiats (570–560 BC) by his son-in-law Manuk Vardges (Vardges the Young) on the Shresh Bloor. The city flourished in the last century BC, especially during the reign of King Tigran the Great (95-45 BC, Fig. 25) growing into a village town.



Figure 24 - Movses Khorenatsi on the USSR issued postal stationery.



Figure 25 - Tigran the Great

The location of Shresh Bloor has long remained a mystery. It was suggested that Shresh Bloor was located on the territory of the current Cathedral. Outstanding historian Abel Archbishop Mkhitarian did not exclude that Shresh Bloor was located in the Red Hills not far from Vagharshapat, where the ruins of Metsamor, the largest settlement of the Bronze Age, were later discovered. However, at the beginning of the 19th century, historian Mesrop Tagiadyan localized Vardgesavan to the northeast of Vagharshapat. Excavations of 1913,

1927, 1945, and 1965 revealed a multilayer settlement that existed from the beginning of the 4th century BC. In 1965 and 1980 archaeologist R. Torosyan unearthed the remains of fortifications, as well as a number of residential quarters dating back to the last centuries BC - first centuries AD. The borders of the city stretched to the walls of St. Gayane church, where the remains of buildings and ceramics were discovered. According to Movses Khorenatsi, the area of Vagharshapat was known as *Artimed*, derived from the ancient Greek deity Artemis (fig. 26).

Vagharsh I Arshakouni (117-140) of Arsacid dynasty fenced Vardgesavan, renovated, renamed Vagharshapat and made it the capital in 120 AD. The town's citadel occupied approximately the fenced territory of the present-day Etchmiadzin monastery (Fig. 27).

In 163 AD the Romans occupied Armenia and moved the main city from the destroyed

Artashat to Vardgesavan. They rebuilt the city and named it Cayenopolis, New City. The city center was located, in all likelihood, on the territory of the modern day Cathedral. This is evidenced by the Latin inscriptions found near the building of the Theological Academy. Greek inscription, as well as seal of the IV Scythian Legion,



Figure 26 - Artemis

among other findings, testify to years of Roman occupation.

King Vagharsh rebuilt the city according to the principles of



Figure 28 - Mihr (Mithra)

ancient urban planning. Many modern streets coincide with the streets of the 2nd century. According to ancient tradition Mihr Temple (fig. 28) was located in front of the entrance to the city. It is speculated that the antique temple was in the place of today's Hripsime church (fig. 29).

To the east of the temple stretched a vast burial ground, and to the west, in the direction of the Cathedral, an agricultural



Figure 29 - St. Hripsime Church

streets, Southern Gate was located. The city had battlements with strong towers; several work-shops, an antique temple, and cemeteries remained outside of the walls.

As we see, Vagharshapat was a major center of pagan religion. South of the royal palace, outside the city limits, on



Figure 27 - St. Hripsime

the site of the church of St. Gayane was another pagan temple. The Temple of the Moon was located north of the palace. This is evidenced by the round sculpture of the lunar deity. According to archaeologist R. Torosyan, stones with bowl-shaped depressions were used to make the sacred drink, haoma.

It was here that St. Hripsime (Fig. 27) and other ascetics of the new faith, fleeing the persecution of the emperor Diocletian. The ascetics chose the agricultural outskirts of the city as their habitat and the center of their missionary activities. According to a medieval historian Agatangeghos, King Trdat III (Fig. 28) amazed by the beauty of St. Hripsime wanted to marry her. However, the Christian virgin refused to become a wife to a pagan king, which caused the martyrdom of the entire community. The death of the Christian community made a depressing impression on all residents of the city, on the royal family. The



Figure 28 - King Trdat III



Figure 27 - Fenced territory of the monastery

belt - vineyards and wine press shops. Not far from the current intersection of Mashtots and Spandaryan streets, the main city gate, Areg Dur (Gate of the Sun), was built. From here in the direction of the royal palace ran the main city street Bun Poghot (Old Avenue). The Royal Palace was located on the site of the current Cathedral, on the top of a small hill, bordered on three sides by the sleeves of the Kasakh River. The safety of citadel was also ensured by a moat filled with water. On the site of the Patriarchal Palace there was a royal palace. To the east of the palace, on the site of the Cathedral, there was a pagan temple, and the royal bath to the east. The space between the temple, and later the Cathedral, formed a vast area. To the south of the royal palace, at the intersection of the present Shahumyan and Kamo

situation was aggravated by the fact that the king fell seriously ill. According to historians, the royal court was struck by elephant disease. Under these conditions, on the initiative of the Great Queen Ashkhen and the king's sister, Princess Khosrovdukht, Gregory son of Anak the Parthian (later known as St. Gregory the Illuminator, Fig. 29) imprisoned in the Artashat prison (Khor Virap) was released and the king who recovered his sight decided to convert to Christianity. He met St. Gregory on the royal road leading from Artashat to Vagharshapat, where the Zvartnots temple (Fig. 30) was later built. The primary task of St. Gregory was the

burial of the relics of the holy virgins and the construction of shrines, which were built on the site of ascetics' death.

It was here in the year 301 that the representative assembly of all strata of Armenian society, headed by King Trdat officially addressed St. Gregory with a request to take the patriarchal dignity. It was here, on the road to Vagharshapat (at the site of the Martyrdom of the Virgin Marianne, not far from the Gate of the Sun) *The Vision* (Shoghakat) appeared to St. Gregory, in which Lord indicated with a fiery hammer the place of construction of the Cathedral (Fig. 30). It was here that another clergy meeting entrusted St. Mesrop Mashtots to begin work on the creation of the Armenian script. The significance of the city grew especially after the declaration of Christianity as a state religion in Armenia (301 AD), and Echmiadzin Cathedral was founded in 302-303.

Although capital of Armenia was moved to Dvin by King Khosrov III Kotak (332-338) in 336 Vagharshapat became spiritual capital of Armenia and still holds this title.

The next stage of church building in Vagharshapat is associated with the name of St. Sahak Partev, a descendant of St. Gregory and 10th Catholicos (387-436). The result of his activities was the reconstruction of the Cathedral, construction of churches at the site of the martyrdom of St. Hripsime and at the site of the apparition of *The Vision* of St. Gregory.

Construction in Vagharshapat continued by the Catholicos Komitas (610-628). The culmination of his activity was the construction of a new church of St. Hripsime, which has been striking for 1600 years with its beauty and perfection of proportions. A little later his successor Catholicos Ezz built a temple in the place of the death of St. Gayane.



Figure 29 - St. Grigor the Illuminator



Figure 30 - Lord showing the place of construction of the Cathedral, St. Gregory and King Trdat III. Divided back lithographed picture postcard. Cliche by Priest Hofsepiyan, Series 1a, No. 11, Galati, Romania. Circa 1920s.

In 652 Catholicos Nerses the Builder moved his residence near Vagharshapat and built a temple at the meeting place of Trdat III and St. Gregory. The temple was dedicated to the Heavenly Host (Zvartnots). The construction of the temple was unique to the Armenian architecture; it was a huge three-tiered building round in plan. Even today, the ruins of Zvartnots are striking in their majesty and scale. Along with the temple, the Patriarch's Palace and outbuildings were built.



Figure 30 - St. Sahak and his apprentices later known as *The Translators*. Divided back postcard printed by the Armenian Patriarchat of Jerusalem, circa 1920s

With some interruption the city has held the seat of Catholicos of All Armenians.

Vagharshapat continued to flourish until the Arab invasion when the city was constantly destroyed and rebuilt by the House of Bagratuni. It was destroyed again and again when Seljuks came from the East only to be followed by similar acts by Mongols, Tatars and other nomadic people. One of the sources mention that Mongols burnt the Mother Cathedral and surrounding city.

With the fall of the Armenian Cilician Kingdom in 1375 and Konstantin moving to Cypress from Sis in 1426 it became clear that moving the seat of Catholicos protected

by the Armenian kings became unreasonable and dangerous. That is when the Armenian clergy and political figures had to deploy new strategy.

For almost two centuries Vagharshapat along with most of Armenia fell under the rule of two Turkmen tribes, Kara-Koyunlu (1374 – 1468) and Ak Koyunlu (1378-1503). In 1431 Prince Orbelian who enjoyed highest respects and hold senior ranks during the Kara-Koyunlu period gifted seven large villages to the monastery. In 1441 twelve bishops, eighteen archimandrites, and more than 300 clergy, princes, reach people and representatives of common folks walked 19 km (11.4 miles) from Yerevan to Etchmiadzin where they had a council and restored the seat of Catholicos to Echmiadzin. Once again the city became the spiritual center of Armenia.

Another death blow came to Armenia and Vagharshapat in 1604 when Shah Abbas II violently relocated Armenians to Persia. The goal was for the attacking Turks to find burnt grounds instead of flourishing villages. While Shah Abbas appropriated the riches of Echmiadzin the European missionaries tried to obtain the spiritual relics. Most of the relics stolen from the tomb of St. Hripsime were recovered, but a few ended up in India's Goa Province, and a temple was built upon them.

Shah Abbas ordered to remove all stones of the Mother Cathedral to be used to rebuild the church in Isfahan, but the task was too large to accomplish, so only 15 stones reached Isfahan in 1615. A decade later in 1627 patriots gathered around Bishop Movses (who later became Catholicos) to restore the places of warship in Vagharshapat. Bishop Movses rebuilt the monastery, added some outbuildings and raised a wall.

But Armenia again met ill fate. In 1636 new Turkish-Persian war started and all wooden parts of the monastery buildings were burnt. So the new Catholicos Pilipos ordered all wooden structures of the monastery to be replaced by stones; even the table where clergy ate and their sits were also constructed from stone.

18th century saw the third player on the military theater in Armenia. Russia joined traditional deconstructive forces, Turks and Persians. In 1804 Russian army under Tsitsianov's command tried to enlarge Empire's boundaries and besieged Yerevan, to no avail. He was forced to retreat to Tiflis, and on its way back ransacked Echmiadzin. In 1805 General Nesvetaev was ordered to march on Erivan Khanate and spent three days in Echmiadzin. It is witnessed by letters written by two monks to Minas Lazarian that many of the monastery riches were appropriated before the general completed his mission to aid Jafar Qoli Khan of Khoi Dynasty who was seeking Russian allegiance.

1827 saw Ararat Valley, Vagharshapat and Yerevan become again a theater of military action. Walled monastery of Echmiadzin was a perfect military base for the Russian army; they even opened a hospital there for wounded soldiers. Five light cannons and a reserve battalion were stationed there. The result – the Treaty of Turkmenchay.

Persia ceded the control of Erivan, Nakhichevan and the remainder of the Talish Khanates to Russia.

The rest of the century was relatively peaceful, so many visitors, scientists and pilgrims came to Echmiadzin to learn and see biblical Mount Ararat. Professor Johann Jacob Friedrich Wilhelm Parrot from Dorpat (Tartu) University was among the first to arrive. He undertook climbing to the summit of the Ararat Mountain, and was accompanied by Khachatur Abovian, prominent Armenian writer.

Refugees fleeing massacres of 1895-1896 in Ottoman Empire found their refuge in Echmiadzin. They got their first aid at the monastery. Another wave of refugees followed when the Genocide of the Armenians in Turkey started in 1915.

During the Soviet period in the history of Armenia the role of Echmiadzin-Vagharshapat strengthened in both national and international arena. Pilgrims of many nationalities from all over the world visit Vagharshapat for its beautiful Mother Cathedral and its treasury, relics like Spear of Longinus, right hand of St. Gregory, encased in a golden



Figure 32 - Zvartnots

arm, churches of St. Hripsime, St. Gayane, and Shoghakat, ruins of Zvartnots cathedral. In 2000 Etchmiadzin Mother Cathedral, Churches of St. Hripsime and St. Gayane, as well as ruins of Zvartnots were designated by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites (Fig. 33).



Figure 32 - UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Etchmiadzin

DVIN



For some time, Armenia had dual capitals, Vagharshapat and Artashat. While Artashat was more political capital, Vagharshapat was considered spiritual capital of Armenia.

In the beginning of 30s in the IV Century then ruling Armenian King Khosrov III Kotak (332-338) started building new city, Dvin, and in the year 336 moved his royal court from Artashat there declaring Dvin capital of Armenia. Why was such a move necessary? The reason was the climate of Artashat. Surrounded by numerous swamps Artashat became susceptible to deadly diseases, while the territory he chose for new capital was dry and hot. To soften the climate he planted large forests, inhabited them with wild animals, and made them royal hunting grounds. They still exist as *Khosrovi Antar* (Forest of Khosrov, Fig. 33) and the area is designated as nature reserve.

Ancient Armenian literary sources almost always give the name of the ancient city of Dvin as *Dowin*, although *Dwin* or *Duin* were eventually widespread. The territory of Dvin has been a settlement since V millennium BC. There are even traces of cyclopean battlements of 2-1 millenniums BC. Also, there are the remains and objects of religious buildings of the pre-Christian era, such as a mausoleum with fragments of stone statues and sculptures.



Figure 33. Khosrov Reserve



Figure 34. Reconstruction of the city

tory of Dvin are the serpent bracelets, chain necklaces, rings, earrings, silver belts, and jugs. Also, ceramics and pottery were so developed that the masters were producing pots of even 1,000 liters capacity. The continuous upheavals, which characterized the history of Armenia, the church center, the Catholicosate moved to different locations together with the political authority. Thus, in 485, it was transferred to the new capital Dvin, and remained there until mid-10th century. Figure 35 shows drawing of the central square of the capital with the main St. Grigor Cathedral (3rd - 5th century), small St. Sarkis Church (to the right, 6th Century), and the residence of the Catholicos (to the left, 5th century).

Several years of war with Persians brought Romans no success and they were forced to make peace. Romans and Persians soon

come to the agreement of dividing Armenian lands between them with the most part going to Persians. In 428 Persian ruler Varakhran V turned Armenia into a province of Sasanid state and put an end to Arshakid dynasty. Armenia lost her independence for 5 centuries, although Dvin continued to play significant role as a part of Marzpanate under Persians.



Figure 35. Central Square Reconstruction



Figure 36. Border as defined in 591

Citadel with powerful battlements and the lower fortress were main defensive installations (fig. 34). Between them, high-ranking people, officials and military personnel were quartered. The lower fortress parapets were enormous, 12-15 meters thick and 15-20 meters high. There were also solid and strong towers in the four water from Azat River. All parts of the city received water from the surrounding mountains via clay tubes.

During its flourishing years, Dvin had more than 100,000 inhabitants. It quickly became the center of advanced craftsmanship. The earliest evidence of goldsmiths' mas-

As Armenia was perpetually battled over by regional powers for its important strategic position, so, too, wealthy Dvin attracted the covetous ambitions of foreign rulers. In 591 CE a repartition of Armenia was drawn up between the Byzantine Empire and the Sassanids (fig. 36). Under the new agreement, Dvin suddenly became a frontier city between the two spheres of influence and, as a result, disputed territory. In 636, the new power in the region, the Arab Rashidun Cali-

phate, won an impressive victory against Byzantine Emperor Heraclius at Yarmak. The Arabs, seemingly risen from nowhere, were led by the brilliant general Khalid who had forged a formidable and highly mobile army using camels, and in October 640 he attacked and captured Dvin. Armenia was now part of the Rashidun Empire. For the next three centuries Dvin became residence of caliphate of the Arminia administration, and so-called policeman was given rights to strike his own copper and silver coins, some with *Dabil* (Dvin), some with *Arminia* impressions.

According to Arab writers, Dvin produced and exported to foreign countries numerous goods; international long-range traders took up temporary residence as the city was located on the well-established trade routes between China, India, Persia, and the Mediterranean. Mixing with the Armenians were Syrians, Jews, Persians, Arabs, Kurds, Turks, and Georgians, amongst others. Imported goods included silk, spices, medicines, and gems while the major exports were horses, grain, wine, oil, metals, and textiles. The dimensions of the city's trade and its range are attested by the number and variety of coins excavated at the site in modern times.

Following the establishment of the Kingdom of Bagratuni in Armenia (885) and regaining its independence (for only three centuries), Dvin lived a new economic upsurge, although Ashot Bagratuni refrained from declaring Dvin his capital. He felt that Dvin lacked security, and the diverse population made it hard to control. He declared impregnable fortress city Shirakavan as his capital.



Figure 31. Queen Tamar. The broken plate made this stamp known as "Sleeping Tamar".

Dvin suffered badly from catastrophes. The huge earthquake of 892 CE destroyed much of Dvin and killed tens of thousands of the inhabitants. The catastrophe was the third large earthquake in the region in the last half-century. The *Catholicos*, his palace in ruins, was obliged to move out. With the city and region in chaos, the Sadjid emir of Azerbaijan, Afshin, took advantage and invaded Armenia, easily capturing Dvin, which had neither defenses nor defenders. The city was made into a military base and thereafter remained part of various independent emirates, not Armenia proper. For few years Dvin even fell under the reign of Georgian Queen Tamar (fig. 37). Several attempts by Armenian kings to recapture Dvin failed, and the city was abandoned to its fate under foreign rule. Nevertheless, the city continued as an important civic center until its destruction during the Mongol invasion of 1236 and definitive abandonment.

B A G A R A N



According to Movses Khorenatsi, the last representative of the Yervanduni royal dynasty, Yervand IV built Bagaran in the beginning of the 2nd century BC. Located at the northeastern end of the Arsharunik canton of the Ayarat province on the right bank of the Akhuryan River (now in Turkey) Bagaran, was established as a religious center nearby of Yervandashat, to which all the idols were transferred by King's brother, Yervaz-Mithras, who was the High Priest of the temples of the Sun and the Moon at Armavir.

As Yervandashat and Bagaran were in close proximity of each other, Yervand ordered to plant a big forest around Bagaran and surrounded it by stone walls. He brought fast running goats, deer, and boars making it royal

hunting grounds and called the forest Tsndots (Born). Bagaran had a citadel with thick parapets around which the city was spread.

When Artashes I seized the Armenian throne he needed to subdue all cities to his rule. Bagaran did not escape this fate; Artashes won the battle with Yervand the Last and moved his army to Bagaran. He drowned Yervaz-Mithras



Figure 32 Saint Theodore Church of Bagaran, before 1923

in Akhurian River tying a millstone around his neck, took all idols and treasures from the temples and transported them to Artashat, his newly established capital.

But the life did not stop in Bagaran, by 8th century Bagaran continued to be a large city although Dvin continued to be much more densely populated and important. A small city was built around the parapets of the citadel. After adopting Christianity as state religion. Several churches were built in Bagaran, St. Theodore's (fig. 32), St. Gevork's, St. Shushanik's, and others, St. Theodore's being the most significant of all. It was built by Prince But Araveghian in circa 624. In 1909 famous architect Toros Toromanyan wrote, "As other glorious historical monuments this shrine was also destined to neglect, destruction, and havoc..."

After fall of the Arsacid/Arshakuni Dynasty Armenia lost its independence for over four centuries. At the time, two very strong houses (that of Bagratuni and Artsruni) were fighting with Arabs for domination in Armenia. With his ties to Iberian kings, Artsruni and Syuni families, and being able to raise a large army Ashot was given the title of Prince of Princes of Armenia by the Abbasid Caliph al-Musta'in. And of course the Arabs had their hidden intentions; they needed a strong hand to take control of local emirs. Later, in 885 he was crowned King of Arminia (he later became known as Ashot I the Great *Msaker*, or *Carnivorous*) through the consent of Caliph al-Mu'tamid. The act was again in the interests of the Caliphate; Arabs wanted to prevent Byzantium intrusion in Armenian territory by Basil I, a Byzantine emperor of Armenian origin.

In 885 he moved his residency to Bagaran, making it the 8th capital of Armenia. He died in 890 while traveling to Gugark to stop another rebellion. Contemporary historian Hovhannes Draskhanakerttsi gives an account of his death:

Since he died on the road, in an inn at a rocky place called K'arsparn, they carried away his body in a coffin and brought it to the town (awan) of Bagaran, the royal residence, where they covered the coffin with robes and veils interwoven and adorned with gold; and carefully selected detachments of military forces clad in arms and ornaments stood guard. The great katholikos, accompanied by the rest of the clerics of the church, also came forth and solemnly chanted psalms and raised the voice of [their] praise. His three sons, the senior [gaherec'] princes of the royal house and other friends followed the coffin, and thus they arrived at the cemetery....Then, building a tomb [suitable] for royalty, they buried him in the cemetery of his ancestors.



Figure 33. Tamerlane on Uzbekistan 1994

Upon his death the capital was moved to Shirakavan by his heir Smbat I. And while Bagaran continued to flourish during all 160 years of the reign of Bagratuni dynasty, just after three years following the fall of the dynasty, in 1048 it was overrun by the Seljuks who destroyed the city and plundered it. Tamerlane's (Fig. 33) conquest dealt the last blow after which the city never recovered.

At the beginning of the 20th century only a small village of 300 souls remained in Bagaran.

Around 1920 in the course of the Armenian-Turkish war the remaining inhabitants crossed the river to avoid certain death and established new village 8 km up the river flow giving it the name Bagaran.



Another remnant of the old city

SHIRAKAVAN



In the VII century Armenian historian Sebeos described Shirakavan (known at the time as Yerazgavors) as a village in the Shirak canton of the Ayrarat province of Armenia Major (this is the first historical mention of the city). According to the Georgian chronical Leonti Mroveli it was yet inhabited in the III-IV centuries BC, as during Artashes I time the Georgian king with the help of other highlanders plundered Armenian cities, including



Figure 34. Council of Chalcedon

Shirakavan. Located about 25 km Northeast of Ani on the right bank of Akhurian River it developed into a small town in the mid-ninth century.

That the city was an important site before becoming a capital is proved by the fact that as early as in 869 (862 per Wikipedia) Katholikos Zakaria Tsagetsi invited a religious council (named later Council of Shirakavan) which rejected Photius's proposal to accept the Chalcedonian creed (Fig. 34).

As we mentioned above, after the death of Ashot I the throne was inherited by his son, Smbat I. He moved his capital to Shirakavan around 890. In 892 he received

his crown from the Caliph, as his father did before him, and a pompous coronation. Many gifts of clothes and other riches were received from the Caliph himself.

As there were no regular excavations conducted at the site (since 1920 it is located within Turkish borders) little information is available about the city and its inhabitants (similar to the history of Bagaran). We know that Smbat I built St. All-Savior (Surb Amenaprkich, Fig. 35-37) church and was baptized there. At a later date the church was converted into a fortified tower. During this conversion the eastern niches and many of the windows were filled in, and the corners of the church were heightened. An external staircase was also added at the northern end of the west façade. The dome of the church had collapsed by the 19th century. Nikolai Marr noted the remains of the polygonal drum of the original dome. That dome had collapsed at a distant period and had been replaced by a conical dome with a smaller diameter. The replacement dome had also mostly collapsed and had been replaced by a covering of wooden beams that were, by 1913, rotten and about to fail. Marr wrote As there were no regular excavations conducted at the site (since 1920 it is located within Turkish borders) little information is available about the city and its inhabitants (similar to the history of Bagaran).

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Figure 35. St All-Savior Church view from Southeast

diameter. The replacement dome had also mostly collapsed and had been replaced by a covering of wooden beams that were, by 1913, rotten and about to fail. Marr wrote that at that time the building was undergoing repairs and was being converted into the village's parish church. He mentions that during those repairs the villagers had dug up many architectural fragments, but none had been recorded and most had just been reused in new buildings. In 1914 the architect N. Bouniatov undertook a detailed measured survey of the Shirakavan church, producing a plan, elevations, cross-sections, and drawings illustrating some of its architectural details. Here are two of Bouniatov's drawings: a cross-section along the nave, and a depiction of the west façade. The church had a rather archaic "domed-hall" plan that was similar to examples dating from the 7th century (such as Aruch). Other archaic features included having three windows in the apse.



Figure 36. Cross-section along the nave

Side chambers with semicircular east walls flanked the apse. The church stood as a beautiful monument of the early Armenian architecture until 1950s when it was deliberately destroyed by Turkish military during the artillery exercises. It would be logical to have some defense to protect the city from invasion, so Tignis fortress was



Figure 37. Depiction of the west façade

built. Although two different theories exist (giving two different construction dates – mid-ninth century and



Figure 38. Tignis Fortress. Divided back picture postcard, circa 1915. Published by the Ani Museum of Antics, Series 3. Photo by Dressler.

mid-eleventh century) we favor the one claiming it was constructed to protect Shirakavan from enemies (fig. 38). The history of the fortress is unknown, as there are no medieval sources that mention it and there were no surviving inscriptions on the walls. Local Muslims removed the stones for their build-

ing purposes, so inscriptions are probably lost forever. The fortress later served as part of the defensive



Figure 39. Monument to Ashot the Iron in Ijevan.

ring around Ani, which later became capital of Armenia.

Shirakavan served as a capital for 40 years, during the reigns of Smbat I and his son Ashot II the Iron. Both kings fought Arabs, the Byzantines and were instrumental in securing independence of Armenia. They spent more time in the regions of Armenia than had time to enjoy peaceful life in the capital. For his role in history Ashot the Iron received a title of the *Guardian of the Armenian Army* in 2012 and a monument in Ijevan..

Shirakavan was destroyed by Seljuk Turks in 1060, but was rebuilt by the Zakarids in the 12th century. By the beginning of the 20th century Shirakavan shrank to a village with 1,200 inhabitants. After Kars province was transferred to Turkey Shirakavan awaited the same fate. Its residents moved to Soviet Armenia and most of them settled in a village currently known as Yerazgavors in Shirak province.

TO BE CONTINUED



TWELVE CAPITALS OF ARMENIA: From Van to Yerevan

Continued from June & December 2021 issues

By Igor Grigorian

In the previous issues of the Journal we presented first nine capitals of Armenia, from Tushpa/Van to Shirakavan. In this issue we continue the chronology.

K A R S



Since ancient times Kars has been a battle ground for many powers. Edward Gibbon, 18th century English

writer (Fig.40), in his work *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* referred to Kars as a 'theater of perpetual war'. Kars has been at the cross-roads and the edge of Greco-Roman and later Byzantine world to the west, and Persians (later Abbasids), Seljuk, Mongols world to the east and south, thus becoming a sight of much bloodshed and plunder.

We couldn't find any reference as to when Kars was first settled or founded.

But rock carvings and paintings testify that Kars was inhabited from the ancient times (Fig.41).

Kars, located on a plateau 5,470 feet (1,750 m) above sea level is situated on the Kars River, tributary of the Aras River, just 50 km to the north-west of Ani.

It has been seat of the House of Vanand from ancient times. Having a great military significance Kars was an important obstacle against Byzantian attacks and those from east-south. It was logical for enemies of the independent Armenia to create unsta-

ble situation there. When Kars princes rebelled under Sahak Mleh Vanandetsi Ashot I took away their domains and Kars became the seat of his brother Sparapet (Military Commander) Abas Bagratuni who strengthened the citadel and built new palace for himself. As a seat of Sparapet royal army was stationed at Kars. The attempt to seize the crown from his nephew after the death of King Ashot failed, and Smbat remained King of Armenia.

Smbat I ruled in uneasy times; wars and battles became his legacy. After one of his defeats nobles' armies were all scattered, and seizing this favorable moment Emir Afshin of Atropatakan marched into Georgia through Utik and Gugark thus threat-

ening Armenian Kingdom from behind. Armenian nobles fortified their own citadels and were fighting the enemy with fury. Although local battles may have been won, the war was lost. In 897 Afshin besieged Kars where amongst other noble women was the Armenian Queen; royal

treasury was also kept in Kars. Smbat I was unable to gather the scattered troops and had to seek refuge in Taik. After persistent struggle, having believed Amir Afshin promises of freedom and safety governor Hasan Gntuni surrender the city, but



Fig.40 -
Edward Gibbon



Fig.41 - Rock Carvings from Kars

the queen, noble women and he himself were taken captive and had to follow the Emir to Dvin. Peace between Smbat I and the Emir Afshin bore a heavy price. To get back his queen and Hasan Gntuni Smbat had to surrender his heir Ashot, his brother Sahak's son Smbat, give his other brother Shapuh's daughter's hand in marriage. He was later able to free his son Ashot.

The peace did not last long. In 909, after the death of Emir Afshim, his brother Yusuf Ibn Abi'l-Saj became *Ostikan* of Arminiya. While Yusuf's reign was not immediately hostile, Smbat committed a series of blunders that led to several of his allies to turn their backs on him: having sought to placate his eastern ally, Smbat of Syunik, by ceding to him Nakhichevan city, Smbat inadvertently drove Gagik Artsruni of Vaspurakan into Yusuf's arms since the city was a part of Gagik's domains. Yusuf took advantage of this feud by awarding Gagik a crown in 908, thus making him King Gagik I of Vaspurakan and creating an Armenian state opposed to the one led by Smbat. Yusuf began a new campaign against Smbat together with Gagik in 909; neither the Byzantines nor the Abbasid caliph, Yusuf's nominal sovereign, sent aid to Smbat; several Armenian princes also chose to withhold their support. Those who did ally with Smbat were brutally dealt with by Yusuf; they were all poisoned. Yusuf's army ravaged the rest of Armenia as it advanced toward Berd Kapoyt (Blue Fortress), where Smbat had taken refuge, and besieged it for some time. Smbat finally decided to surrender himself to Yusuf in 914 in hopes of ending the Arab onslaught. Yusuf, showing no compassion toward his prisoner, brought him to Yernjak, tortured the Armenian king to

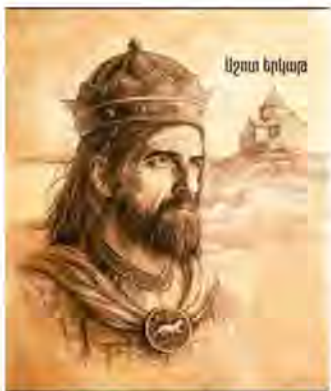


Fig.41 - Ashot II Iron

II able to defeat his Arab invaders, at the same time harshly dealing with inner rebellions, hence his nickname Ashot Yerkat (Ashot the Iron). He died childless, so Abas was proclaimed King of Armenia (928-953).

Abas decided not to move to Shirakavan, stayed in

death, beheaded him, and put the headless body on display on a cross in Dvin. After Smbat's tragic death his son Ashot was proclaimed King of Armenia (914-928). He appointed his loyal ally Gevork Marzpetuni as Sparapet and his brother Abas as Governor of Kars. Time and again was King Ashot

Kars and proclaimed Kars as his capital. His reign was relatively peaceful. As neighboring emirates became mostly independent states and fought each other for power domination, while Byzantium was busy fighting Arabs and other invading forces, not to mention inner rebellions and attempts for enthronement, Armenia was to enjoy some favorable conditions.

Abas started large scale construction in his new capital. Royal palace and other important buildings were located in the citadel, while around it a heart of the city was already being formed. He also erected a Holy Apostles Church on the bank of the Kars River (Fig.42). Today, eleven centuries later, the building is still there; the church has converted three times to a mosque, once to a Russian Orthodox Church, was briefly resurrected as an Armenian church, and then turned into petroleum depot, then into a museum, then again into a mosque.



Fig.42 - Holy Apostles Church

After the death of King Abas he was succeeded by Ashot III Voghormats (Merciful). In spite of his failure to free Dvin from the Muslims he took steps to centralize power in the kingdom. In 961 he proclaimed Ani the capital of the kingdom, thus ending history of Kars as capital of Armenia.

During his reign a new phenomenon should draw our attention – creation of sub-kingdoms. As such, Vanand Kingdom was declared in 963 under his brother Mushegh, and administrative district of Dzoraget on the banks of Lake Sevan (Fig.43) was ruled by Ashot's son Gurgen. The proliferation of so many kingdom worked for the benefit of Armenia as long as the king in Ani remained strong and maintained his hegemony over other kings.

Kars outlived Ani, it was never abandoned completely. The Armenians, the Greeks, the Georgians (to a much lesser degree), the Arabs, the Mongols, the Persians, the Turks, the Kurds, and

the Russians populated Kars at any given period of time, with the numbers of Armenian residents being significantly larger than any other ethnicity before 1920s, when the Armenians were driven from Kars for good.

Kars fell in 1065, and until the second half of the 12th century was dominated by Seljuk Turks (Fig. 44). Tired of their constant invasions King of Vanand



Fig.44 - Seljuk Turk

Gagik Karsetsi surrendered Kars and surrounding areas to Byzantium and moved to Capadocia. Shortly after Kars changed hands and became part of Seljuk Empire. In the early 13th century joint Armenian-Georgian army under command of Zakarian brothers surrounded and captivated Kars, which was joint to Georgia and given

to the son of Queen Tamar. The rest of the lands were given to the Zakarian brothers. In 1236 Mongol under Tamerlane occupied the city; it is known that an Armenian prince was governing Kars, so as with other places Mongols probably gave a great deal of autonomy to the major Armenian population.

After the collapse of the Mongolian Empire in 1534 Kars



Fig.45 - Queen Tamar.
Due to broken plate
this error is known as
"Sleeping Tamar".



Fig.46 - Suleiman Magnificent

In 1745 during the Ottoman-Persian war Nadir Shah of Persia completely and utterly defeated the Ottoman

Army, but was unable to conquer Kars which remained within borders of the Ottoman Empire.

With gradual Russian conquest of the Caucasus Kars became a strategic and heavily fortified town, a key to Anatolia. Three times Kars fell in the hands of Russians, in 1828 (Fig.47), 1855 and again in 1877. It is the decisive victory of the Russian army under General Hovhannes (Ivan) Lazarev that made it possible to annex Kars to the Russian Empire, and a new Russian district was created.



Fig.47 - Siege of Kars in 1828. Painter Yanuariy Sukhdolski

Kars flourished. A general plan of the city was created, and the construction work began (Fig. 48). Two central streets were laid, Aleksandrovsкая St. and Loris Melikov St., named after famous noble family from Lory General of Cavalry, Russian Statement Count Mikhail Loris-Melikov (Fig.49). The street was so long, that per testimony of famous Armenian poet Eghishe Charents, who was born in Kars, it stretched all the way to the rail station, had 436



Fig.48 - Plan of Kars



Fig.49 - Loris-Melikov.
Painter Ivan Aivazovsky

stores on both sides of the street. On the right bank on the Kars River there were city baths (Fig.51) and a beautiful park where Charents liked to stroll. Different parts of the city were connected via five bridges, the oldest be-

ing that of Vardan constructed by stone. Four Armenian, one Russian and one Greek churches welcomed the worshippers. 12 schools, even a kindergarten, movie theaters *Illusion* and *Triumph*, three newspapers provide evidence that life in the city was fast paced. Construction of the railway Tbilisi-Alexandropol-Kars in 1899 revived



Fig. 51 - Afsamcale hot water baths near Kars

the city life even more. (Fig.52) Armenians were occupied in both agriculture (arable farming, stock raising and bee-keeping) and crafts (tailoring, shoemaking, stone carving, metal work, jewelry making). There were four flour mills, three ceramic and three lime, two beer and brick works, wine, vodka, furniture, leather factories. Then WWI happened, then October Revolution and Bolshevik propaganda collapsed the Russian army. By 1918 Turkey was cutting a swathe of destruction across Armenia, capturing Kars in April and reaching Baku on the Caspian Sea. Being defeated on other fronts, Turkish army withdraw to pre-war positions. By Brest-Litovsk Treaty that



Fig.50 - General view of Kars

was signed by Russian Federation at the expense of Armenia Russia ceded Kars, Ardahan and Batum to Turkey. The agreement was rejected by Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan who declared their independence. Armenians were left alone to defend their newly proclaimed republic, and at the Battle at Sardarapat in May 1918 regular Armenian military units and militia



Fig.52 - Transcaucasian Railroad Postcard mailed from Kars to Tiflis in 1913.

stopped the Ottoman army (Fig.53).



Fig.53 - Sardarapat Battle Monument

In 1920 much of the town's Armenian population fled in the panic before the advancing Turks. Of those who stayed, were either executed or sent to Erzurum to build roads. Those survived had little incentive to remain there.

Treaty of Kars (centennial of which was celebrated by Turkey and Azerbaijan, Fig.54) signed in 1921 created a new boundary between Turkey and Soviet Armenia, defined by the Akhurian and Aras Rivers. Turkey obtained from Armenia most of the former Kars Oblast of Russian Empire, including the Surmalu uyezd, with Mount Ararat and the cities of İğdir and Koghb (Tuzluca), the cities of Kars, Ardahan, and Oltu, the ruins of Ani, and Lake Çıldır. Most of these areas were already under Turkish military control.



Fig.54 - Centennial of the Treaty of Kars



Current view of Kars



*Woman from Kars -
costume*



Fig. 55 - Mosque in the place of Holy Apostles Church

During the rest of the 20th century population of Kars increased from several hundreds to 78,000 (mainly Turks, Azerbaijanis and Kurds) and the town is now an important center for trade in livestock and is noted for its cheese. It also produces coarse woolens, carpets, and felts.

Although history of Kars as the capital of Armenia was a short one, the city played an extremely important role geopolitically throughout centuries. And the Holy Apostles Church, although converted to mosque, still stands as a reminder of the glory of Kars (Fig. 55-56).



*Fig. 56 - Mosque
on Turkish stamp*

A N I



Like Kars, Ani was an ancient site. Robert H. Hewsen, Professor Emeritus of History at Rowan University, suggests that its name may come from “the Anians, another little known people who once lived in this part of Armenia according to the first-century Greek geographer Strabo”.

Until Middle Ages Ani was an unimportant village; its name was mentioned only in connection with an Armenia first scientist, Anania Shirakatsi (Fig. 57) who was born there. Ani was lying along the right bank of the Akhurian (Arpachai) River in the great plain of Shirak. The city was surrounded by deep canyons from three sides on a plateau which stretched about 1 km in length and around 500-600 meters wide in its widest part. While Ani did not play an important role in commerce and did not have a large population at the time, the inhabitants did construct a few temples dedicated to ancient deities and built some defensive ramparts.

From the first to the fifth centuries Ani became part of Arsacid dynasty domain. Later Ani came under the rule of the House of Kamsarakan which played a significant role in the Armenian history. The House of Kamsarakan have been known for their implacable position against Arabs and took part in several anti-Arab uprising in the eighth century; they were eventually forced to move to Cilicia and further to the south living a power vacuum in Armenia. The more flexible Bagratuni princes took advantage of that and absorbed Ani and other parts of Shirak in the ninth century.

And then the rise of Ani began. After the death of King Abas he was succeeded by Ashot III Voghormats (Merciful). Instead of remaining in Kars he proclaimed Ani the capital of the kingdom in 961. Only in couple of years of Ashot III reign a wall enclosing Ani was constructed and later took its name after him; he sponsored the building of monasteries, hospitals, schools, and almshouses. His consort, Queen Khosrovanyush meanwhile sponsored the construction of the



Fig. 57 - Anania Shirakatsi

churches in Sanahin and Haghpata. In the war between the Byzantine emperor John Tzimiskes and the Arabs, Armenia did its best to remain neutral and forced the two battling parties to respect the boundaries of its country. The Byzantine army began to march across the plain of Mush, thinking to strike the decisive blow against the Arabs from Armenia, but when they met with the 30,000-strong army of Ashot III, they altered their plan

and left Armenia. Ashot instead provided Tzimiskes (Fig. 59) with 10,000 soldiers, who accompanied his men in their campaign in Mesopotamia. Further construction of Ani was done with unprecedented for that times speed. Within 10-15 years the city grew so



Fig. 58 - Ashot III Statue in Gyumri

much that King Smbat II who succeeded Ashot the Merciful was forced to build new walls; eight long years and enormous amount of material, human and financial resources were invested. The walls that took their name after him were around 2.5 km long and had 8-10 meters in height. From outside, the walls were surrounded by 10-12 m wide moat that was filled with water; while it had military importance, in the time of peace the water was used

of its development Ani has a citadel which stood at a height of 80-100 meters above the city itself surrounded by stone walls; the city (old and new) itself located between Smbat's and Ashot's walls (700-720 m wide), and two suburbs, one outside the Smbat's wall and the other stretching for over 1 km on the left side of the Akhurian River (Fig. 61).



Fig. 61 - Walls and towers of Ani. Postcard issued by Ani Museum of Antiquities. Circa 1900s

On the stony slopes across Ani there were over 400 carved in the rocks houses, were, most probably, the poorest population of Ani lived (Fig. 62). It is also notable that there are traces of churches and cemeteries there. They were connected to the main city through many bridges.

Almost everything in Ani was constructed using tufa stone, the palaces, churches, houses. Even the roofs were laid with thin tufa stone slabs which were dipped in oil to prevent water and humidity intrusion.

Ani was known as a *city of thousand churches*. Although this number may have been exaggerated the total of religious building in the city was still impressive. There were several churches in the citadel, one of them constructed during the Kamsarakan period going back to the 7th century. As we already mentioned above, there



Fig. 62 - Map of Ami. Caves are shown on the West side of the map. Internet picture.

were many churches carved in the rocks for the poor class; churches were built inside the towers that stood in the walls surrounding Ani. Many structures in Ani are attributed to architect Trdat (940s -1020s). Many residential houses, palaces and churches were constructed in Ani by his designs, but the most magnificent of all his work is the Mother Cathedral of Ani started in 989 contracted by Smbat II. After the king's death the construction of the cathedral continues under hospices of Katranide his brother Gagik I (? - 1120) consort. The cathedral is built entirely from tufa stone, extremely well cut and finished hiding a rubble concrete core. The plan is that of domed basilica found in Armenia since the seventh century (Fig. 63 - 66). "However, Trdat's design takes this old

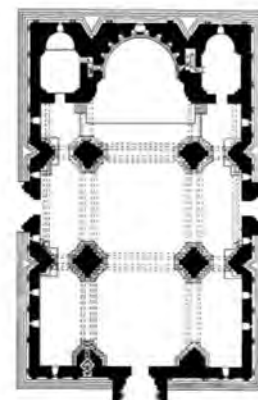


Fig. 63 - Floor plan of the Ani Mother Cathedral

form to new heights of sophistication and originality” (<http://virtualani.org/cathedral/index.htm>).



Fig. 64 - .Ani Mother Cathedral. Souvenir sheet used on cover mailed from Garni to Yerevan in 2007.



Fig. 65 - .Ani Mother Cathedral. Reconstructed model by Toros Toramanyan



Fig. 66 - .Ani Mother Cathedral on a postcard mailed in 1906 from Batumi to Yelizavetpol.

The second most notable cathedral in Ani was one ordered by the King Gagik I (Fig. 67) himself. It has close resemblance to the Zvartnots Cathedral (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), but the construction design differs (Fig. 68 - 70).

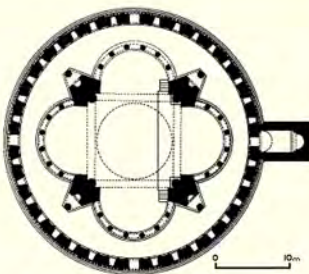


Fig. 68 - .Gagikashen Church plan

Fig. 67 - .Statue of Gagik I unearthed during the excavations in Ani, now lost. Next to him is Matteos Catholikos Izmirlian at the Ani Museum. Picture from Krikor Balakian book "Ruins of Ani", 1910.



Գագիկ Ա. քաղաքի արձանը՝ Մատթեոս Բ. Կաթողիկոս Ամենայն Հայոց



Fig. 69-70 - .Ruins of the Gagikashen Church of St. Gregory (left) and Toramanyan's reconstruction (above).



Toros Toramanyan on 2014 Armenian Stamp.

Another interesting religious structure is the Abughamrents St. Gregory's church (Fig. 71). It is probably dated to late tenth century and was commissioned by Prince Grigor Pahlavuni as a private family chapel. The plan is twelve sided, each side alternating deep niches and small windows (Fig. 72).

Ani was the capital of Armenia for only 84 years. After the death of Gagik I his two sons, Hovhannes-Smbat and Ashot fought for the crown, but eventually brothers reconciled and Hovhannes-Smbat remained King of



Fig. 71 - .Abughamrents St. Gregory Church. Postcard issued by Ani Museum of Antiquities. Circa 1900s

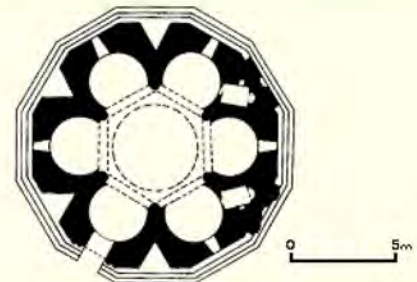


Fig. 72 - .Abughamrents St. Gregory Church. Floor plan.

Armenia by the right of the first-born, and Ashot received other lands. After the death of both brothers it was necessary to maintain a strong Armenia, but struggle for the vacant Armenian throne started between various Armenian princes. At the same time in Constantinople a treacherous agreement on Constantinople between Petros Catholicos and Byzantine Emperor Basil II the Bulgar Slayer was made providing that Byzantine Empire would inherit Ani after the death of the Armenian King. Four times did the Byzantine attack Ani, but all four times was given a defeat by the Armenians under Sparapet Vahram Pahlavuni.



Walls of Ani. 1842. Engraving by Charles Tessier.

He orders Petros Cathalicos to crown Ashot's son, eighteen years old Gagik in the Mother Cathedral of Ani as Gagik II, King of Armenia. But Byzantium did not abandoned their claims to Ani. Constantine Monomachus invites Gagik II to Constantinople for negotiations and offers him Melitene in exchange of Ani. He was jailed and still fought for the fate of Ani for 30 days. Monomachus sent a large army to Ani, but one of the Armenian princes Grigor Magistros delivered to Monomachus 40 keys to the gates of Ani, accompanied by written oaths of loyalty of other Armenian princes. Gagik II was forced to abdicate (Fig. 73) and has agreed to the offer, but Monomachus did not keep his word giving Gagik II Kalon peghat and Pizu in Caesarea instead. Gagik II was later killed by three brothers, Byzantine governors, his body mutilated



Fig. 73 - .Gagik II submits to Constantine Monomachus. A miniature from the Madrid Skylitzes . Biblioteca Nacional de España in Madrid,

and hanged from the fort for others to see. Thus was the end of the last King of Armenia. His younger son and grandson were poisoned, his older son died shortly, and the male line of the Bagratuni dynasty became extinct. During the reign of Toros I of Cilicia Gagik's death was avenged by the Armenian forces who took the fort and killed the three brothers. Incompetent rule and increased Armenophobia of the Byzantine Empire brought to a sad result - Ani was lost to the Seljuk-Turks led by Alp Aslan. Instead of strengthening the Armenian army of several hundred thousand strong the Byzantine Empire facing the Seljuks threat completely disbanded Armenian military force that was ready to fight for the last drop of blood. But the destruction of Ani by

the Seljuks was not the end of the city. The city existed for at least another 500 years. Sold to Shaddadin emir of Ganja (Gandzak) who gave the city to his grandson Manuche (Minuchihr; hence the name of the mosque build in Ani) Ani fell to Georgians in 1161. It was retaken by the Seljuks in 1163, only to be won back by the Georgians in 1199. In 1239 the city was plundered by the Mongols under Charmaghan when much of the population was massacred.

Earthquakes (1064, 1131, and 1263) caused a lot of destruction to Ani, but it was the devastating one of 1319 (this is still under debate, some historians do not consider this earthquake as devastating as it seemed to be) that brought to mass exodus of the remaining population of Ani. Many moved North to Georgia, others to South Russia (Astrakhan, Cri-

mea), and many others went South to Constantinople only to move further to Italy, Galicia and Poland.

Safavid-Ottoman wars brought to further decline of the Armenian population. "At the beginning of the 17th century, the Persian Shah Abbas decided to follow a scorched-earth policy and abandon devastated land to his Ottoman enemies. He therefore deported much of the Armenian population of the Araxes River Valle to his new capital, Isfahan" (Claude Mutaftian, Professor

Emeritus of Mathematics of Universite de Paris-Nord who also holds doctorate degree in history). Ani became completely deserted. In 1878, Ani passed to Russia. And the exploration and excavations began. Between 1893-1894 and 1904-1916 Nikolay Marr led archeological expeditions to Ani; a lot of authentic findings were dug out. Unfortunately, in 1917-1918 many of them were somehow lost, so his

scientific research is being treated as original source.

In 1920 Ani was ceded to Turkey where further decline of the historical monuments is recorded.

With the fall of Ani Armenia lost its independence for many centuries. Independence was regained only in 1918 with the declaration of the First Republic and Yerevan became Armenia's twelve's capital.



Old Church in Ani Citadel.



Smbat's wall



All Savior Church. Postcard mailed in 1911 from Tiflis to Grenoble.

TO BE CONTINUED

