

Source:

Bobokhyan *et al.* 2019. *Vishap between fairy tale and reality*, Yerevan: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, 528-545.

LES POISSONS MUETS. FISH-SHAPED VISHAPS AND CULT OF WATER IN PREHISTORIC ARMENIA

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Introduction

On Sunday, July 19th, 1909, Russian scholars Nikolay J. Marr and Yakov I. Smirnov went on a horseback trip to the mountains above Garni, Armenia¹. They were curious to see “certaines pierres énormes aux images sculptées”, which locals called “vishaps”, i.e. “dragons” (Marr, Smirnov 1931, 61). Marr and Smirnov were immediately captivated. In total, they visited and documented 19 vishaps (Gilibert, Storaci 2015). In their account, the reader detect a special surprise in finding out that some vishaps were in-the-round reliefs of a fish. More than a century has gone by, but we still share the amazement of Marr and Smirnov.

Today, we classify vishaps according to their iconography. Most of them belong to a kind that we propose to name “vellus” (e.g., fig. 1, PROSPECT 1)². Vellus vishaps are standing stelae characterised by the image of a prepared hide of a horned animal represented as if draped, or spread, on the stela. In consideration of the elongated snout, the downward curved horns, and the position of the ears, we favour an identification with a ram³. A second group of vishaps belong to the “piscis” class, as we propose to call them, and are unique and

distinctive representations of fish (e.g., fig. 1, IMIRZEK 5). Rare examples of an admixture of the two iconographies, which we call “hybrida”, indicates that both the vellus and the piscis vishaps are part of the same phenomenon (e.g., fig. 1, IMIRZEK 2). However, while the vellus iconography is quickly filed within a well-documented deep history of the ritual killing of bovids and caprids, the fish “restent muets quant à leur passé” (Marr, Smirnov 1931, 67). In this contribution, we explore their identification, localisation, meaning and symbolic associations.

Vishaps are one of the most enigmatic megalithic phenomena of Eurasian prehistory. Originally erected with great communal efforts as stand-alone stelae in remote mountain locations, they materialise a system of symbolic practices once widespread over a vast macroregion and now, after several millennia, long lost to us (fig. 2). The original meaning of these monuments is a question of interest for a transdisciplinary scientific community, from archaeologists to historians of religion and folklore as well as, importantly, for the public, particularly in modern Armenia. However, it is also a topic with dangerous pitfalls – primarily the temptation to project medieval and contemporary folk tales back to prehistory – and inherent difficulties, most importantly the uniqueness of the phenomenon: as far as now, we lack any strong parallels. Crucially, we do not even know precisely when vishaps were made: based on absolute datings sampled at Karmir Sar on the south slope of Mount Aragats, the chronological window currently opens in the late-fifth millennium (earliest dated human presence on site) and closes around 2100 BC, when vishaps started to be re-used in funerary monuments (Hnila *et al.* in press). In addition to these chronological uncertainties, excavations recorded spare traces of the monuments’ process of creation and erection, but none that may help us to evaluate better the kind of activities that may have taken place around the monument in its original context, and thus illuminate their

1 Acknowledgments: This research is based on the data collected by The Vishap Project, an ongoing international research project led by Arsen Bobokhyan for the Armenian Academy of Science, by Pavol Hnila for the Freie Universität Berlin (Germany) and by Alessandra Gilibert for the Ca' Foscari University of Venice (Italy). All data pertinent to the excavation at Karmir Sar as well as the data pertinent to the surveys are courtesy of The Vishap Project. We would like to address our most sincere thanks to Professor Paolo Almondo (University of Turin, Italy) for helping us elaborating Graphs 1-4 (below), generously sharing with us his time and expertise.

2 In the recording system devised by The Vishap Project, each vishap is identified by the name of the site of its original location (or, if unavailable, its current location) and a progressive number. So far, for example, five vishaps have been identified as originating from the site “Prospect” on Mount Aragats. Accordingly, they are denominated PROSPECT 1-5.

3 The matter is not settled, as other scholars propose alternative identifications with a goat, a bull, or a buffalo (cf. the discussion in Xnkikyan 2002, 113-117).

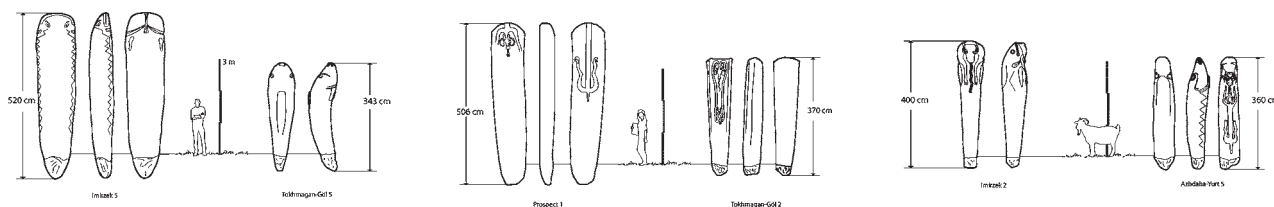


Fig. 1. Overview of vishap typology: examples of piscis (left), vellus (center), and hybrida (right) (Drawing: A. Gilibert)

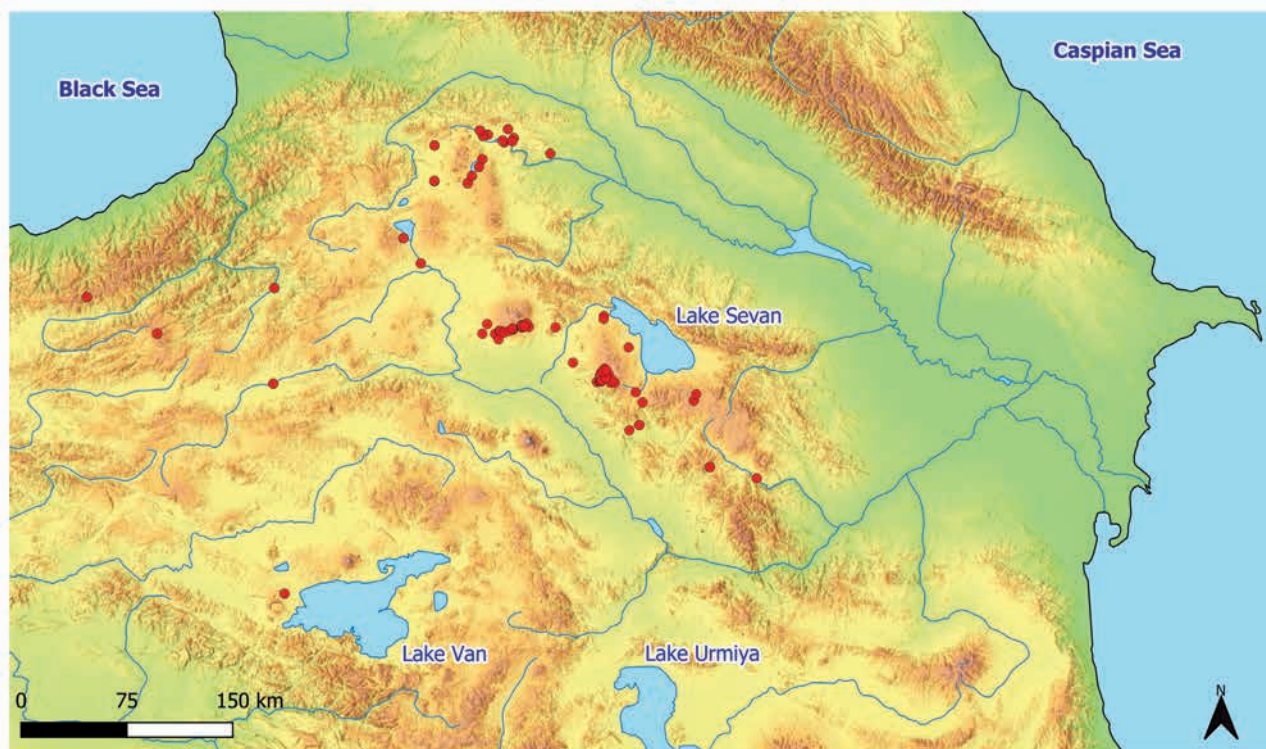


Fig. 2. Distribution of vishaps in the South Caucasus (Map: P. Hnila)

symbolic function. In this contribution, we try to bypass these obstacles by focusing on piscis vishaps and approaching the question of meaning from three different angles: quantitative analysis, iconographic analysis, and semiotic analysis. As we shall see, contrasting piscis and vellus vishaps is crucial to understand both. Therefore, our discussion of piscis vishaps will repeatedly refer to vellus and hybrida vishaps too.

Quantitative analysis

Currently, the ever-increasing database of the Vishap Project counts 113 identified vishaps, and 30 stelae of uncertain nature preliminarily classified as “vishapoids”. The clear majority of the vishaps known to us – 94, i.e. 83% of the total – are located within the borders of Armenia, including three located in Nagorno Karabakh. In addition, ten vishaps are in Southern Georgia; eight are in Eastern Turkey⁴; and one in Nakhichevan. In the following, we base our quantitative analysis on the Armenian vishaps. The majority of Ar-

menian vishaps (83 of total 94 vishaps identified in Armenia) is linked with certainty to one of the three primary typological groups (the identification of the rest is hampered by their fragmentary, eroded, or re-modeled surface). Fifty-six vishaps⁵ (67% of the total 89 typologically identified monuments) belong to the vellus class, nineteen (23%) are piscis⁶, and eight (10%) are hybrida⁷.

5 Currently, this is the list of the 56 vellus vishaps typologically identified with certainty within Armenia (Table 2): AHMADI-OBA 1; ANGEHAKOT 1; ARSHALUYS 1–2, 5; ARTABUYNK 1; ATTASH 1; AZHDAHA-YURT 3, 6; BUZHAKAN 1; CHIVA 1; DASHTADEM 1; DAVAGÖZI 1–3; DAVTASHEN 1; DIKTASH 1; EGHEGIS 1; EGHVARDI SAR 1; GARNI 1; GOGHT 1; HAYSERI-OBA 1; IMIRZEK 1; IRIND 1; KAKAVADZOR 1; KARMIR SAR 1–4, 7–9; KARMRASHEN 1; LCHASHEN 1–2; MURJAKHETI 1; POKR GILANLAR 1; PROSPECT 1–5; SARNAGHBYUR 1; SARUKHAN 1; SELIMPASS 1; TOKHMAGHAN-GÖL 1–2, 4, 6–7; TSAGHKUNK 1; ULGYUR 1–2; VERIN BAZMABERD 1; VISHAPASAR 1–2.

6 piscis vishaps, listed in detail in Table 1, are: ARSHALUYS 3–4, ARTANISH 1, AZHDAHA-YURT 1 and 4, DIKTASH 2–3, GÖLI-YURT 1 and 3, IMIRZEK 4–5, KARMIR SAR 5–6 and 10–11, MAGHALNER 1, SOTK 1, TOKHMAGHAN-GÖL 5, VERIN SASNASHEN 1.

7 Hybrida vishaps (Table 3): ALLICH 3, AZHDAHA-YURT 2 and 5, TOKHMAGHAN-GÖL 3, VOSKETAS 1, IMIRZEK 2.

4 Hnila in press.

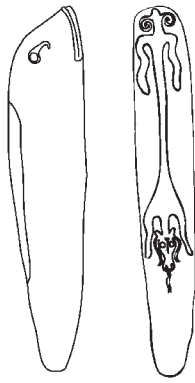


Fig. 3. *Hybrida vishap* IMIRZEK 2, 270 cm (Drawing: A. Gilibert)



Fig. 4. *Piscis vishap* IMIRZEK 4
(Source: Marr, Smirnov 1931, pl. 6)

We propose to start from this sample and compare height and the elevation above sea level of the piscis vishaps with vishaps of other classes, in order to identify patterns of meaning⁸.

Piscis vishaps have a mean height of c. 280 cm (Graph 1). This data is comparable to the mean height of the vellus vishaps, 300 cm, which also has an analogous dispersion around the mean value (Graph 2). This result indicates that both kinds of vishaps followed the same artistic canon and suggests a parallel diachronic history, during which both kinds co-existed at the same time. The data fit well with the existence of a few hybrida vishaps (mean height 310 cm; see Table 4), which demonstrate incontrovertibly that both piscis and vellus vishaps belong to the same phenomenon. The low variability of the canon, particularly the low stylistic variability, may correlate with a relatively short life span of the phenomenon, but this is far from sure and deserves more in-depth study.

Moving on from the data pertaining vishap height to the altitude of their locations, we see that all vishaps belong to the generic mountain environment: the lowest recorded altitude for an original vishap location is

that of the vellus GARNI 1 at 1390 m asl. However, we also note that the mean altitude of piscis vishaps – 2768 m asl – is considerably higher than that of vellus vishaps – 2493 m asl. Indeed, 75% of the piscis vishaps (12 of 16) are located at an altitude between 2700 and 3000 m asl, while this is true for only 53% of the vellus vishaps (Graphs 3–4)⁹. Further, 15% of the vellus vishaps are located at or below 2000 m asl, whereas not a single piscis vishap is found at or below that altitude: the lowest recorded piscis are located in the Gheghama Mountains, at the sites of Imirzek and Azhdaha Yurt, between 2300 and 2500 m asl¹⁰. The 2000 m contour line is significant: below this line, permanent prehistoric settlements begin to appear (Badalyan et al. 2004, 440). Therefore, vellus vishaps found below this altitude were erected in a landscape that might have been already modelled, at least in part, by cultivated fields and gardens (also implying increased accessibility), whereas this cannot be true for piscis vishaps.

This preliminary quantitative analysis leads us to conclude that, in the worldview of the makers of the vishaps, piscis vishaps enjoyed a privileged connection with higher altitudes, as opposed to the vellus vishaps, which were erected at lower altitudes too.

Iconographic analysis

Although vishaps of the piscis class show a relative variability in relief quality and detail, most display a remarkable degree of anatomic precision. The makers of the piscis vishaps paid attention to the form of the fish's body, mouth, snout, nostrils, and gills. They also represented meticulously pectoral fins and, often, the well-defined groove of the dorsal fin. These elements allow us to trace back the piscis to existing fish species. As we shall see, it appears that not all piscis vishaps represent the same fish.

As already noted by previous scholars (most recently, Simonyan 2012:30) as well as by German palaeontologist Oliver Hampe¹¹, several vishaps of the piscis class may represent catfish, as in the case of the piscis vishaps AZHDAHA YURT 4 (fig. 3) and ARSHALUIS 3, as well as the hybrida AZHDAHA YURT 2 (fig. 4). Catfish is a vernacular name used in many countries for a fish of the Siluridae family. According to the international database Fishbase¹², the only native Armenian

8 As we do that, we will take into consideration each time only that fraction of vishaps from the total sample for which complete measures or elevation of the place of origin are known.

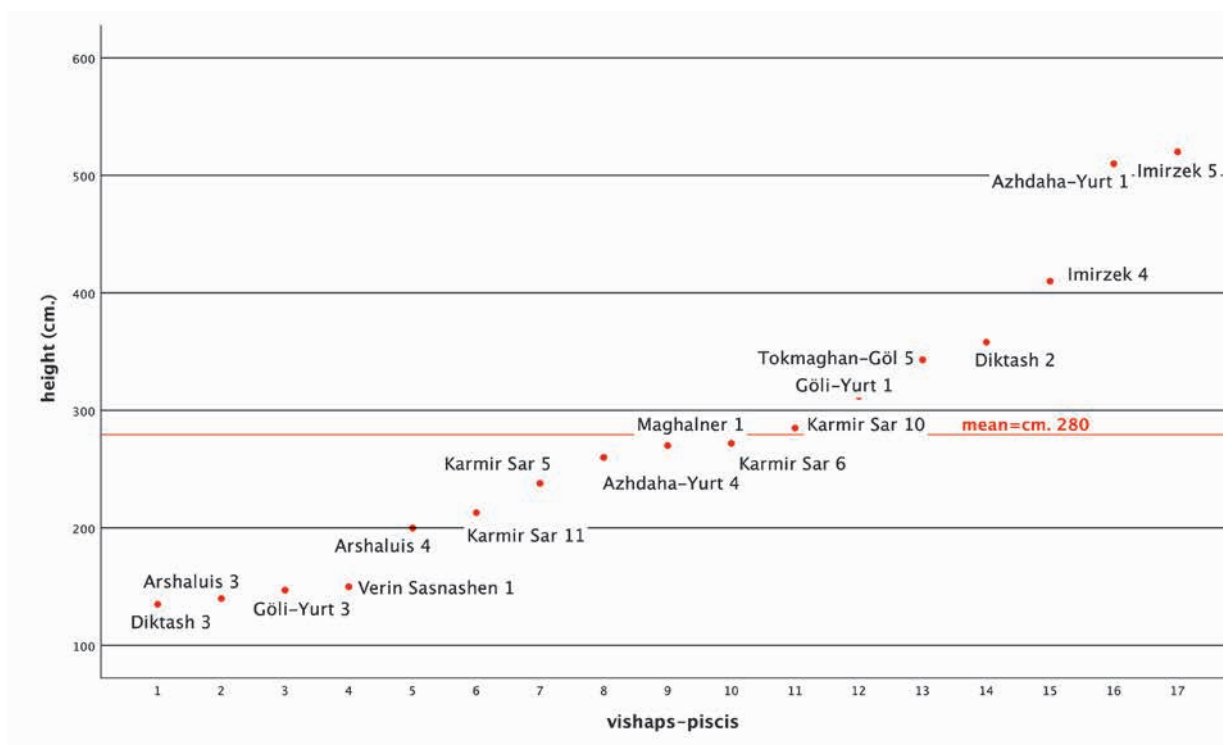
9 The small group of the *hybrida* vishaps (mean elevation: 2461 m asl; Table 3) is in line with the *values* of the vellus vishaps.

10 The piscis from Imirzek and Azhdaha Yurt form a somewhat anomalous subgroup, characterised by an above-average height and a tendentially abstract style, perhaps an index of a chronologically distinct phase.

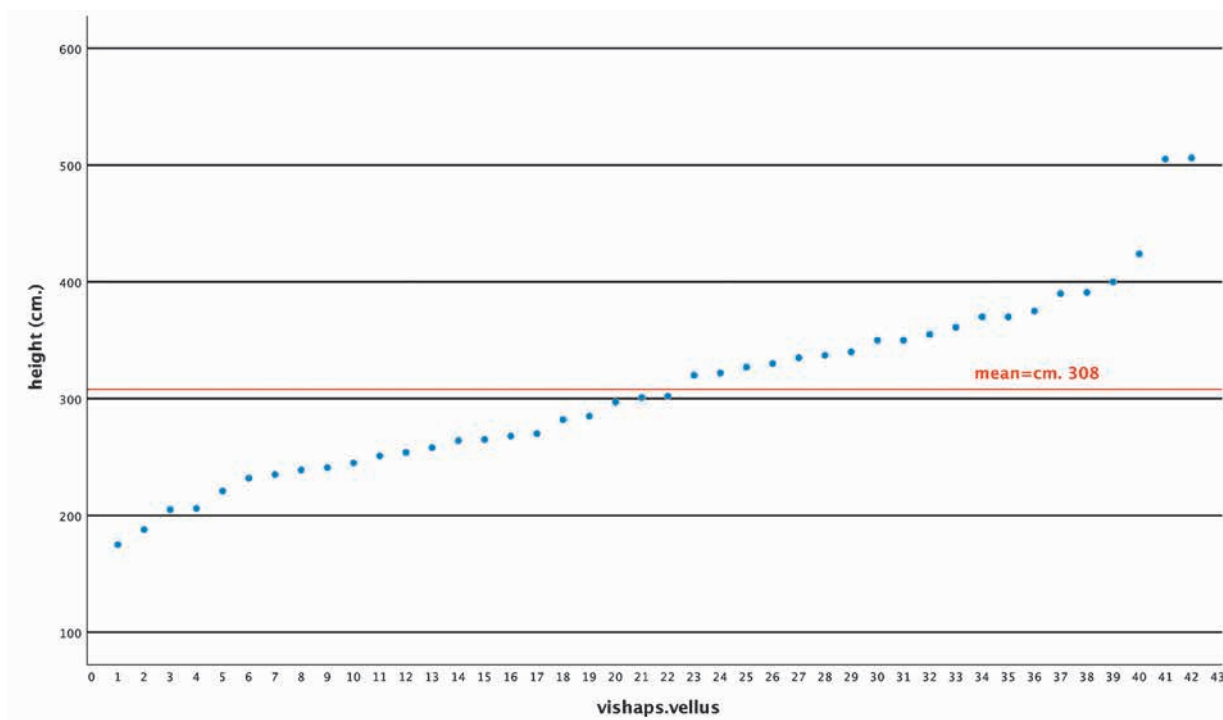
11 Oliver Hampe, email communication to A. Gilibert, dated May 7, 2018.

12 <https://www.fishbase.org/summary/Silurus-glanis.html> (last

Graph 1. Piscis vishaps: an overview of height (source: Table 1)

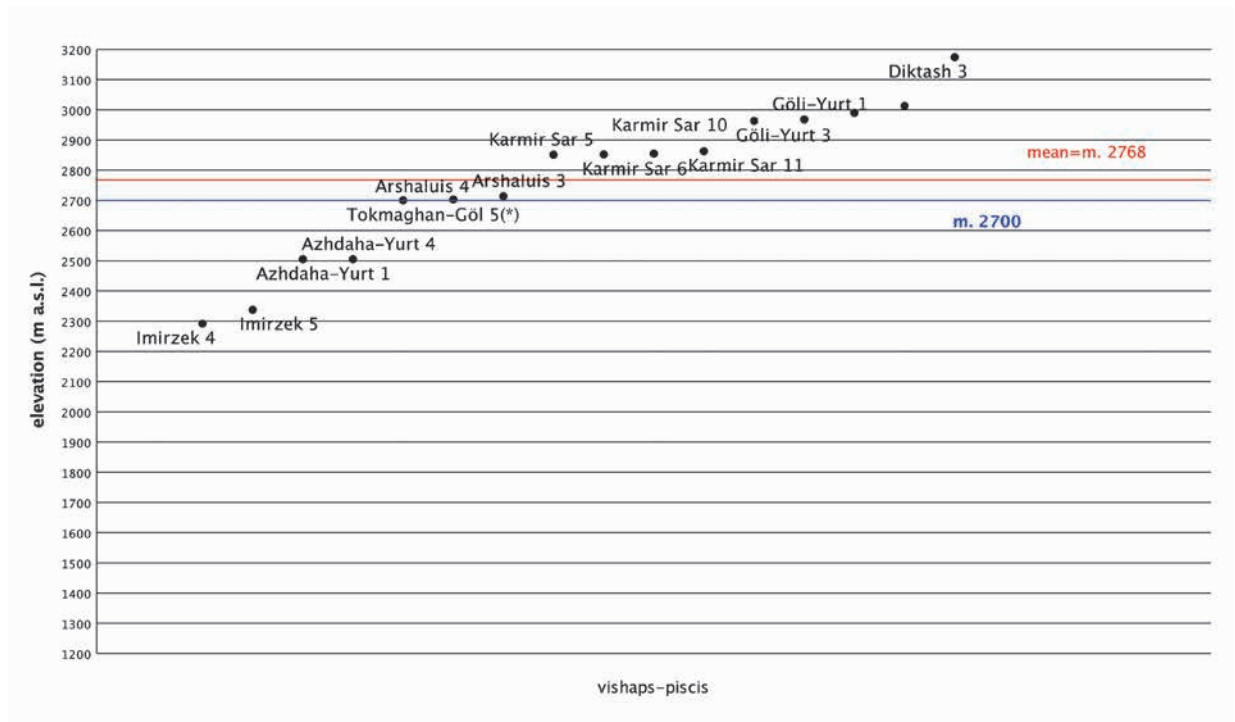


Graph 2. Vellus vishaps: an overview of height (source: Table 2)

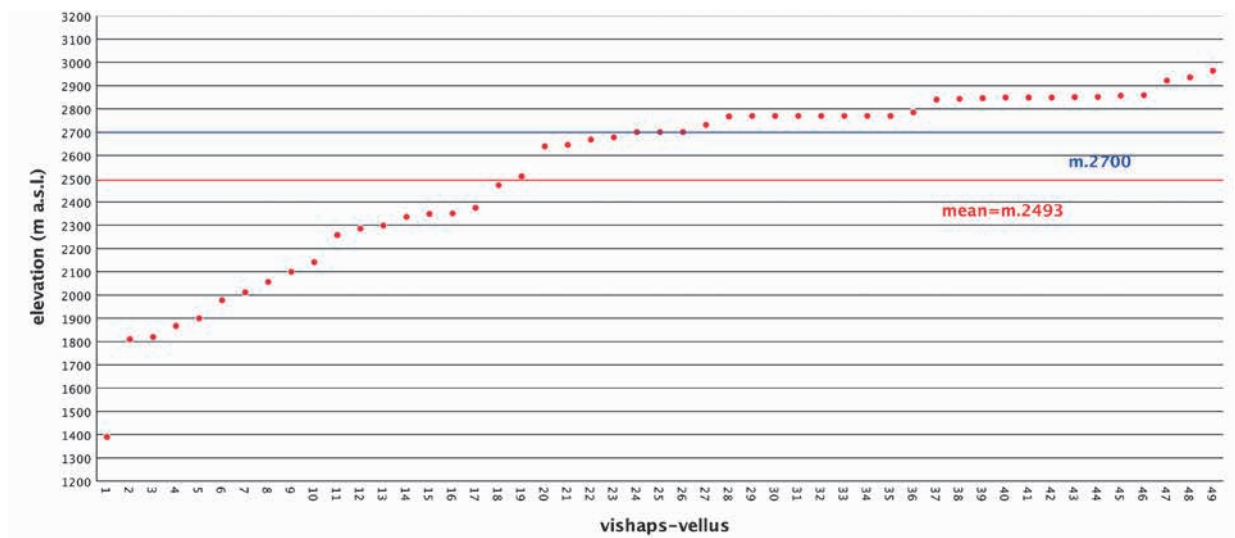


legenda: 1=ATTASH 1; 2=VISHAPASAR 1; 3=TOKHMAGHAN-GÖL 4; 4=POKR GILANLAR 1; 5=ARSHALUYS 1; 6=PROSPECT 5; 7=DAVAGÖZI 2; 8=Buzhakan 1; 9=ANGEGHAKOT 1; 10=ARSHALUYS 5; 11=ULGYUR 2; 12=TSAGHKUNK 1; 13=AZHDAHA-YURT 3; 14=AHMADI-OBA 1; 15=PROSPECT 2; 16=SARNAGHBYUR 1; 17=SELIM PASS 1; 18=KARMRASHEN 1; 19=GOGHT 1; 20=DASHTADEM 1; 21=KARMIR SAR 1; 22=DIKTASH 1; 23=VISHAPASAR 2; 24=EGHEGIS 1; 25=KARMIR SAR 2; 26=AZHDAHA-YURT 6; 27=DAVTASHEN 1; 28=IRIND 1; 29=PROSPECT 3; 30=PROSPECT 4; 31=KARMIR SAR 8; 32=KARMIR SAR 12; 33=ULGYUR 1; 34=LCHASHEN 1; 35=TOKHMAGHAN-GÖL 2; 36=KAKAVADZOR 1; 37=IMIRZEK 3; 38=EGHVARDI SAR 1; 39=TOKHMAGHAN-GÖL 1; 40=KARMIR SAR 4; 41=IMIRZEK 1; 42=PROSPECT 1

Graph 3. Piscis vishaps: an overview of altitude (source: Table 1)



Graph 4. Vellus vishaps: an overview of altitude (source: Table 2)



legenda: 1=GARNI 1; 2=VERIN BAZMABERD 1; 3=BUZHAKAN 1; 4=SARNAGHBYUR 1; 5=LCHASHEN 1; 6=IRIND 1; 7=SA-RUKHAN 1; 8=LCHASHEN 2; 9= IMIRZEK 1; 10=GOGHT 1; 11=IMIRZEK 3; 12=ATTASH 1; 13=HAYSERI-OBA 1; 14=DASH-TADEM 1; 15=SELIM PASS 1; 16=KAKAVADZOR 1; 17= Davtashen 1; 18=AZHDAHA-YURT 6; 19=AZHDAHA-YURT 3; 20=ARSHALUYS 1; 21=ARSHALUYS 2; 22=ARSHALUYS 5; 23=EGHVARDI SAR 1; 24=TOKHMAGHAN-GÖL 2; 25=TOKHMAGHAN-GÖL 6; 26=TOKHMAGHAN-GÖL 7; 27=DAVAGÖZI 3; 28=AHMADI-OBA 1; 29=PROSPECT 1; 30=PROSPECT 2; 31=PROSPECT 3; 32=PROSPECT 4; 33=PROSPECT 5; 34=TOKHMAGHAN-GÖL 1; 35=TOKHMAGHAN-GÖL 4; 36=VISHAPASAR 1; 37=KARMIR SAR 1; 38=KARMIR SAR 3; 39=KARMIR SAR 8; 40=KARMIR SAR 2; 41=KARMIR SAR 4; 42=KARMIR SAR 9; 43=KARMIR SAR 7; 44=KARMIR SAR 12; 45=DAVAGÖZI 2; 46=DAVAGÖZI 1; 47=VISHAPASAR 2; 48=DIKTASH 1; 49=GÖLI-YURT 2.

fish of this family is the *Silurus glanis* (fig. 5). *S. glanis* has an elongated body and a broad head, with a rounded, flattened snout and widely spaced nostrils (Copp et al. 2009, 254): these traits are found in vishaps too. In addition, *S. glanis* is a remarkable fish: it is among the 20 largest freshwater fish worldwide (Stone 2007) and perhaps the most impressive native Armenian fish. It has a mean length of three meters, but it can sometimes reach an exceptional five meters in length. *S. glanis* lives primarily in lakes and slow, deep lowland rivers (Copp et al. 2009, 255). It is a nocturnal predator that grows typically up to 25 years old (but 80-years-old specimens have been registered!) and weight up to more than 300 kg (Copp et al. 2009, 265). From November to March, it hibernates in holes or soft mud. When the water temperature increases, in spring and summer, prey species become abundant, and *S. glanis* begins its feeding season. At the end of March-beginning of April, males and females pair up and undertake short-distance migration to spawn. In the Manzelet Reservoir (Turkey), the spawning season last from early June to August. During spawning, the male pursues the female just under the water surface, repeatedly and with much noise and splashes. When the spawning period is over, *S. glanis* moves back and seeks deeper waters grounds (Copp et al. 2009, 267–269).

The flesh of *S. glanis* is highly palatable, white and boneless, and has 6–8% fat (Linhart 2002, 140). In addition, the skin and eggs of *S. glanis* are also often treated and eaten (Copp et al. 2009, 254). In the South Caucasus, fishing *S. glanis* is a practice attested since the Neolithic and Chalcolithic Ages, although it appears to have been rare and exceptional. At the small Early Bronze Age settlement of Ovçular Tepesi, located on the bank of Arpaçai River in Nakhchivan and inhabited since the Late Chalcolithic (ca. 4350–3940 BC), three one-meter-long bones of *S. glanis* and a vertebra of a smaller individual were found (Kovács et al. 2013, 169)¹³. Further information come from the Neolithic and Chalcolithic levels of Aratashen and Khatunark-Akhnashen in the Ararat plain, both on or near the river Kazakh, which, during the sixth millennium BC “formed a broad basin with small lagoons and lakes, where carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) and catfish (*Silurus glanis*) could be fished”



Fig. 5. *Silurus glanis*. Source: <https://www.youtube.com> (last accessed 12/05/2019)

(Chataigner C. et al. 2014, 13)¹⁴. At Aratashen, more than 15.000 animal bone remains have been collected, and more than 5.000 have been determined by taxa: only two belongs to fishes, both to the Cyprinidae family (Bălăşescu et al. 2010, 27). We find an analogous situation at the site of Shirakavan, situated on the bank of Akhurian River and dating from the 3rd to the 1st millennium BC. Here, 658 faunal remains have been recorded, of which only six belongs to fish of unidentified species. Notably, all fish remains date to the 3rd millennium (Mirzoyan and Manaseryan 2008, 522, with Tab. 1). At Khatunark-Aknashen, about 13.000 faunal remains have been recorded, and more than 5900 have been identified by taxa. Fish bones are less than fifty, almost all coming from the Neolithic level. Of them, only four bones have been identified: three belong to carps, and one belongs to *S. glanis*, a vertebra. This vertebra comes from a 1.5m-long *S. glanis* of c. 30kg (Bălăşescu et al. 2010, 29). Fishing was a rather marginal activity, limited perhaps to small sized fish, eaten probably in their entirety and leaving very rarefied traces in the archaeological record. On the other hand, fishing *S. glanis* must have been an extraordinary event, as shown by the fact that, among a different set of various ornamental artefacts, we also find a pendant made with a catfish vertebra (Badalyan et al. 2010, 201 and fig. 14:7)¹⁵.

Not all piscis look like *S. glanis*. As already noted by Marr, “certains ont la tête d’un silure, d’autres la tête pointue d’un poisson connu au Caucase – tanar” (Marr 1931, 94). The tanar is a kind of carp that originated in the drainages of Black, Caspian and Aral seas and, from this zone, it disseminated to the east and the west (Balon 1995, 3). As already mentioned, the fish remains of Ovçular Tepesi are almost exclusively carps, as are the few fish remains of fishes of Aratashen and

accessed May 3, 2019).

13 At Ovçular Tepesi, fish remains are abundant. The analysis of faunal remains found in three large refuse pits dated to the earlier phase (ca. 4350–4250 BC) led to the identification of more than 2500 fish bones, almost exclusively cyprinids. The analysis of remains from the Early Bronze Age village are similar (Berthon et al. 2013, tab. 5; Kovács et al. 2013, tab. 4). The subsistence of the inhabitants was based on mixed farming, but “fishing in the nearby river completed the meat diet” (Berthon et al. 2013, 198).

14 For fish species, see Badalyan et al. 2007 and Badalyan et al. 2010.

15 Bones of *S. glanis* were also found at the urban centre Argishtikhinili (1st millennium BC) and Medieval (Manaseryan 2003, 102).



Fig. 6. *Cyprinus carpio*. Source: <https://www.carpology.net/articles/features/understanding-carp-shows> (last accessed 12/05/2019)



Fig. 7. Piscis vishap VERIN SASNASHEN 1 (Photo: A. Gilibert)

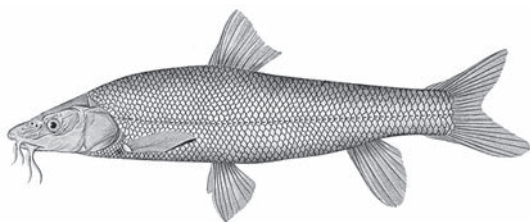


Fig. 8. *Luciobarbus capito* (Source: Kessler 1874, pl. 11)



Fig. 9. Piscis vishap GÖLI-YURT 1 (Photo: P. Hnila)

Khatunark-Akhnashen. Therefore, carps may have directly inspired the makers of vishaps too. Even if less impressive than the *S. glanis*, the common carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) can reach a remarkable size of more than one meter of length, and weight up to 20 kg. The carp's body is large and stocky, the belly prominent and pronounced (fig. 6), features that we may recognise in piscis vishaps such as KARMIR SAR 5, TOKHMA-GAN-GÖL 5 and VERIN SASNASHEN 1 (fig. 7). Furthermore, the common carp is known to be able to vertically jump out of the water (Stuart et al. 2006, 889), in a way that may have been captured by the vertical position of the piscis vishaps. In general, however, the common carp do not have “la tête pointue” noted by Marr, which indeed characterises several vishaps. Nina Manaseryan suggests that the piscis vishaps with a pointed head may instead represent another carp, the *Luciobarbus capito* (Manaseryan 2003, 102)¹⁶, also known as Bulatmai barbel, or simply barbel. The head of the *L. capito* is decidedly pointy (fig. 8), with direct parallels in piscis vishaps such as GÖLI-YURT 1 (fig. 9). The *L. capito* is native of the Caspian Sea and the Aral Lake. For spawning, in spring and summer, it migrates up larger tributaries. It can reach one meter in length and today lives in the Akhurian and Metsamor rivers, as well as in some reservoirs. Unsurprisingly, the *L. capito* was known in prehistoric times: in the Chalcolithic pits of Ovçular Tepesi two fish remains of *L. capito* were found (Berthon et al. 2013, Table 5).

Other piscis vishaps combine a pointy head with a slender, elongated and fusiform silhouette, far from the stocky body of carps. We would not go as far as to see in them “certaines variétés peu connues de dauphins”, as Smirnov hypothesised in 1909 (Marr, Smirnov 1931, 64) when he saw the hybrida AZHDAHA-YURT 5 (fig. 10), now in front of Sardarapat Museum. Rather, we suggest searching among fish species native to Armenia. Among them, we find the *Esox lucius*, also known as Northern pike. Pikes have an elongated, torpedo-like form, with sharply pointed heads and sharp teeth (fig. 11). Their colouration is typically grey-green with camouflage stripes along their backs. Pike can grow to a large size: the average length is about 40–55 cm, with maximum recorded lengths of up to 150 cm and published weights of 28.4 kg¹⁷. It is a fish with a mild-tasting flesh and a long history in cuisine, but its most notable characteristics are his aggressive and even cannibalistic

16 “The fish-vishaps appeared [to Marr] to have in one case a large head of a sheet-fish, in another one the head is sharp like chanar-fish (perhaps *Barbus capito*)” (Manaseryan 2003, 103). Sheet fish is a common name for *Silurus glanis*. *Luciobarbus capito* and *Barbus capito* are synonyms.

17 <https://www.fishbase.org/summary/Esox-lucius.html> (last accessed May 3, 2019).

behaviour. The pike is an ambush predator, a characteristic that has earned it a place in numerous worldwide mythologies. Currently, the pike lives in the rivers Akhurian, Arpa, Metsamor and Vorotan. Like *S. glanis*, the pike has a large mouth, but, other than *S. glanis*, the body is elongated and streamlined. The pike also has a flat, broad, almost duck-like snout (In France, its common name is “Bec de canard”). These features are reminiscent of AZHDAHA-YURT 5 and, perhaps, KARMIR SAR 6.

A last subgroup of piscis, finally, seems to be idealised and abstract versions of the above-described types: this is the case of AZHDAHA-YURT 1, ARSHALUIS 4, IMIRZEK 4, IMIRZEK 5 (fig. 12), and KARMIR SAR 11 (fig. 13). These piscis display an elongated and arched body form, with schematic and geometrically stylized details. Although they are still reminiscent of *Siluridi* and *Cyprini*¹⁸, their makers pursued a conscious choice towards abstraction. As we shall see in the paragraph below, some of these vishaps also have a height above average (4-5m) and are located at sites with a below-average altitude. Since they are few, circumscribed to the Geghama Mountains and located at sites marked by the presence of hybrida, which themselves represents a small per cent the total of vishaps, we may perhaps detect here a chronologically distinct group, somewhat later than earlier than the rest (due to its limited number and distribution)¹⁹.

The iconographic analysis of the piscis vishaps indicates that the vishaps materialised meanings conveyed not by a specific kind of fish, but by several similar fish species, all belonging to a larger group of lowland fish. More specifically, the makers of vishaps were inspired by large-size predator fish naturally living in the rivers and lakes of the lowlands, known and fished at least since the Neolithic period. Combining this conclusion with the conclusions drawn from the quantitative analysis, we observe a specific desire to erect the image of a fish known from a lowland environment at a location far away from its habitat, thus envisioning a precise connection between high-altitude meadows and lowland environments.

18 They may even remind of *Percidi* – *nota bene*: two remains of perches were found in the Urartian site of Aramus, Kotayk (Kuchelmann et al. 2017, with Table 2).

19 Although, of course, we shall beware of dating based on alleged innate tendencies, assuming for example that “abstract” phases evolve from “realistic” phases... Relief stelae from Western Europe, for example, are thought to follow a tendency from more straightforward, more geometric forms to increased complexity and richness of details: Mezzena 1998, 82. We mainly refer to the unique site of St. Martin de Corleans, in the Italian Alps, where over 40 anthropomorphic stelae were erected between 2900 and 2500 BC, with a distinct evolution towards increasing complexity of composition and details (Poggiani Keller et al. 2016).



Fig. 10. Hybrida vishap AZHDAHA-YURT 5 (Photo: P.Hnila)



Fig. 11. *Esox lucius*. Photo: Georg Mittenecker.
Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons>
(last accessed 13/05/2019)



Fig. 12. Piscis vishap IMIRZEK 5 (Photo: P.Hnila)



Fig. 13. Piscis vishap KARMIR SAR 11 during excavation
(Photo: P.Hnila)

Semiotic analysis

The immediate trait-d'union between lowland rivers and mountain meadows are the water springs found near most higher-altitude sites. A connection between vishaps and water sources was observed already by Atrpet in the late 19th century (Bobokhyan, in press). As noted by Marr as early as 1909, vishaps are “construites par groupes ou par famille au milieu des eaux, près des sources de lacs ou de rivières” (Marr, Smirnov 1931, 87). The same idea was embraced by Ashkharbek Kalantar in the 1920s, who identified the vishaps as “monuments related to the “cult of water” (Kalantar 1994 (1925), 22), with the piscis vishaps identified as “the god of water, the fish” (Kalantar 1925, 22)²⁰.

Numerous scholars then accepted this basic idea, and several aspects that we discuss below have been already prefigured in earlier literature, notably by eminent Armenian scholars: we refer the reader to the extensive resume of the history of research compiled by Xnkikyan (2002, 114–115) and Bobokhyan (in press), in press. Here, we propose to integrate the results obtained by previous scholars with an approach loosely inspired by structural semiotics.

First, we note that piscis and vellus vishaps fit into a single symbolic paradigm, share the same communicative strategies and make use of the same semiotic code, as clearly demonstrated by the existence of a few vishaps combining both iconographies. Indeed, all vishaps are monumental, vertical stelae located at high-altitude meadows; all vishaps were stand-alone monuments erected in loose clusters, or “families”, including vishaps of both kinds²¹; They never stand out in the landscape but are preferably placed in secluded positions, within water-rich mountain meadows. Finally, clusters of vishaps are never inter-visible, thus suggesting that each cluster was independent of the next. In short, piscis and the vellus vishaps are atoms of a single,

independent cultural molecule. In this molecule the two atoms appear to bear the same weight: neither size nor relative spatial arrangements are suggestive of an inner hierarchy between the two. These observations lead us to explore the differences between them. If analysed as part of a coherent code, the meaning of the piscis and the vellus vishaps seems structured around binary oppositions. On one side, we have the representation of a living animal, a giant lowland fish, emerging vertically and powerfully from the ground, captured perhaps in the middle of a jump. The fish is beyond human control: a wild animal, enveloped in silence, emerging from depths unknown, precluded to humankind. The peculiarity of the representation – a standing / rising / jumping fish – underscores the divine aura surrounding the stelae. Sax, who studied the metaphorical bonds between animals and human beings, points out: “fish are remarkably difficult to humanise. The reason may be a combination of their remote, expressionless eyes and their utter silence, which are such a contrast to the expressive glances and constant speech of human beings” (Sax 2011, 211). Another point of contrast with most other animals is gender: it is notoriously difficult to identify fish by gender, and some fish can even change sex at a certain point in life. Accordingly, although piscis vishaps do have in a few cases a phallic aspect, the gender of the represented fish remains unexpressed²². In short, the piscis vishaps is likely to represent a divine being, silent and remote – the master, or at least the god-sent representant, of deep waters.

Vellus vishaps tell another story. As opposed to piscis vishaps, vellus vishaps do not represent a being but an artefact, a ceremonial object: a prepared animal hide spread or draped on a stela. The animal in question – in our understanding: a caprid, probably an adult male domesticated sheep, i.e., a ram²³ – is, of course, dead. More than that: it has been killed, and the stone relief is a memorial to this event. Its death has followed a precise choreography. We can easily envisage the main acts involved: the animal was selected and killed, presumably by cutting the throat: wavy lines coming out of the animal's throat are likely to represent the spurt of blood accompanying the act, symbolically underscoring its importance. The animal was then disembowelled and slaughtered. Probably, its meat was por-

20 According to Kalantar, the *piscis* vishaps were erected in “important points of ancient irrigation systems” (Kalantar 1994 (1925), 24). Until now, however, our field observations could not confirm this statement: although ancient canals are occasionally occurring in the proximity of vishap sites, we could not record any clear connection or pattern.

21 This statement is not to be interpreted in the sense that each vishap is a solitary feature of an otherwise “empty” landscape. The point is instead that, when vishaps come in groups, they still strike us as remarkably independent from one another and from other prehistoric structures that are often found in their proximity. Groups of vishaps found at the same spot show no apparent relation between one another, hierarchical or otherwise, nor do we detect any significance or regularity in the pattern of their cluster. When prehistoric constructions (e.g., funerary mounds) are found at vishap sites, they are seldom adjacent to vishaps, and those who are, appear to date later than the vishaps. In this sense, we define every single vishaps as a stand-alone monument in a particular place deemed apt for its erection, where also other vishaps could be erected.

22 It remains equally unclear whether the *double entendre* phallus // fish is intentional or not. In selected cases, the visual analogy is undeniable and quite beyond cultural misunderstandings, but the same does not hold for most piscis vishaps.

23 Oliver Hampe, curator at the Museum for Natural History of Berlin, prefers to see in it a West Caucasian tur (*Capra caucasica*), or a wild goat (*Capra aegagrus*). However, he also notes that identification is unsure. Oliver Hampe, email to Alessandra Gilibert, May 7, 2018.

tioned, cooked, shared and consumed. Finally, its skin and extremities were prepared according to a ritual scheme and ceremonially exposed. The collection of sacrificial blood, further offerings and divination might have taken place concurrently. In this religious drama, the human agency takes centre stage. The caprid is the sacrificial victim – the chosen means to engage in communication with the divine. The choice of animal for sacrifice is significant. Herd animals such as sheep and goats are uniquely integrated into human society, and it is not by chance that they have been among the earliest domesticated species – and among the most favoured for ritual sacrifice. Sheep and goats share with us a similar ecological habitat, and their social behaviour is immediately decipherable from a human perspective: they move in groups, follow leaders, and need protection from predators. Although they lack speech, their voices, glances and body language are easily humanised and unfailingly arise human empathy. Finally, much of their anatomy bears immediate resemblance to ours, beginning from their inner organs, which are often used for divination of the future. In *Homo Necans*, Burkert puts an accent on the exchangeability of man and animal in sacrifice: in the eyes of the ritual killers, animals like sheep and goats “conspicuously resembled men in their body structure and movements, their eyes and their ‘faces,’ their breath and voices, in fleeing and in fear. Most of all, this similarity with man was to be recognized in killing and slaughtering: the flesh was like flesh, bones like bones, phallus like phallus, and heart like heart, and most important of all, the warm running blood was the same. One could, perhaps, most clearly grasp the animal’s resemblance to man when it died” (Burkert 1983, 20). According to Burkert’s analysis, bloody sacrifices take place to channel, heighten and resolve social tensions in an emotional performance. Given its aspects as a dramatisation of social relationships, in ritual killing the gender of the participants and the sacrificed animal is often an explicit preoccupation. Accordingly, it is not surprising that, on vellus vishaps, the sacrificed animal is invariably male.

Since the bloody sacrifice is a ritual enactment of the necessity of death for the continuation of life, we can see the manipulation of the sacrificed animal’s skin and bones into a fetish object as an attempt at restoration, “thereby establishing an order whose power resides in its contrast to what went on before” (Burkert 1983, 38). The vellus vishaps are a powerful testimony to the ambiguity of the ritual. Usually, the animal’s hide is portrayed with the horned head draped at shoulder height and the front extremities hanging down (fig. 14). The whole assemblage gives a distinctly anthropomorphic impression, conveying a peculiarly affecting, even



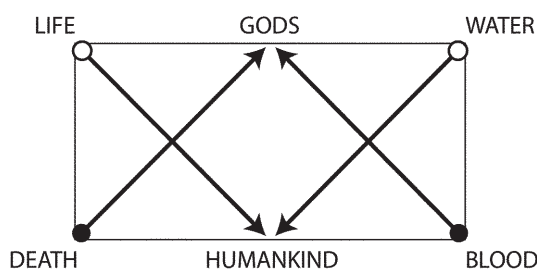
Fig. 14. Vellus vishap KARMIR SAR 8 (Photo: P. Hnila)

frightening admixture of death, power, and re-birth as fetish. (Later, in a few cases, people reinterpreted or mistook vellus vishaps as portraits of warriors and kings). In our view, the makers of the vellus vishaps saw themselves primarily as participants in a ritual killing and perhaps in the ensuing sacred meal – a stark contrast to the making of a divine fish, we believe.

Preliminarily, we may summarise the different connotations of piscis and vellus vishaps in the following scheme:

Piscis	Vellus
life	death
water	blood
gender-fluid	male
silent and emotionless	loud and expressive
beyond human control	under human control
far away from natural habitat	in natural habitat
represents a divine being	is manipulated into a ritual artefact
functions as a divine epiphany	functions as a request of divine agency
human agency is absent	human agency is central

If this line of inquiry is correct, piscis and the vellus vishaps materialise two complementary aspects of a single religious cult. We can organise the critical oppositional terms around the vertices of a rectangle, as in the diagram:



In our view, vishaps derive their meanings from an axial opposition between the sphere of the divine (in



Fig. 15. Fragmentary vellus vishap LCHASHEN 2
(Photo: P. Hnila)



Fig. 16. The Hasanlu bowl (Source: Winter 1989, 90, fig. 6,
drawing by M. T. M. de Schauensee)

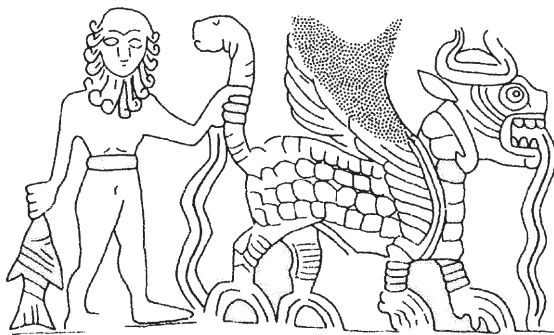


Fig. 17. Detail of the relief on a cultic basin from Ebla
(Source: Seidl 1998, 111, fig. 10)

the diagram: above), beyond human control and associated with life and water, and the sphere of human agency (in the diagram: below), under human control and associated with death and blood. Thus, we begin to grasp the exchange envisaged by the makers of the vishaps: death and blood offered to the gods, in return for life and water.

In this perspective, the piscis and the vellus vishaps are integral parts of a cult of water as a life-spending element. However, once accepted this interpretation as a possibility, the imagery itself is still far from being explained. We want to go a little further and try to sketch a possible religious scenario behind the specific choice of imagery.

Following a scheme recently proposed by Duffy (2017, 3), from earliest times to the advent of modern

science, the balance of water has generally been explained according to two basic models. The first model, which Duffy calls “reverse hydrologic cycle”, assumes the existence of a subterranean freshwater reservoir, seen as the source of water for springs and rivers. In this view, the vertical exchange of precipitation and evaporation plays a minor role and is separate from the subterranean freshwater reservoir (with various ideas of how subterranean water might ascend to the surface). The second model, the “vertical hydrologic cycle”, sets the accent on rainfall and assumes that rainfall is, in some way or another, the prime responsible for the water of springs and rivers. Text sources indicate that, in the ancient Near East, both models coexisted. At least from the second millennium BC onwards, Babylonia and Assyria adhered to the first model, while the Levant, where rainfall had the most significant impact on agriculture, adhered to the second model. Each model gave way to a different pantheon structure. Assyro-Babylonian cosmologies distinguished between a wise, creator god commanding a subterranean freshwater ocean (connected to fish imagery, precisely, a carp²⁴), and a god commanding rainfall, storm and thunder. Levantine cosmologies, on the other hand, adhered to the second model, denied the existence of a subterranean water expanse and consequently conferred special prominence to storm gods, invariably conceived as warrior deities. In Central Turkey, seal impressions of the early second millennium show both a terrestrial water-god, in association with fish, and a celestial storm-god holding a thunderbolt and riding a bull, imported from the Syro-Mesopotamian area (Green 2003, 107-112). These images suggest that around 1800 BC local cosmologies distinguished rainfall and spring water²⁵. Given these considerations, we advance the hypothesis that piscis vishaps may represent a local numinous entity connected with the idea of vast, primaevial expanses of subterranean water as the origin of life and wisdom. At the same time, the high-altitude location of the piscis vishaps may imply a belief in mountain springs as the place where the primaevial water ascends to the surface from the underground. The fish imagery on the vishaps corresponds well to all known characteristics of subterranean water cults, which are usually believed to be a source of ancient wisdom, surrounded by mystery and silence. Are the vellus vishaps sacrifices to this fish-god?

24 The carp, Akkadian *purādu*, was thought to live in the *apsū*, the subterranean freshwater sea, and to partake of ancient wisdom (Wiggermann 1992, 76-77).

25 In the second half of the second millennium BC, perhaps for political reasons, Hittite religion took a Levantine turn, abandoned the “terrestrial water-god” and adhered to the “vertical hydrologic cycle” model, with a storm-god dominating the pantheon (Archi 2015).

Not in our view, since the size and relative position of the stelae reflect a complementary, not a hierarchical relation between the two kinds. However, every cosmology adhering to the “reverse hydrological cycle” has to explain rainfall too and usually does that through the hypostasis of one or more storm gods. In the ancient Near East, the abode of the storm god is, without exceptions, the sky, the clouds, and the mountain peaks.

Furthermore, storm gods are powerful warrior deities, commanding the weather, and brandishing deadly weapons. Whereas the cult of the underground waters revolves around the concepts of origin, creation, depth and wisdom, the cult of the storm god revolves around the concept of unpredictability, seasonality, and the need for perpetual appeasement of an irascible god. The visual rhetoric of violence encoded in the vellus vishaps supports the hypothesis that the caprid was sacrificed to a storm-god, in order to appease the weather and bring rain.

The interpretation of vellus vishaps as sacrifices to a storm god is reinforced by the iconographic detail of the wavy lines regularly incised as if hanging from or streaming out of the mouth, the chin or, more likely perhaps, the cut throat of the animal. The length and form of these lines are variable, with a tendency to split up in two or more parts. In some vellus vishaps, such as LCHASHEN 2 (fig. 15) or IMIRZEK 4, the lines are remarkably prominent and occupy a large part of the relief surface. This fact indicates that the lines are unlikely to represent a real detail of the prepared hide (e.g., a goat’s beard²⁶) but rather signify the symbolic flowing of a liquid out of the sacrificed animal. According to the previous line of argument, the liquid in question is likely to be the animal’s blood. In our understanding, the imagery envisions an exchange between the sacrificed animal’s blood and god-sent rainwater. As already argued elsewhere (Bobokhyan et al. 2015, 205), the religious ideas behind the vishaps’s imagery may be tentatively illustrated through a golden bowl found at Hasanlu, Iran, probably dating to the late-2nd millennium BC (fig. 16).

The Hasanlu bowl is decorated with complex mythological scenes. According to the interpretation of Porada and Winter, the fulcrum of the composition is, in the upper part, the storm god riding a chariot driven by two bulls (Winter 1989, 93). The bulls issue streams of water from their mouths. In front of the god, men bring in rams as sacrificial victims. On the bowl, we see the representation of a symbolic exchange: the blood of sheep in exchange for rainwater. The sacrifice of sheep

to the storm god is a standard procedure in the Hurro-Hittite world of the 2nd millennium²⁷ and characterizes also 1st-millennium storm-god cults: at the Iron Age mountain sanctuary of Dülük Baba Tepesi, where the Storm God of Doliche (later Iupiter Dolichenus) was revered, 97.2% of burnt meat offerings were sheep (Pöllath and Peters 2011)²⁸. The complex imagery of the Hasanlu bowl adheres to this general practice, but is thought to reflect Hurrian mythology in particular, i.e., the mythology of a population who spoke a Caucasian language group and arrived in the Near East from the Caucasus sometime between the late-4th and early-3rd millennium BC²⁹. Hurrian religion appears to have precisely imagined rainwater as issuing in streams out of the mouth of mythical bulls – the bulls which pulled the chariot of the Storm God. This idea was widely shared in the northern regions of the Near East. Rhytons with bull-head spouts were in use in Anatolia already in the Old Assyrian Period (Özgüç 2005, 213, fig. 217). In the later course of the second millennium, the Hittites appropriated the myth of the water-spending bull and manufactured fountain spouts in the shape of a bull’s head, with water sprouting from the animal’s mouth (Yildirim 2008: 838-839; Schachner 2018, 260). Spouts in the shape of bull’s heads also ornated the rim of ritual vessels: “when liquid was poured into a slot in the rim, a mystical stream flowed from the heads of bulls into the vessel, like rain from the Storm-god’s sacred animals” (Gates 2017, 202). A similar mythological worldview may have lived on into the Iron Age and beyond, for example, as recently proposed, in the figure of the Urartian god Quera (Bobokhyan et al. 2019). Acknowledging these parallels quite early, Armenian scholars interpreted vellus vishaps as images of water-sprouting bulls (Xnkikyan 2002, 14). This hypothesis cannot be entirely dismissed, but we rather propose to identify the image as that of a sacrificial animal with anatomical traits typical of a domesticated male sheep, a ram. Following the semiotic code visualised above, we understand the liquid streaming out the mouth of the

26 Our earlier readings went in this direction, but we are now convinced otherwise, as more and more vishaps bearing non-realistic / symbolic details are being discovered.

27 As represented, among other sources, on the relief orthostats from the Hittite site of Alaca Höyük, modern Turkey: see the discussion in Yıldırım 2008.

28 The unburnt bone assemblage at Dülük Baba Tepesi, thought to reflect banqueting practices accompanying the sacrifice, is equally dominated by sheep, but includes also mutton, chevron, cattle, small birds and, interestingly, fish – catfish and cyprinids (Pöllath and Peters 2011, 49).

29 In Hurrian mythology, the two bulls drawing the storm god’s chariot are called *sēriš* and *hurra*. The etymologies of the names are unclear, but Melikišvili proposes to translate *hurra* as “dispenser of water” (Melikišvili 1971, quoted in Haas 1982, 74). Haas, on the other hand, favours an interpretation as “day” and “night” (Haas 1982, 76-77). Cf, however, the doubts about both interpretations formulated by Schwemer 2001, 478-479.

sacrificed caprid as the blood offered to the deity to receive water in exchange³⁰, perhaps metonymically imagined as water coming out of the mouth of the storm god's sacred animal, the bull.

More broadly speaking, the idea of water coming out the mouth of a mythical animal reined in by the storm god is also documented on visual and textual sources from Mesopotamia and the Levant at least since the late-3rd millennium BC (Collon 1987, Nos. 725, 779-80; Seidl 1998, Matthiae 2015). Here, the water-spending animal associated with the storm god is a mixed being, a "lion-dragon" called *abūbu* (Akkadian "flood"). On a cult basin from late 3rd-millennium Ebla (fig. 17), the tail of this mythical animal is firmly held by a naked hero with a wildly curly beard; streams of water flow from the figure's left hand, and a fish hangs from his right hand. Wiggerman has identified this iconographic type with a protective spirit called *lahmu*, the "Hairy One", characterised by texts as a benevolent water spirit and keeper of life; his curly hairs are yet another indirect representation of water (Wiggermann 1992, 148-150). Numerous textual and figurative parallels from the late-3rd and 2nd millennium BC attest the "Hairy One" as a spirit subservient to Ea, the Mesopotamian god of knowledge, master of the subterranean freshwater – for which he often stands (Boehmer 1965, 92-93; Otto 2000, 242-243). In conclusion, the composition on the Ebla basin is a mythological representation of the double origin of freshwater, the subterranean basin and rainfall, a quite fitting conceptual parallel from the Mediterranean Levant to the symbolic system of the vishaps³¹.

30 During the second millennium, blood was the prime index of mortality. Beckman notes: "In a legendary account of the campaigns conducted in Anatolia by the Sargonic king Narām-Sîn, the ruler commands that a scout be dispatched to perform the following test on terrifying beings encountered by his forces: 'When he proceeds to pierce(!) them with a spear and cut them with a blade(?)—if [blood] spurts forth from them, they are human, and I shall go against them (in battle). If blood does not spurt forth from them, they are deities, and I will not go against them.'" (Beckman 2011, 95). In Hittite ritual, blood stood as *pars pro toto* for the sacrifice itself; special prominence was given to the cutting of the animal's throat and the collecting of the blood, which was then regularly offered as a drink to the deity (Beckman 2011, 99-100).

31 In a few cases, *vellus* vishaps were used as a canvas for slightly more varied compositions. HARSZHIS 1 is a *vellus* additionally decorated with a snake, with no parallels. Six *vellus* vishaps are decorated with two or more hides of sacrificed caprids (AZHDAHA YURT 3, TOKHMAGAN GÖL 1, IMIRZEK 1, KARMIR SAR 2, KARMIR SAR 9, VISHAPASAR 2) and three with a hide with multiple heads (ARSHALUIS 5, IMIRZEK 3, PROSPECT 5). Three *vellus* vishaps – TOKHMAGAN GÖL 1, IMIRZEK 1 and KARMIR SAR 9 – and the *hybrida* vishap AZHDAHA YURT 2 bear the additional image of two birds represented face to face. The birds have long legs, long necks, a streamlined body and a wedge-shaped, medium-sized beak. Their anatomy and their position allow us to identify them as cranes in the typically erect "parade march" posture that these birds adopt

Conclusion

In this contribution, we argue that piscis vishaps are part of a religious cult of water, with a focus on mountain springs. We identify them as monumental representations of large-size predator fish naturally living in the rivers and lakes of the lowlands, such as catfish, pikes, or carps. What are the images of lowland fish doing in high-altitude meadows? In our view, the meaning of the piscis vishaps must be understood contrasting them with the vellus vishaps, taking into account the existence of the mixed iconographies on hybrida vishaps. We advance the hypothesis that vishaps reflect a cult based on a dual origin of water, a subterranean and a celestial origin. This hypothesis is supported both by Bronze Age textual and visual parallels, in particular from Hurrian mythology, and by a "structuralist" analysis of the iconography. Specifically, we argue that piscis vishaps represent a local numinous entity connected with the idea of vast, primaevial expanses of subterranean water as the origin of the water of mountain springs, rivers, and lakes, but also of life and wisdom. Conversely, we propose to interpret vellus vishaps as images of bloody sacrifices to a local storm god, based on a cultic offering of blood in exchange for rainfall water.

The complexity implied by the making of such monuments points to the presence on site of coordinated groups of people. The connection between lowlands and high-altitude meadows and the importance conferred to herd animals suggest that the makers of vishaps were familiar with both environments, pointing perhaps to agro-pastoralist groups involved in water-dependent seasonal activities and practising a summer vertical transhumance.

Monument-making activities, particularly in extreme natural environments, have a critical socio-anthropological impact on collective identity. As already

when engaging in their distinctive dances of courtship or agonistic display (Johnsgard 1983, 235). The seasonal pattern, group behaviour, loud cries and dancing choreographies of cranes attracted human attention everywhere. In Central Turkey, however, cranes were attached symbolic significance particularly during the Neolithic. At the site of Çatalhöyük, for example, images of dancing cranes were found together with a crane wing, initially complete with feather, apparently used as a dancing mask (Russell and McGowan 2003). As seasonal water birds, cranes connect well with the cult of a celestial, water-spending deity such as the storm god. However, cranes do not play any known role in known Near Eastern mythologies, and their full symbolic significance in the prehistory of the South Caucasus is still very much obscure. Significantly, the crane wing at Çatalhöyük was found together with the bones of sacrificed animals, including cattle and goat horns, while at Göbekli Tepe images of cranes regularly appear beneath the image of a bull. This fact raises the possibility of an enduring mythic association of cranes with animal sacrifice as well as with bull cult (Russell and McGowan 2003, 450), while at the same time introducing a critical social aspect – music and dance – connected with ceremony and feasting.

discussed elsewhere (e.g., Gilibert et al. 2018), we might perhaps imagine that vishap-making stressed common beliefs through feasting and ritual, and thus resulted in improved social cohesion among groups of people with potentially conflicting interests, such as access to pastures.

Table 1. Piscis vishaps in Armenia: height, elevation, geographical distribution and current location

name	height (cm)	elevation (m asl)	original location	current location
ARSHALUIS 3	140	2714	Geghama Montains	in loco
ARSHALUIS 4	200	2703	Geghama Montains	in loco
AZHDAHA-YURT 1	510	2505	Geghama Mountains	in situ
AZHDAHA-YURT 4	260	2505	Geghama Mountains	in situ
DIKTASH 2	358	2990	Geghama Mountains	in situ
DIKTASH 3	135	3174	Geghama Mountains	in situ
GÖLI-YURT 1	312	2968	Geghama Mountains	in situ
GÖLI-YURT 3	147	2963	Geghama Mountains	in situ
IMIRZEK 4	410	2292	Geghama Mountains	in situ
IMIRZEK 5	520	2338	Geghama Mountains	in situ
KARMIR SAR 5	238	2851	Mt. Aragats	in loco
KARMIR SAR 6	272	2852	Mt. Aragats	in loco
KARMIR SAR 10	285	2855	Mt. Aragats	in situ
KARMIR SAR 11	213	2863	Mt. Aragats	in loco
MAGHALNER 1	270	3013	Geghama Mountains	in situ
TOKMAGHAN-GÖL 5(*)	343	2700	Geghama Mountains	2 nd Massiv, Yerevan
VERIN SASNASHEN 1	150		Mt. Aragats	Verin Sasnashen

Table 2. Vellus vishaps in Armenia: height, elevation, geographical distribution and current location

name	height (cm)	elevation m. asl	original location	current location
AHMADI-OBA 1	264	2768	Mt. Aragats	in loco
ANGEGHAKOT 1	241	1805	unknown	Angeghakot, modern cemetery
ARSHALUYS 1	221	2639	Geghama Montains	in loco
ARSHALUYS 2		2645	Geghama Mountains	in situ
ARSHALUYS 5	245	2668	Geghama Mountains	in loco
ATTASH 1	175	2285	Geghama Mountains	in loco
AZHDAHA-YURT 3	258	2510	Geghama Mountains	in situ
AZHDAHA-YURT 6	330	2472	Geghama Mountains	in situ
BUZHAKAN 1	239	1820	Buzhakan (Kotayk)	in loco
CHIVA 1		1295		in loco
DASHTADEM 1	297	2336	Mt. Aragats	Dashtadem
DAVAGÖZI 1		2859	Gheghama Mountains	in loco
DAVAGÖZI 2	235	2857	Gheghama Mountains	in situ
DAVAGÖZI 3		2731	Gheghama Mountains	in situ
DAVTASHEN 1	335	2375	Mt. Aragats	Davtashen
DIKTASH 1	302	2936	Gheghama Mountains	in situ
EGHEGIS 1	322			in loco
EGHVARDI SAR 1	391	2677	Mt. Aragats	in situ
GARNI 1		1390	Geghama Montains	in loco
GOGHT 1	285	2141	Geghama Montains	National Museum, Institute of Architecture
GÖLI-YURT 2		2964	Geghama Mountains	in situ
HAYSERI-OBA 1		2299	Mt. Aragats	in loco
IMIRZEK 1	505	2100	Geghama Mountains	in situ
IMIRZEK 3	390	2258	Geghama Mountains	in situ
IRIND 1	337	1977	Gir Sar, Aragatsotn	in loco
KAKAVADZOR 1	375	2351		in loco
KARMIR SAR 1	301	2840	Mt. Aragats	in situ
KARMIR SAR 2	327	2849	Mt. Aragats	in situ

KARMIR SAR 3		2843	Mt. Aragats	in loco
KARMIR SAR 4	424	2849	Mt. Aragats	in situ
KARMIR SAR 7		2851	Mt. Aragats	in situ
KARMIR SAR 8	350	2846	Mt. Aragats	in situ
KARMIR SAR 9		2849	Mt. Aragats	in loco
KARMIR SAR 12	355	2852	Mt. Aragats	in situ
KARMRASHEN 1	282			Karmrashen
LCHASHEN 1	370	1900	Geghama Mountains	Metsamor Archeological Site (d)
LCHASHEN 2		2056	Geghama Mountains	in loco
POKR GILANLAR 1	206		Geghama Mountains	in loco
PROSPECT 1	506	2770	Mt. Aragats	Yerevan Physics Institute
PROSPECT 2	265	2770	Mt. Aragats	Nor-Amberd
PROSPECT 3	340	2770	Mt. Aragats	Cosmic Ray Division of Mt. Aragats Station
PROSPECT 4	350	2770	Mt. Aragats	Byurakan, in a private garden
PROSPECT 5	232	2770	Mt. Aragats	Voskevaz, Aragatsotn
SARNAGHBYUR 1	268	1867	Mt. Aragats	in loco
SARUKHAN 1		2012	Geghama Mountains	in loco
SELIM PASS 1	270	2349	Geghama Mountains	Yeghegnadzor, Momik Park
TOKHMAGHAN-GÖL 1	400	2770	Geghama Mountains	in loco
TOKHMAGHAN-GÖL 2	370	2700	Geghama Mountains	Massiv 2nd, Yerevan
TOKHMAGHAN-GÖL 4	205	2770	Geghama Mountains	in loco
TOKHMAGHAN-GÖL 6		2700	Geghama Mountains	in loco
TOKHMAGHAN-GÖL 7		2700	Geghama Mountains	in loco
TSAGHKUNK 1	254			Tsaghkunk
ULGYUR 1	361			in loco?
ULGYUR 2	251			in loco?
VISHAPASAR 1	188	2785	Geghama Mountains	in situ
VISHAPASAR 2	320	2798	Geghama Mountains	in situ
VERIN BAZMABERD 1		1810	Eshli Chayer	in loco

Table 3: Hybrida vishaps in Armenia: height, elevation, geographical distribution and current location

NAME	height (cm)	elevation m asl	original location	current location
ALLICH 3	279	2737	Karabakh	in loco
AZHDAHA-YURT 2	340	2508	Geghama Mountains	Yerevan, Poplavok
AZHDAHA-YURT 5	360	2494	Geghama Mountains	Sardapat Museum
IMIRZEK 2	400	2256	Geghama Mountains	in situ
TOKHMAGHAN-GÖL 3	200	2700	Geghama Mountains	Yerevan, Matenadaran
VOSKETAZ 1	282	2072	Mt. Aragats	Vosketaz

Appendix 1: Taxonomy and synthetic dates of native Armenian fishes mentioned in the text

family	species	max length	max recorded weight	English name	recorded presence in Armenia
Ciprinidae	Cyprinus carpio	120 SL	40.1 kg	Common carp	Lake Sevan, Akhurian and Metsamor rivers
Ciprinidae	Luciobarbus capito or Barbus capito	105 TL	15,0 kg	Barbel	Akhurian and Metsamor rivers
Siluridae	Silurus glanis	500 SL	306 kg	Catfish, Wels catfish	Akhurian, Arpa, Metsamor and Vorotan rivers
Esocidae	Esox lucius	150 TL	28,4 kg	Pike; Northern pike	

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**ՀԱՄԻ ԶԿՆԵՐԸ. ԶԿՆԱԿԵՐՊ ՎԻՇԱՊՆԵՐԸ ԵՎ ԶՐԻ ՊԱՇՏԱՄՈՒԼՔԸ
ՆԱԽԱՊԱՏԱՄԱԿԱՆ ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆՈՒՄ**

Մարինա Ստորաչի, Ալեքսանդրա Զիլիբերտ

Վենետրիկի Կու Ֆոսկարի համալսարան

Վիշապները Հարավային Կովկասի լեռներում հանդիպող և կենդանական ռեյիեֆով կոթողային արձաններ են: Չնայած դրանց գոյությունն ու նշանակությունը հայտնի է XIX դ. վերջերից, սակայն շարունակում են մնալ եվրասիական մեգալիթյան աշխարհի առավել առեղծվածային երևույթներից մեկը: Հատկապես ուշագրավ են ձկնակերպ վիշապները: Այս հողվածը զարգացում է մի մեթոդ, որը փորձում է վերձանել վերջիններիս խորհրդանշական իմաստը՝ ինտեգրելով քանակական, պատկերագրական և սեմիոտիկ վերլուծությունները: Վիշապների սկզբնական բարձրությունների դասակարգումը ցույց է տալիս, որ ձկնակերպ վիշապները ձգտում են ավելի բարձր գոտիների. մինչդեռ ցլակերպները կարող են ի հայտ գալ նաև ստորին բարձրություններում: Պատկերագրական առանձնահատկությունների գնումը ցույց է տալիս, որ ձկնավիշապները ներկայացնում են խոշոր չափի ձկներ (լոքո, գայլածուկ կամ ծածան), որոնք ապրում են ցածրադիր գետներում և լճերում: Այս պարագայում մենք տեսնում ենք ցածրադիր գոտիներում ապրող ձկների կերպարների վերարտադրում այնպիսի միջավայրերում, որոնք նրանց կենսատարածքից շատ հեռու են գտնվում, որը ցույց է տալիս ցածր և բարձր գոտիների ակնհայտ կապը: Ձկնակերպ վիշապների սեմիոտիկ վերլուծությունը զարգացնում է այն տեսակետը, որ դրանք լեռնային աղբյուրների հետ կապվող ջրի պաշտամունքի մի մասն են կազմում: Վիշապների խորհրդարանական կողի բրոնզեղարյան գուգա-

հեռները և կառուցվածքաբանական վերլուծությունը ենթադրում են, որ դրանք արտացոլում են այնպիսի մի պաշտամունք, որը հիմնվում է ջրի դուալ՝ ստորգետնյա և երկնային ծագման գաղափարի վրա: Մասնավորապես կարծում ենք, որ ձկնակերպ վիշապները արտացոլում են տեղական հոգևոր մշակույթի այնպիսի միավոր, որը կապված է ստորերկրյա նախնական և ընդհանրական ջրերի, լեռների ակունքների, գետերի և լճերի, բայց նաև կյանքի և իմաստնության գաղափարների հետ: Մինչդեռ, ցլակերպ վիշապաբարերը, ի տարբերություն ձկնակերպների, նախատեսված են եղել ամպրոպի անձրևաբեր աստվածությանը արյունալի զոհաբերություններ անելու համար:

Հիմնաբառեր. *հնագույն արվեստ, լեռնային հնագիտություն, գարնան պաշտամունք, ջրի պաշտամունք, նախապարսկական կրոն, հուրիական կրոն:*

НЕМЫЕ РЫБЫ: РЫБОПОДОБНЫЕ ВИШАПЫ И КУЛЬТ ВОДЫ В ДОИСТОРИЧЕСКОЙ АРМЕНИИ

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Vishaps – монументальные статуи с рельефами животных в горах Южного Кавказа. Хотя их существование и значение было известно еще в XIX веке, но они продолжают оставаться одним из самых загадочных явлений евразийского мегалитического мира. Особенно замечательны рыбоподобные вишапы. В данной статье разработан метод, расшифровывающий символическое значение последних на основе количественного, иконографического и семиотического анализа. Классификация начальной точки обнаружения вишапов показывает, что рыбоподобные вишапы устанавливались выше, нежели вишапы в форме быков, которые могли стоять на более низких высотах. Иконографические исследования явствуют о том, что рыбоподобные вишапы представляют крупных рыб (сом, щука, карп), обитающих в реках и озерах низинных зон. В этом случае мы видим воспроизведение рыб, живущих в низинных зонах в таких средах, которые далеки от их жизненного пространства: это доказывает очевидную связь между низинной и высокогорной зонами. Семиотический анализ рыбоподобных вишапов указывает на то, что они являются элементом религиозного поклонения горным источникам. Параллели с бронзовым веком и структурный анализ символического кода вишапов свидетельствуют о том, что они отражают культ, основанный на идее дуального происхождения вод – подземного и небесного. В частности, мы считаем, что рыбоподобные вишапы представляют собой такой объект местной духовной культуры, который связан с идеей грунтовых и общих вод, горных источников, рек и озер, а также с идеей жизни и мудрости. В отличие от рыбоподобных вишапов вишапы в форме быков предназначались для кровавых жертвоприношений и были посвящены местному богу грозы.

Ключевые слова: *древнее искусство, горная археология, весенний культ, культ воды, доисторическая религия, хурритская религия.*

LES POISSONS MUETS. FISH-SHAPED VISHAPS AND CULT OF WATER IN PREHISTORIC ARMENIA

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Vishaps are monumental standing stelae decorated with animal reliefs found in the mountains of the South Caucasus. Although their existence and importance have been known since the late 19th century, they remain one of the most enigmatic megalithic phenomena of Eurasian prehistory. Especially intriguing are those vishaps representing monumental fish, the “piscis” vishaps. This contribution lays out a method to decode their symbolic meaning integrating quantitative analysis, iconographic analysis, and semiotic analysis. Quantitative analysis of the original altitude of vishaps shows that piscis vishaps enjoyed a privileged connection with higher altitudes, as opposed to other vishaps, such as the “vellus” vishaps, which were also erected at lower altitudes. Iconographic analysis indicates that piscis vishaps represent large-size fish naturally living in the rivers and lakes of the lowlands, such as catfish, pikes, or carps. As a result, we observe a specific desire to monumentalize fish known from a lowland environment at a location far away from its habitat, thus envisioning a precise connection between high-altitude meadows and lowland environments. A semiotic analysis of piscis vishaps supports the hypothesis that they are part of a religious cult of water, with a focus on mountain springs. Bronze Age parallels and a structuralist analysis of the symbolic code of vishaps suggest that they reflect a cult based on a dual origin of water, a subterranean and a celestial origin. Specifically, we argue that piscis vishaps represent a local numinous entity connected with the idea of vast, primaeval expanses of subterranean water as the origin of the water of mountain springs, rivers, and lakes, but also of life and wisdom. Conversely, we propose to interpret vellus vishaps as images of bloody sacrifices to a local storm god, based on a cultic offering of blood in exchange for rainfall water.

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