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the Columnar Structures of
Armenia in the Achaemenid Period



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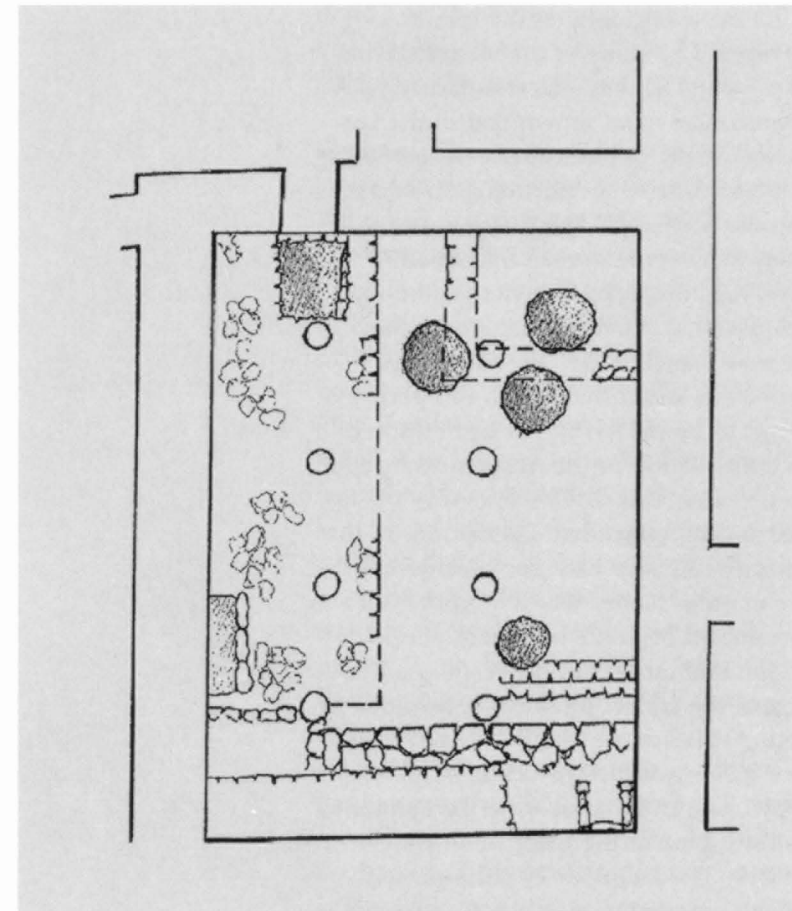
The Typology of the Columnar Structures of Armenia in the Achaemenid Period

Felix I.
Ter-Martirossov

The architecture of the Achaemenid Empire is known mainly from the palatial buildings of Iran, the central nuclei of which are large multi-column halls – *apadanas*. Therefore, the discovery of columnar structures of the Achaemenid period in Armenia (Armavir, Erebuni, Draskhanakert, Oshakan), is of great interest. These monuments are diachronic, and consequently it is practical to consider them chronologically.

Fig. 1. Oshakan. Plan of the rectangular hall.

Oshakan: The structure in question is situated in the northern part of the valley of



Ararat on the bank of the river Kasakh. It was excavated by Dr. S. Esayan and Dr. A. Kalantaryan in the middle of the 80s, and the report was published in 1988. The monument consists of two building-complexes of which the palace-complex located below the hill is of particular interest for our present topic. This well-preserved complex is dated to the 7th to 4th centuries BC and thus covers the pre-Achaemenid and Achaemenid period of Armenian culture. The excavations revealed a hall of rectangular form in the eastern part of the complex. The floor was paved with stone slabs along one of the longitudinal walls of the hall, and cylindrical stone bases for wooden columns were placed in the central part, on the clay-rimmed floor along the paving (Fig. 1). The complex of finds from the hall, which includes a hearth, idols and other material, has allowed the excavators to identify it with confidence as a sanctuary.¹ Architectural structures of this form are not known from Achaemenid complexes. On the other hand, buildings with paving flanked by columns are characteristic of Armenian architecture in the Achaemenid (Draskhanakert) and Hellenistic (Shirakavan, Hoghmik) periods. Their continuous significance as cult complexes is most clearly traced in the temple complex of Shirakavan, where in the rooms with paved floors and columns along them altars and cult objects such as idols and statuary images of *phalloi* and *kteis* were found. At the same time, however, paved floors with columns along them are found also in complexes of secular purpose (Shirakavan, Hoghmik).² This allows us to consider such structures as a parameter for architectural buildings of prestige and sig-

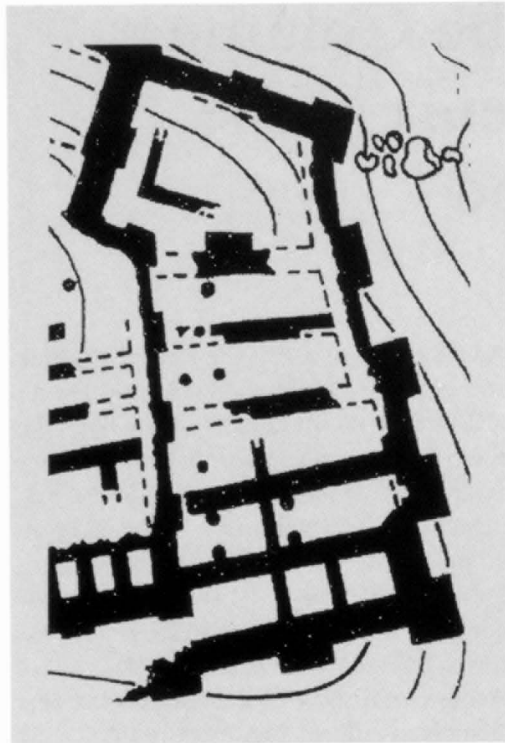


Fig. 2. Armavir. West part of the Urartian Citadel.

nificance in Armenian culture of the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods. It is possible that the complexes with paved floor and columnar structures were inherent also in the local Urartian culture, but they have not been detected so far.

Armavir: The structure in question is situated on a high hill in the central part of the valley of Ararat, and in antiquity, up to the 3rd century BC, it was washed by the waters of the river Araxes. In the Urartian period, Armavir, a citadel with cult buildings, was included in the city Argishtikhinili. Armavir was described by the ancient Armenian historian Moses of Khorene as the ancient centre of the Armenian state,³ which was confirmed in the course of archaeological research. The excavations of the monument have been conducted since 1964 under the direction of B. Arakelyan (up to 1971), G. Tiratsyan (up to 1991), and I. Karapetyan.⁴ Complexes of the Urartian and Hellenistic periods were revealed. Things are more complicated with the cultural stratum of the Achaemenid period. Despite the recovery of a great deal of objects in the

building including a gold pectoral, which can be determined as items belonging to Achaemenid culture, no Achaemenid cultural stratum was found on the hill.⁵

Further stratigraphic analysis of the cultural strata of the Armavir hill, has, however, shown that constructions of the Achaemenid period do indeed exist and are mainly represented by a hall with 21 columns in the western part of the citadel⁶ (Figs. 2, and Fig. 4 on p. 147). The bases of the columns found here are divided into two groups. The first group includes bases of the Urartian type made of basalt with an untreated block of stone at the bottom. While this block was buried into the ground the cylindrical part of the 40 cm high base remained above the surface. The second type included conically formed bases made from tufa of a cylindrical form similar to those in Oshakan. The attempt to date the construction of this columnar hall to the late Urartian period is contradicted by the general situation in the territory of the city of Argishtikhinili, as well as by the topography of the hill of Armavir. The study of the western, Urartian part of the city – accomplished by A. Martirosyan – has shown that in the last period of the city's existence, its entire population tried to take refuge inside the fortress walls. Even the palace constructions here were changed into small dwelling complexes.⁷ Therefore, the supposition that the only entrance to the eastern citadel of the city was changed into a vast columned hall in this period seems to be incorrect. The attribution of its construction to the Achaemenid period seems more natural. The discovery of tablets with cuneiform inscriptions in the Elamite language here completely refutes the existing theory that life on the hill terminated in the Achaemenid period. Despite differences in the reading of the text of the tablets, philologists do agree in dating them to the end of 6th and the first quarter of the 5th century BC.⁸ Obviously, at the same time the columned hall was built at the entrance of the fortress. The hall with 21 columns with similar proportions as the columnar hall in

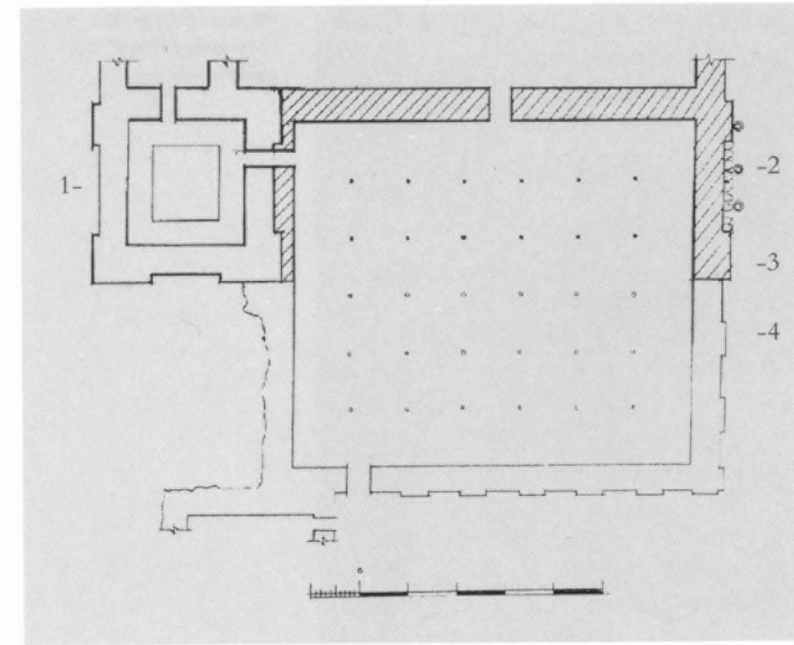


Fig. 3. Erebuni. The Apadana.
1. Urartian
2. Posturartian
3. First Achaemenid Period
4. Second Achaemenid Period.

Chivin-Tepe was added. In the opinion of G.D. Summers this monument constituted the centre of the 13th Armenian satrapy.⁹ The archaeological material of this time allows us to assume that Armavir constituted a large administrative centre and was, possibly, the centre of the Armenian satrapy in the given period.

Erebuni: The structure in question is located in the valley of Ararat, on a large hill called Arin-Berd in the suburbs of Yerevan city. The excavation of this structure began in 1951 under the direction of K. Hovhannisyanyan. During the excavations of 1958, the discovery of a building inscription of the Urartian king Argishti I (786-764 BC) concerning the establishment of the city of Iripuni – Erebuni (the name of which had been considered by number of scholars to be connected to the name of the city of Yerevan), created an occasion for the realization of large restoration works in 1966-68,¹⁰ which unfortunately have caused a significant loss to the monument. In the 1980s the archaeological work on the structure stopped. The material of the excavation has been published in a general way, with special attention being paid to the architecture. In all publications the monument is identified as a fortress-complex belong-

ing to the Urartian town, in which there are three buildings of the later Achaemenid period.

In 1998-99, however, the author conducted archaeological excavations on a small scale at the centre and in the environments of the monument. These investigations made it possible to identify a more precise stratigraphy, to reveal fortification constructions of the Achaemenid period preserved up to 2 metres in height, to trace an Achaemenid cultural stratum, which in a number of places had a thickness of more than one metre, and to identify a territory of about 3 hectares untouched by the previous excavations, where architectural complexes, including fortifications of the Urartian and Achaemenid periods, are still preserved. Despite the small scale of the work conducted, its outcome allows us to reconsider the identification of the monument, which now appears to be a fortified Achaemenid centre, built on the site of an Urartian fortress, and also to reconstruct part of its buildings.¹¹

Of special interest was the discovery of an architectural complex with a hall of 30 columns – an *apadana* (Fig. 3, see also Fig. 2 on p. 146). This identification constituted the basis for a valid definition of Erebuni as a centre of the 18th satrapy (G. Tiratsyan).¹² It was supposed that at the place of the apadana stood originally a gallery with 12 columns belonging to the Urartian temple of Khaldi. It was also suggested that in the 5th century, a hall with 18 columns was attached to the gallery, thus creating an apadana.¹³ The exploration conducted in 1999 in the territory adjacent to the apadana has revealed a more complicated situation, however. The Urartian cultural stratum is bedded deeper, and the level of the floor of the Urartian structures is thus 120 cm lower than that of the floor of the gallery of 12 columns. The study of the stratigraphy has given the following picture: the Urartian cultural stratum was covered by a new clay-rammed floor 40 cm above the Urartian floor. Here, the excavations revealed part of a paved floor of stone slabs under

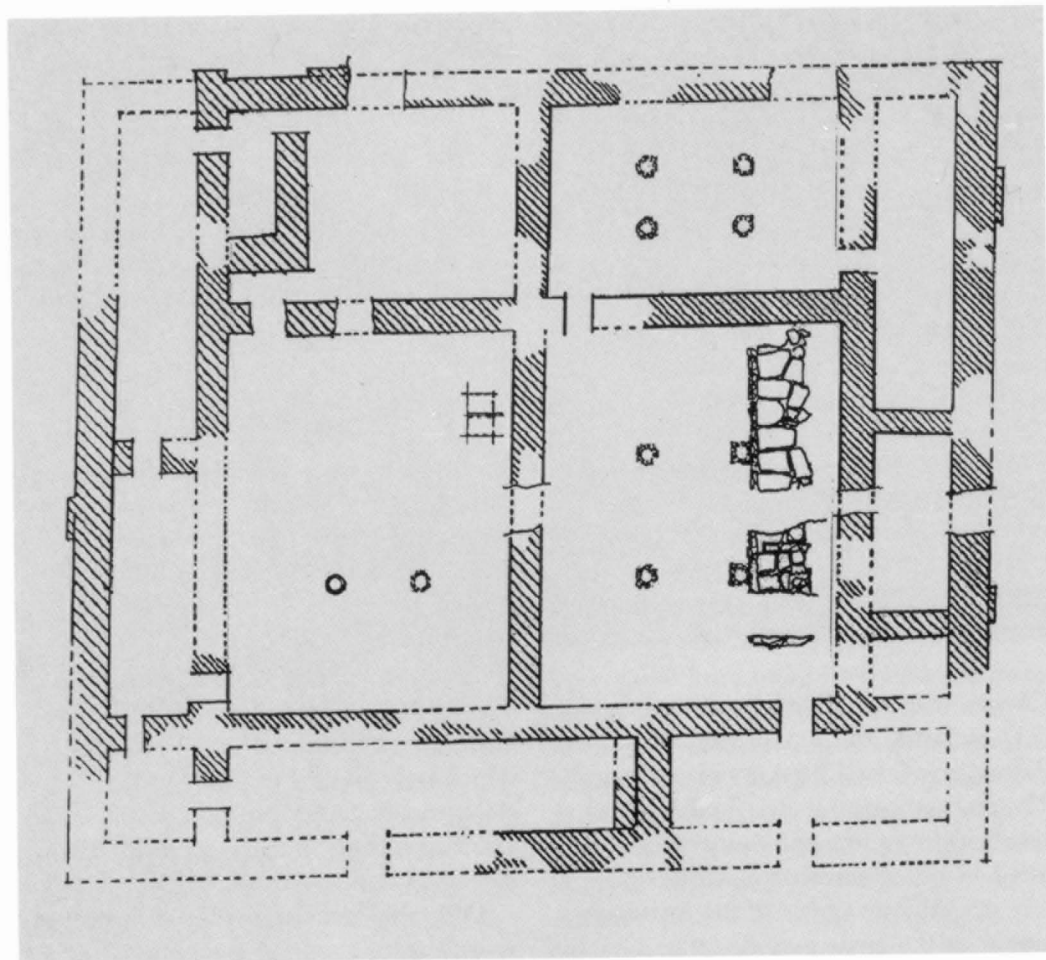


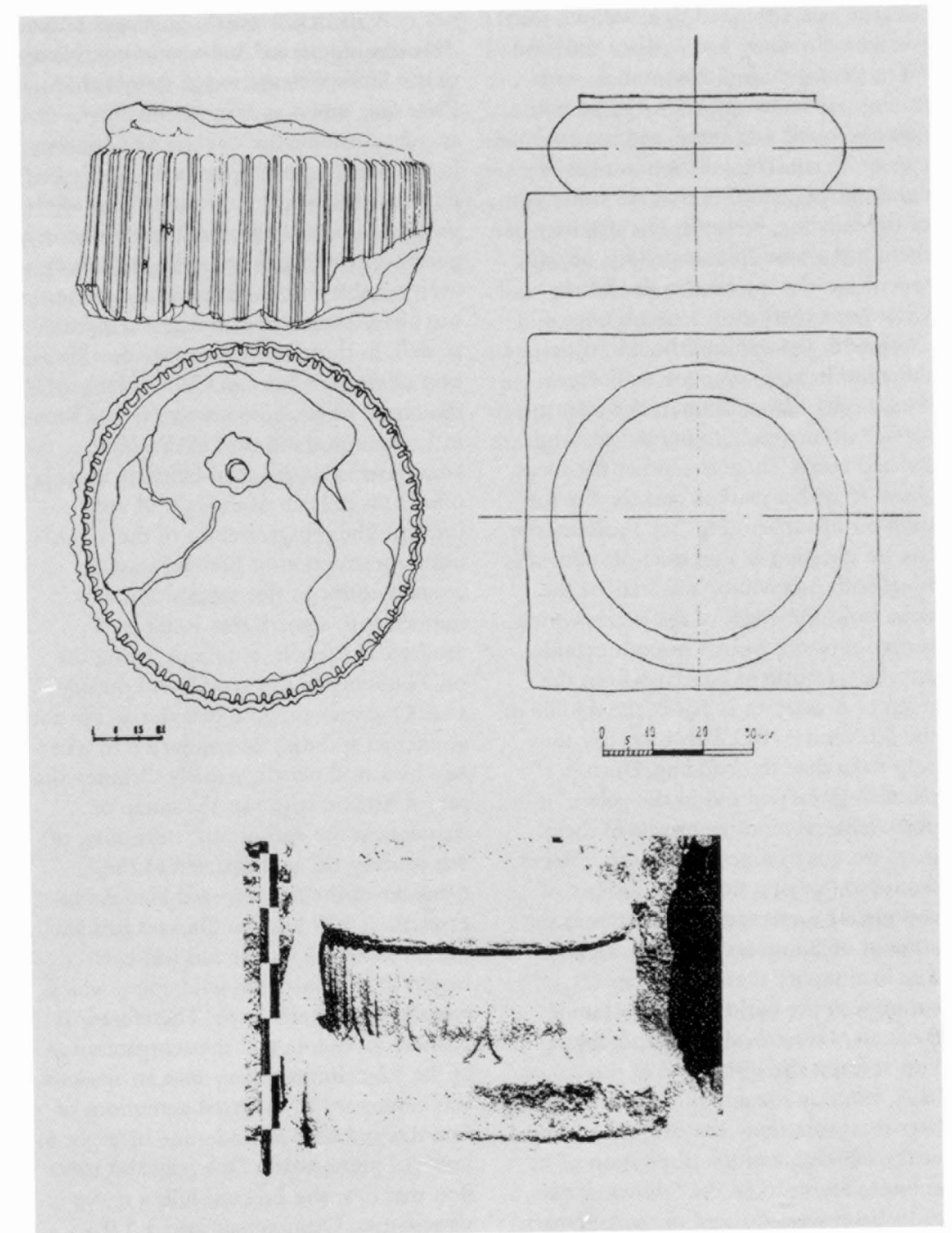
Fig. 4. Draskhanakert (Beniamin). Plan of the Palace-Sanctuary.

the wall of the 12-column-gallery, and also three large column bases of cylindrical form standing along the paved floor were uncovered. The construction of the paved floor is similar to that of Oshakan. Later on, this structure was covered by another clay-rammed floor and the walls of the 12-column-gallery were erected on it. Only later, the walls of the apadana became attached to it. Thus, the site in question first housed the Urartian temple of Khaldi; then, obviously in the 6th century, a construction with paving and columns was erected near the temple. Hereafter the 12-column-gallery was built. It seems that the construction of the 12-column-gallery in Erebuni was also connected to the transformation of the site into the centre of 18th satrapy in the 5th century BC. The construction of the apadana is supposed to be dated to the middle of the 4th century BC.

Draskhanakert: The structure in question is situated in the north-eastern part of the Republic of Armenia in the historical province of Shirak, 10 km to the south of Gyumri. The excavations began in 1989. The site occupies a vast territory of about 80 hectares of fields and several hills. In antiquity, the area was a 'dastakert', that is, in the private possession of the governor of Shirak. On the top of the central hill the excavations have uncovered the foundations of a large palace of rectangular form. The palace was established in 5th century BC. Later on, it was exposed to numerous rebuildings and existed at least until the early Roman period, as the Augustan coins found here testify.

For our topic, the initial layout of the palace is of greatest interest. At this first stage, the palace was almost square in plan, c. 28 x 28 m (Fig. 4). The lower part of the walls was made of stone, on which walls of mud-bricks decorated with flat

Fig. 5a-c. Types of column-bases from Draskhanakert (Beniamin).



pilasters rested. The building included two large, square rooms located in the central part, which were surrounded by rectangular rooms. The palace had two entrances from the south. Functionally, the complex combines cult rooms in the eastern part and rooms of secular character to the west. The eastern central room had cult significance, judging from the finds of vessels for burning incense and a protome

with a horned animal's head with the mark of female genitalia on its forehead. At the eastern wall of the room a shed was built, with a crib, which had a carefully made floor paved with stone slabs and a gutter covered with plates. The shed was probably intended for sacred cows, which had not calved. To the north of the sanctuary opened a room with columns, which can be identified as a treasury. The

western part, separated by a wall without passages, obviously had a palace function. Here, a lotus shaped column base with fluting was found (Fig. 5a). The base was made of black tufa-stone, and has a diameter of 70 cm. The greatest number of column bases was found in the other part of the building, however. The majority of them had a *torus*-like shape (Fig. 5b). Of special interest is a base in black tufa, whose ornamentation reminds one of those from Persepolis, although its shape is different. It has a low square plinth, on which rests a large round torus with the surface decorated with boldly cut, large, stylized petals. There is another flat torus above it, with a marked area for the column on its surface (Fig. 5c). Probably the base in question is a product of influences from both Asia Minor and Iran. At the same time, the edges of the petals, which spring outwards from a smooth cylinder, are characteristic of buildings from the reign of Artaxerxes I, that is, the middle of the 5th century BC. This base may thus help us to date the building. During rebuildings carried out in the palace in post-Achaemenid times, some of these bases were rearranged, while others were destroyed. Judging from the number of completely preserved bases and from the amount of fragments, one may suppose that in antiquity there were 8 or 10 columns in the building. The columns themselves were made of wood. Taking into account the placement of the column bases found *in situ* and the character of the later reorganizations, the original lay-out of the building and the disposition of its columns seems to be the following: two torus bases were situated in the sanctuary, either placed along the paved floor or, which is more probable, at the entrance into the sanctuary. In the central part of the treasury stood 4 or 6 bases, while another two bases were situated in the central part of the palace room.¹⁴

It is necessary to underline that the disposition of bases and their quantity in one room or another does not depend on the size of the room. This is well documented

not only in architectural complexes of the Achaemenid period, but also in complexes of the Hellenistic period in Armenia. Therefore one may suppose that in ancient Armenia the existence of columns in the buildings and specifically their number, may reveal a certain system of prestige, connected to the status of the person inhabiting the building. It is, however, possible that the same phenomenon was characteristic of Achaemenid culture as well. In this connection, the identification of the structures in Chivin-Tepe as the centre of the 13th satrapy, and of those in Erebuni as the centre of the 18th satrapy, and also the availability of 12-column-halls in both of them, is of great interest. The reorganization of the 12-column-construction in Erebuni into an *apadana* confirms this supposition. It is important to remark that so far the *apadana* of Erebuni, is unique, being the only building of this type found outside Iran. One may suppose that this fact is not accidental and may be connected to a certain historical person, namely Orontes, the son of Artaxir, who was the satrap of Armenia at the end of 5th - beginning of 4th century BC and married to the daughter of the Achaemenid king Artaxerxes. As is well known, Orontes had led the revolt of the satraps and had even begun to mint his own gold coins, which was the king's prerogative. Therefore it is possible to assume that the reorganization of the 12-column-gallery into an *apadana* was connected to the royal aspirations of Orontes and used to underline his right to imperial prerogatives. One may also mention that near the Erebuni hills a *rhyton* representing Orontes was found.¹⁵ It is interesting that during the excavations of the *apadana* of Erebuni an altar adjoining the southern wall was found. One may therefore argue that the *apadana* not only symbolized the highest authority, but also served a function connected with the cult of the Achaemenid kings.

As for the status of the *apadana* type of building, which only appeared in Iran with the formation of the Achaemenid

empire, one may assume that such *apadanas*, connected to the king's cult and symbolizing his imperial status, were identical with those temples – *ayadana*, for the destruction of which Darius I accused Bardia-Gaumata, and for the recovery of which he was proud. It is possible that what Bardia had destroyed, thus underlining his adherence to the ancient, pre-imperial traditions, were the *apadana* buildings, which by that time were connected not with the cult of the Achaemenid house, but rather with the new form of cult belonging to the imperial authority. This kind of authority is precisely reflected in the titles of king

Darius I: 'great king, king of kings, king of Persia, king of all countries'. No doubt this supposition needs more research, and also the theory of a connection between the columnar structures and the administrative status of the owner seems to open perspectives for further investigations into Achaemenid culture.

Already now we may, however, conclude that the consideration of certain architectural constructions in Armenia is important for the understanding of the character and of the development not only of the culture of Armenia, but also of the Achaemenid empire as a whole.

Notes

NOTE 1
Yesayan & Kalantaryan 1988, 29, 115.

NOTE 2
Ter-Martirossov & Karakhanyan 1977, 32, depicted on pp. 41-42.

NOTE 3
Moses of Knorene, *History of Armenia* 1,12; 2,8.

NOTE 4
Arakelyan 1969; Tiratsiyan 1988; Karapetyan 1996, 35f, Karapetyan 1988, 35f.

NOTE 5
Tiratsiyan 1988, 22

NOTE 6
Ter-Martirossov 1974, 62f.

NOTE 7
Martirosyan 1974, 34, 135.

NOTE 8
Koch 1993; Vellat 1995, 9.

NOTE 9
Summer 1993, 96.

NOTE 10
Oganessian 1980

NOTE 11
Ter-Martirossov in print.

NOTE 12
Tiratsiyan 1960, N 7-8; Oganessian 1980, 61-64, 93-96.

NOTE 13
Oganessian 1980, 61-64, 93-96.

NOTE 14
Ter-Martirossov 1993, 59-72, N1; Ibid. 1999, 32-49, Fig. 33.

NOTE 15
Harmatta 1979, 309; Ter-Martirossov, 1996, 197-200.

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