

PAVEL AVETISYAN: ON THE OCCASION OF HIS SIXTIETH ANNIVERSARY



Pavel Avetisyan, a modern leading Armenian archaeologist, a specialist with wide international acknowledgment, was born in Tbilisi, but spent his childhood and youth in Talin, Aragatsotn Region, Republic of Armenia - one of the first shelters of the Armenian refugees from Mush.

The first, educational phase of conscious biography of P. Avetisyan includes secondary and middle school in 1965-1975 in Yerevan and further study at the Faculty of History, Yerevan State University during 1975-1980. After graduating from the University he “lost” only a year by working in the company “Knowledge” in 1980-1981. After that, chronology of his life is only archaeological: “Erebuni” Museum of History of Yerevan, Chair of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Yerevan State University, Scientific Research Laboratory of Archaeology of the same University and finally since 1993 - member of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, National Academy of Sciences of Republic of Armenia, the main scientific research center of Armenian archaeology.

In 2003 P. Avetisyan got his PhD and in 2014 Habilitation degrees, after which one more fact was attested towards his scientific progress: he was elected a Corresponding member of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia.

Taking into consideration scientific-organizational and administrative skills of P. Avetisyan, his colleagues trusted him the post of the director of the Institute since 2006.

The scientific-organizational skills of P. Avetisyan have been demonstrated also in his activities beyond the Institute. In this regard worth mentioning is his work at Yerevan State University as a lecturer. He has active participation in several commissions of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Armenia, as vice-president of Archaeological Commission, member of Scientific-Methodological and Expert Councils of the Ministry, etc.

For his productive activities P. Avetisyan was awarded the state medal of Movses Khorenatsi (2010).

P. Avetisyan should be introduced hereafter in more detail as a scholar.

The scientific heritage of P. Avetisyan, represented by several books and more than 100 articles, can conditionally be divided into two main groups. In the first one are included practical publications towards the excavations and research works of different archaeological sites during the last 30 years. The second group combines theoretical works which came out as a result of the above-mentioned field works, in which the corresponding archaeological material is considered in the context of historical and cultural developments of ancient Armenia and the Near East.

Moreover, the logic of the above-mentioned publications corresponds mainly to the phases of scientific biography of P. Avetisyan. Particularly, the first period of his activity is characterized by continuous field works (1980-1990s), and the second one relates to theorizing of accumulated data in conjunction with the field work (2000-2010s).

During his scientific biography P. Avetisyan took part in the study of numerous sites (cemeteries and settlements). Those works were realized in the frames of both Armenian and international expeditions. The main field works were directed to the study of the Bronze and Iron Age sites (ca. 3500-500 BC), which is the main axis of scientific interests of P. Avetisyan. The next target of works was the research of the sites of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods (ca. 6000-3500 BC).

P. Avetisyan started with excavations of the Bronze and Iron Age sites on the slopes of the Mount Aragats. Particularly, the first excavations led by him took place in the cemeteries of Mastara and Talin in 1980s. Actually these excavations became an initial point for further activities of P. Avetisyan and formation of his scientific worldview.

Especially the excavations of the Bronze and Iron Age site of Agarak in 2000s led by P. Avetisyan became an important stage for the development of his opinions. The research of the multilayer rock-cut settlement and the sanctuary essentially increased the imaginations of Armenian archaeology towards landscape archaeology.

P. Avetisyan's contribution is essential in the works of the Armenian-American project "Aragats", since the beginning of 2000s. For the first time in the history of Armenian archaeology that project had carried regular research in a compact region, in the Tsaghkahovit plain, as well as excavations in several important settlements of that zone.

Among numerous excavations of other Bronze and Iron Age sites carried out with the participation of P. Avetisyan the works in Lori-Berd are remarkable.

Especially important are the excavations carried out during recent years under the leadership of P. Avetisyan in the Early Bronze Age high altitude settlement Tsaghkasar and the extensive excavations in the Middle and Late Bronze Age cemetery of Karashamb. These endeavors provide a fundamental basis for understanding the Bronze Age social developments in Armenia.

In the context of research of the Bronze and Iron Age Armenia a valuable contribution the compact monograph concerning the archaeological sites of the mountain system of Aragats, which introduces the important archaeological units of that region by a detailed catalogue and maps is worth to mention. The book was published in Oxford in 2007 and is one of the most referred works of Armenian archaeology.

P. Avetisyan's contribution to the research of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic period is also very essential. In this connection excavations of the Armenian-French expedition in the settlement of Godedzor should be mentioned, which takes place under his leadership since 2004. From the one hand this site reveals transitional Chalcolithic to Bronze Age features, from the other hand it demonstrates the process of relations of Armenia to the Near East and the Iranian Plateau. P. Avetisyan made an essential

contribution also to the research of such sites relating to the periods under consideration as Aratashen. These studies may definitely complete our imaginations towards the origin and development of early agricultural societies in the Armenian Highland.

The main targets of theoretical studies of P. Avetisyan were formed on the basis of the above-mentioned field works. Among them especially worth mentioning is the problem concerning chronology and periodization of Armenian archaeology. Till the end of 1980s early archaeology in Armenia was guided by the famous work of H. Martirosyan dedicated to the Bronze and Iron Ages, which was published still in 1964. After that work many years passed, a great number of new materials were accumulated, on the basis of which the new generation of Armenian archaeologists had to reconsider the traditional scales of chronology and periodization. The first attempts in this task were made in 1990s, with direct participation of P. Avetisyan. In his further studies he deepened the investigation of the problem and brought it to a high theoretical level. The results of this work were summarized in the PhD (“Chronology and Periodization of the Middle Bronze Age of Armenia”) and Habilitation (“Armenian Highland during the 24-9th centuries BC: The Dynamics of Socio-Cultural Transformations, according to Archaeological Data”) works.

In contrary to other authors studying the problems of chronology and periodization, P. Avetisyan formed his opinions on the basis of a great number of radiocarbon data and by creating a corresponding theoretical and methodological basis. For the first time he introduced the problem under consideration in the context of common developments of the different periods, transformation of social environments and culture sequences, which naturally made his opinions towards chronology and periodization more probable. Instead of Marxist and purely evolutionary theories he suggested to use modern sociological methods, which infer not only logical sequences of cultural developments but also their coexistence and crossings in various niveaus of time and space.

The studies of P. Avetisyan towards fundamental archaeological problems of ancient Armenia gradually shifted the accent of problems to the meta-archaeological levels. Particularly for clarifying the position of the Armenian Highland in the context of the ancient world and in particular the ancient Near East the author recurs to the “world-system” theory, and by analysis of its main concepts (such as borderland, marginal zone, frontier) he substantiates the thesis, according to which the ancient world-system was dissolved in the first half of the 7th millennium BC, resulting in the formation of new regional systems which grew to the Bronze Age world-systems.

Theoretical studies of P. Avetisyan touch also problems concerning the formation and development of complex society in the Armenian Highland, demonstrating the features typical to regional developments within the common Near Eastern context.

Also several other problems, such as ceramic typology, burial rite, palaeodemography, sacred landscape, etc. have been considered in the works of P. Avetisyan.

Theorizing of present day archaeological problems, application of precise methodology and selected terminology, multidisciplinary way of working are typical to the above-mentioned studies. From this point of view, the works of P. Avetisyan stand out by their scientific value and help to rise Armenian archaeology to an international level. This fact is attested by thousands of references of those works both in Armenian and in international scientific circles.

The archaeological activities of P. Avetisyan coincided with the recreation of the Armenian statehood as well as with radical change of directions in scientific relations and in worldview. In this sense, the name of P. Avetisyan undoubtedly lies at the basis of the Armenian new archaeological school.

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