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Textual Layering, Landscape Memory, and Medieval Places in Vayots Dzor, Armenia

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Travel accounts provide both benefits and challenges to survey archaeologists. This article presents a case study, generated by the Vayots Dzor Silk Road Survey, which aims to reconstruct the medieval (tenth to fifteenth centuries AD) landscape of Vayots Dzor in the Republic of Armenia, 'excavating' literary accounts of its landscape. Knowledge of this region in the Middle Ages is dominated by a core text written in the thirteenth century by Bishop Step'anos Orbelyan. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the region was visited by travellers who found links between the places they visited, the inscriptions they recorded, and the events and locations attested in Orbelyan's text. Through examples from the site list of the Vayots Dzor Silk Road Survey, the authors explore how these and other sources accumulate, creating local knowledge about places that inform archaeologists and heritage professionals. They argue for reflection on the ways that local memory, archaeology, and the physical landscape inform complex makings of place.

Keywords: landscape archaeology, Armenia, heritage, survey methodology, Middle Ages, travel accounts

Introduction

Landscape archaeologists are aware of the layered nature of the landscapes they study, and of the complexity of the formation processes which generate the land surfaces and site distributions they record. Survey archaeologists also grapple with the challenges of sifting through the textual accounts and memories which attach to places, and which structure the knowledge they bring to bear on archaeological sites (for orienting discussions, see Bradley & Williams, 1998; Van Dyke & Alcock, 2003; Harmanşah, 2014; Gilchrist, 2020). In the following, we present the interdisciplinary landscape archaeology of the Vayots Dzor Silk Road Survey (VDSRS hereafter), a collaborative research project working in Vayots Dzor, south-east of Yerevan in Armenia (Figure 1, with inset maps in Figures 2–4), as a case study deliberately considering layered textual, cultural, and physical landscapes. We discuss the ways that archaeological landscape research in Vayots Dzor involves navigating the state heritage management documentation and the local memory of places. Critically, we focus on the ways in which these forms of knowledge are informed by more than a

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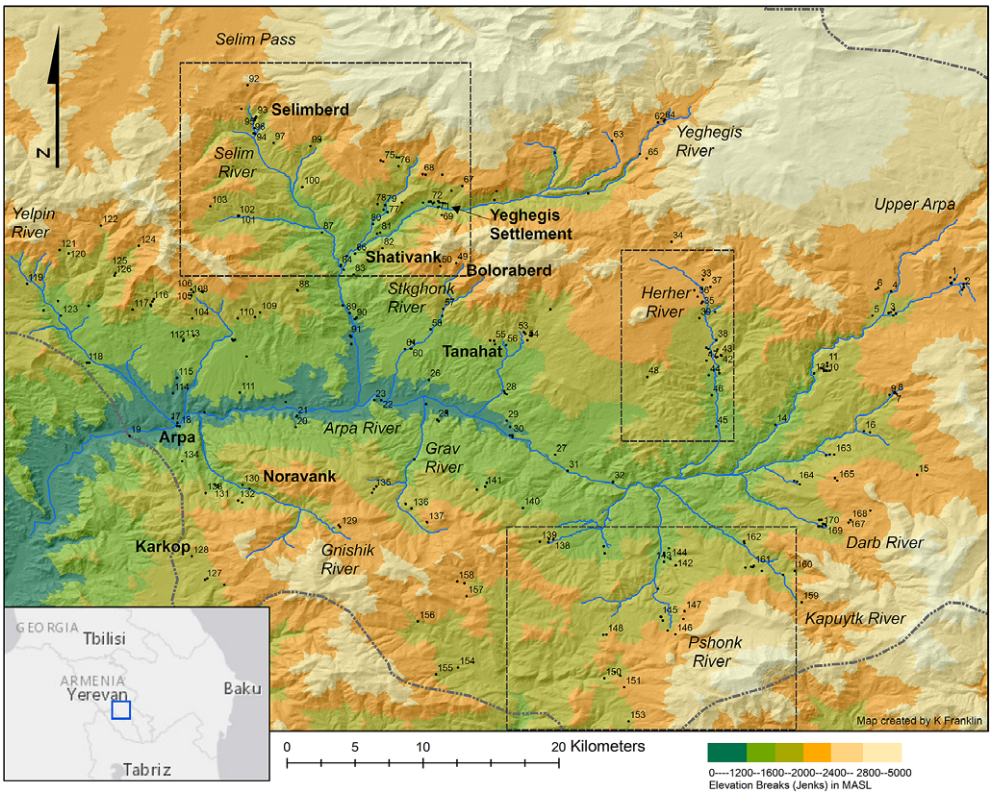

Figure 1. *Map of Vayots Dzor with inset maps illustrated in Figures 2–4. Black dots indicate sites and features recorded by the VDSRS (the numbers refer to the Supplementary Material Map Number).*

century of written accounts of the landscape. These accounts are, in turn, based on a complex dialogue between the medieval histories of Vayots Dzor and shifting perceptions of that landscape from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, including the ongoing meaning-making of people living in Vayots Dzor. The VDSRS records a history of place-making linked to evolving ideas of Armenian national history, combined with our recording of the rich archaeological landscape of the medieval period. Ultimately, this article provides a case study in the complex ways that survey archaeology interacts with written accounts of landscape, prompting reflection on the intertextuality of seemingly independent sources of knowledge of places in an evolving physical landscape.

Vayots Dzor in the Middle Ages

During the high and late Middle Ages (twelfth to fifteenth centuries AD), Vayots Dzor was part of the larger principality of Syunik (also called Sisakan), united under the administration of a powerful princely family, the Orbelyans, and their vassals. After the Mongol invasions of the Caucasus and Iran in the first half of the thirteenth century, the Orbelyans were privileged by the Ilkhanid Mongols, and administered the region in their name. The medieval archaeological landscape of Vayots Dzor is dominated by the architectural and infrastructural legacy of the Orbelyans, from monasteries and palaces to caravanserais, bridges, fortresses, and standing monuments. The Orbelyans collected revenues

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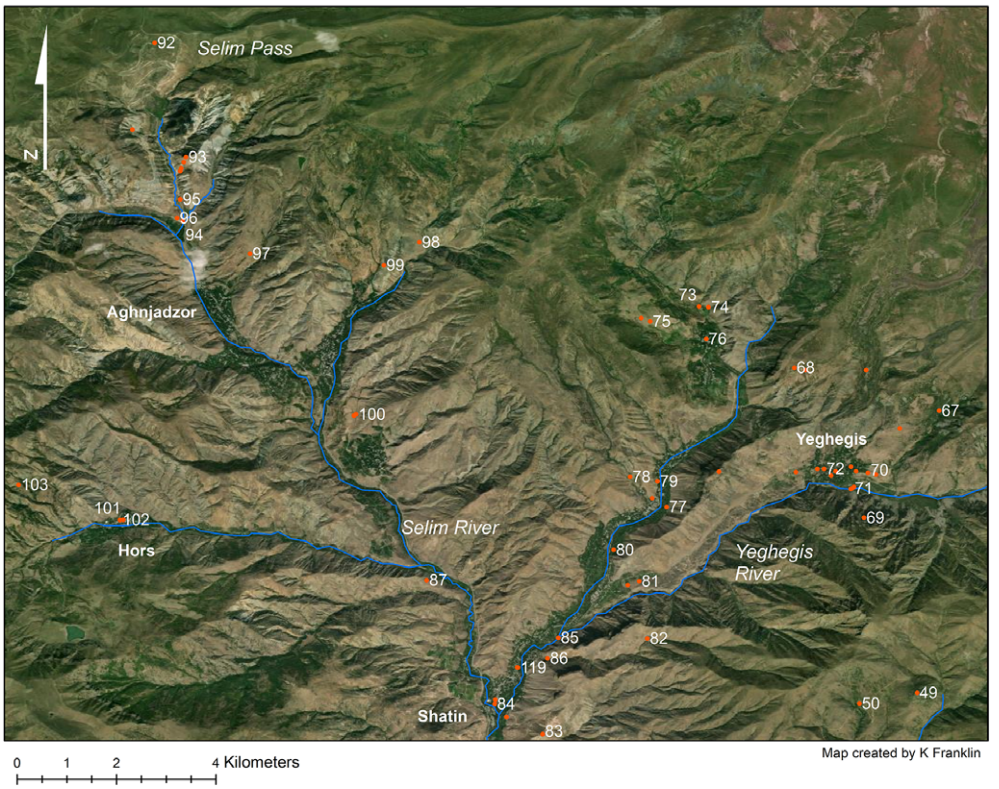

Figure 2. *The Yeghegis and Selim rivers area (north-western part of Figure 1).*

from gardens, farms, oil presses, mills, orchards, forests, and rivers, tended by the inhabitants of a network of villages. The political relationships of the Orbelyans and other families with their Mongol patrons and their feudal vassals is documented in numerous dedicatory inscriptions from medieval churches across Vayots Dzor, part of a broader Armenian epigraphic tradition spanning the highlands of Armenia and Cilicia starting in the early Middle Ages.

The cultural life of the Armenian Middle Ages fades in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as princely families were gradually dispersed and monastic power contracted. The postmedieval history of the Caucasus saw major shifts in imperial borders, which complicate attempts to create linear narratives of place. Ruled by Persia from the early modern period until the Treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828, the territory of Vayots Dzor was part of the Russian Sharur-Daralagyaz province from 1849 onwards (Sargsyan & Khachatryan, 1980: 107–20). From the early Soviet period (Armenia became a Soviet Socialist Republic in 1920), the region of central Vayots Dzor was renamed Azizbekov, after the Bolshevik revolutionary. Towns and locations across the region were renamed by Soviet authorities to erase the legacies of local resistance to Soviet power. These name changes are reflected in historical maps and documentation used by archaeologists. It is worth noting that the population of Vayots Dzor was more diverse in terms of religion and ethnicity before the end of the twentieth century, as is reflected

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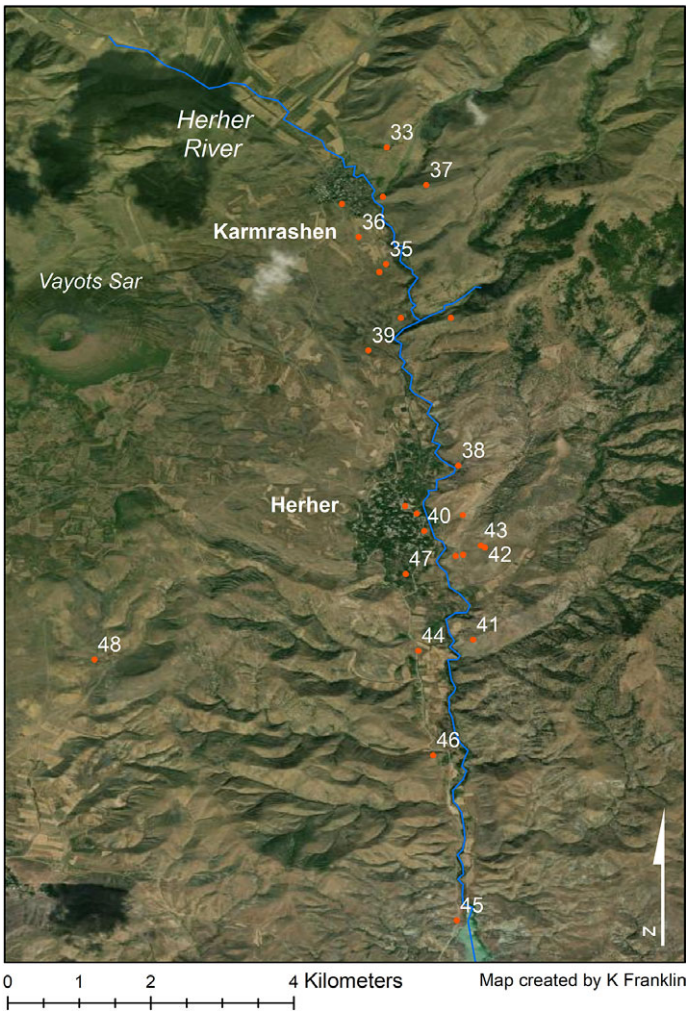

Figure 3. *The Herher river area (central-eastern part of Figure 1) .*

in the presence of Muslim cemeteries and in the Turkish names for villages used to this day.

The Vayots Dzor Silk Road Survey and Interdisciplinary Methodology

Since the outset of the project in 2015, the VDSRS has built on more than a century of accumulated information concerning archaeological sites and features, requiring us to interrogate how the sources cite and build upon each other, such that our recording of the landscape is always a recording of the construction of knowledge of that landscape as well. The core methodology of the VDSRS is site-based survey, using the *List of Immovable Cultural and Historical Monuments* (Republic of Armenia n.d.) maintained by the Armenian Ministry of Culture (henceforth the Monuments List). This resource is a digitized and open-access version of the information contained in the 'passport system' maintained by the Scientific Centre of Historical-Cultural Heritage,

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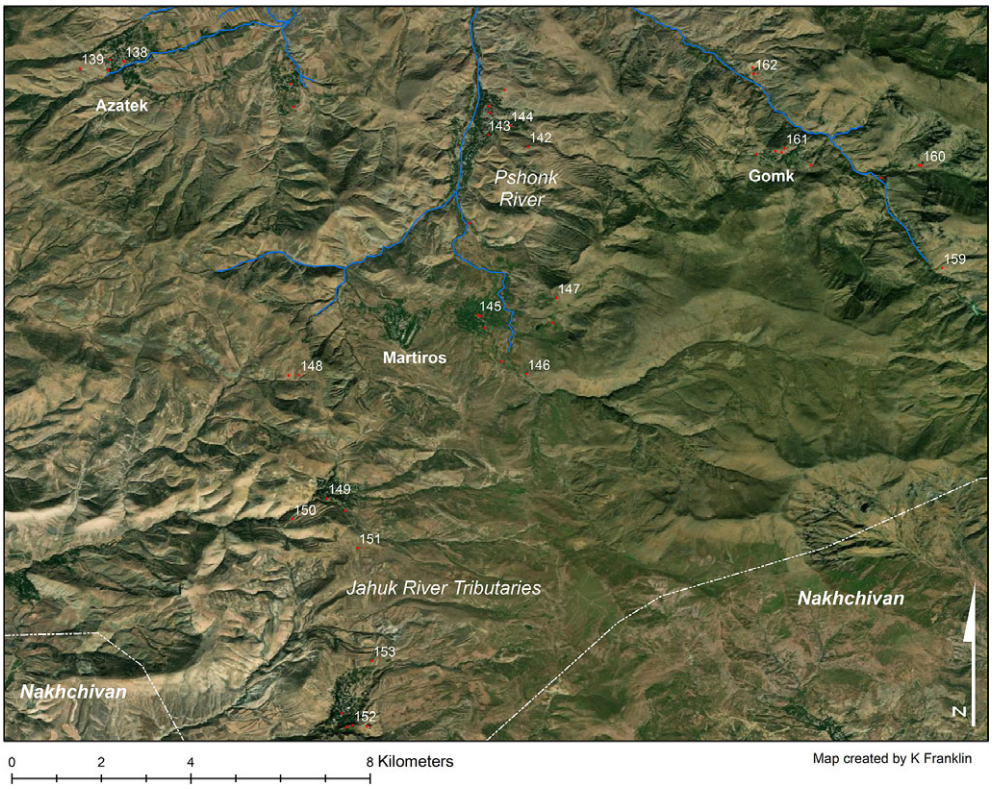

Figure 4. *The Pshonk river and South Vayots Dzor area (south-eastern part of Figure 1).*

derived from a system established in the Soviet period. The Monuments List is organized by village, with the locations of monuments described in terms of distances from the relevant village. A core project of the VDSRS has been to locate and record accurate coordinates of the sites on the Monuments List, as well as complement the list's information through systematic survey (Franklin & Babajanyan, 2018a and 2018b; see VDSRS site list in the Supplementary Material). Our methodology involved a critical reading of the information in the Monuments List, alongside corroborating descriptions of the landscape and observations in the field. A fundamental challenge lies in the ways that seemingly independent sources of information are interleaved in ways that we must 'excavate'. This especially relates to the identification of physical ruins in the landscape with toponyms from medieval and later textual sources, and the resulting dating of those sites based on such textual precedents. Before providing examples of how this appears in practice, we present the key texts and authors involved. These texts underpin ongoing research and management strategy as well as shape local memory, and constitute the core of what might be approached as an archaeological hermeneutics of medieval place in Vayots Dzor.

Written accounts of the historical landscape of Vayots Dzor

Our central source is a universal history (account of the world from creation to

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the author's time) composed at the end of the thirteenth century by a member of the Orbelyan family, Step'anos Orbelyan, the metropolitan bishop of Syunik. Orbelyan's *History of the Province of Sisakan* (or *The History of Syunik*) provides information about the geography and built environment of Vayots Dzor (Orbelyan, 1859, 1986, 2015). The author declares early in his account that he intends to tell the story of the princes of Syunik, in particular 'their wars, their building activities, their times of peace, their admirable doings and building of houses of God which they erected in their own world as unerasable monuments and undying memorials' (Orbelyan, 2015: 87). The last century of professional archaeology in Vayots Dzor has relied heavily on the place names and descriptions of Orbelyan's *History*, and their interpretations by the following scholars:

- In 1842 and 1858, Archbishop Sargis Jalalyanc' published a two-volume account of travels through the lands of 'Greater Armenia', including the territory of Vayots Dzor-Daralagyaz (Jalalyanc', 2016).
- Later that century, the provincial doctor Gabriel Ter-Hovhannisyan, known as Kajberuni, travelled extensively and provided detailed descriptions of the topography, monuments, and ethnographic customs of Vayots Dzor. Initially published in various periodicals which circulated across the Armenian diaspora, his writings were compiled and released in his *Travel Observations* in 1890 (Kajberuni, 2003).
- During the late years of the Russian Empire, a mission of the Moscow Archaeological Society produced a series of reports, *Materials for the Archaeology of the Caucasus* (known as MAC; Uvarova & Kuchuk-Ioannesov, 1916). These reports contain photographs and plans of places that had disappeared by the mid-twentieth century.
- During the same period, the ethnographer Yervand Lalayan published extensively on the landscapes and human geography of the South Caucasus in the Armenian-language journal *Ethnographic Review* (Lalayan, 1904, 1916, 2021).
- The archaeologist and historian Hovsep Yeghiazaryan, representative of the Soviet Antiquities Preservation Committee, carried out fieldwork in Vayots Dzor, resulting in his *Cultural Monuments of the Azizbekov Region* (Yeghiazaryan, 1955). This text summarizes the recorded historical landscape of Vayots Dzor for a general audience, serving as a guidebook in step with the development of internal tourism.
- In the 1960s, the first of the still-expanding series of the *Corpus of Armenian Inscriptions* (*Divan Hay Vimagrutyan*, henceforth DHV) was published. The 1967 volume on Vayots Dzor (Barkhudaryan, 1967) draws on all the work discussed above as well as sources used to compile it, such as the geography of Ghevond Alishan (Alishan, 1893).

In our efforts to locate and preserve the medieval places described in Orbelyan's *History*, we share the project of these travellers and scholars. The study of medieval landscapes in Vayots Dzor has been marked by technological change, of which the first printing of Orbelyan's text in 1859 (hence making it a portable reference) is as significant an example as the recent application of remote-sensing survey techniques. But, as we show here, our methodology has moved from identifying place names and descriptions across various accounts to analysing the ways that each of these texts builds on those which came before. In some cases, this textual layering has preserved records of now-destroyed sites, objects, or inscriptions. In other cases, hypotheses put forward by an earlier writer

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became solidified into 'facts' over decades of citation. A further major result is that the Monuments List, which effectively flattened the 150-plus years covered by these texts into a palimpsest of traces and erasures, can now be recontextualized and in some cases corrected by the VDSRS and other work by our colleagues.

Results: The VDSRS Research Region as a Layered Text-Scape

We have selected six of the medieval sites recorded by the VDSRS as examples of the complex layering of description, knowledge, citation, and commemoration that have created this landscape. These case studies are complemented by a listing of the sites we have recorded to date (see Supplementary Material).

Karkop

The monastic site of Karkop (also called Khotakerac') (Supplementary Material no. 236 and Figure 1: Point 128) is located at the south-western edge of Vayots Dzor, overlooking the Sharur Plain. Jalalyanc' reports that 'this monastery was built in the year 385 [AD 937] by Prince Smbat and his wife Sophia, in the time of Bishop Hakob of Syunik. And here assembled vegetarian (*xotačarak*) hermits' (Jalalyanc', 2016: 361). The author enumerates the inscriptions on the building relating how it was rebuilt following a tenth-century earthquake: critically, he transcribes Step'anos Orbelyan's account of those inscriptions as they appear in his *History* (Orbelyan, 1859: 281–82, 2015: 125). As Kajberuni notes a few decades later, '[Jalalyanc'] took the text not from the walls of Karkop, but from the history' (Kajberuni, 2003: 307). So, the perspective of an eyewitness account of this site shifts to the 'eyes' of the medieval writer. Jalalyanc' augments this with the fragmentary inscription that encircled the building and was carved at the top of the exterior walls, recording the donation of Smbat Orbelyan (in the thirteenth century) in the name of himself, his brother Tarsayič', his mother Asp'a, and his wife 'Uk'an' (Jalalyanc', 2016: 364; Barkhudaryan, 1967: 206). Rare in Vayots Dzor, encircling inscriptions like this have been argued to have played a role in liturgical processions, tying buildings in with the seasons of the canonical year and linking them with their surrounding sacralized landscape (Maranci, 2019).

Kajberuni notes the different Armenian (Karkop) and Turkish (Kaladash) names for the site, and remarks on its ruined state and the nature of its construction. He observes that the fine yellow stone used in details including the dedicatory inscription matches stonework at Arpa (medieval Areni, Supplementary Material no. 37), suggesting a link between the site and other Orbelyan constructions. Repeating the contents of the long inscription by Smbat Orbelyan, Kajberuni corrects Jalalyanc''s reading of the name of Smbat's wife (Ruzuk'an, not Uk'an). He describes these inscriptions as 'broken from the falling and loss of stones and worn from rain and wind' and provides his own reading of the repaired inscription, noting where he uses Orbelyan's words to plug the holes in the 'worn and lost text' (Kajberuni, 2003: 307). This is a remarkable piece of nineteenth-century epigraphic archaeology.

In recent decades, a local person independently took the initiative to 'restore' the church at Karkop, which resulted in the dismantling of the standing ruin and further damage to the integrity of the structure. While the buildings of the monastery remain buried, the ongoing physical degradation of this monument means that our link between the archaeological site and the medieval place are increasingly dependent on the textual record.

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Selimberd, or Sulema's Fortress

The 'impregnable fortress of Sulema' (Supplementary Material no. 172 and Figures 1 and 2: 93) has a special importance within Orbelyan's *History*, connected to the narrative of the conversion period and the related 'conversion' of the landscape of the Armenian highlands through the transport and commemoration of relics. Orbelyan links the fortress with the relics of St Mamas (or Mammes) of Caesarea. In a widespread medieval practice of converting and claiming landscape through the consecration of relics, the St Mamas relics were brought by the princes of Syunik in the fourth century from Caesarea on the backs of mules; the latter refused to walk further than the spot where the relics would eventually be housed 'within the borders of the impregnable fortress of Sulema', which Orbelyan further identifies as 'a level spot in the Sulema valley, called Dezpanart' (Orbelyan, 2015: 138–39). We thus see a medieval example of rooting history in places, attested severally in Vayots Dzor.

Moving up the canyon of the river Selim, Kajberuni provides us with a first observation of a ruined settlement on the slopes and crown of the cliffs to the east of the river. Describing the visible rooms and remains of walls, he concludes: 'This is the fortress built by Sulema, which is recorded in the history of Orbelyan. It is so protected and encircled by nature, that no technological method was needed for the slaughtering of enemies, especially in the time of this fortress's activity, when men were destroyed with bow and arrow, and not with Krupp guns' (Kajberuni, 2003: 136). It is fascinating to see Kajberuni's reflections on his own too-modern times incorporated into his reading of the medieval landscape, especially his romantically imagined relationships between the nature of Vayots Dzor and its medieval inhabitants. Having reached the Selim pass at the head of the canyon, Kajberuni included a moving description of the perceived landscape from the crest of the pass, juxtaposing his reflections on the historical power of the Orbelyans with the timeless power of the natural landscape on the emotions of the viewer.

In his description of the Selim gorge, Lalayan merely repeats the attribution of the place name to 'Lord (*tanuter*) Sulema' and the reference to Orbelyan (Lalayan, 1904: 278). By the mid-1950s, the identification of this fortress as 'Sulema berd' ('Sulema's fortress') is unquestioned and bolstered by the fact that it is 'noted in manuscripts to have existed from the fourth-fifth centuries' (Yeghiazaryan, 1955: 75). In this note, Yeghiazaryan combines Orbelyan's link with fourth-century events and Kajberuni's identification of this site with Orbelyan's narrative, compounding this connection by further noting, without reference, that the neighbouring village 'was called Dezpanart in the fourth century' (Yeghiazaryan, 1955: 75). The dating of the fortress to the fourth century is ultimately codified on the Monuments List entry for the fortress. This chain of inferences only becomes visible by tracing the links between these travellers and their accounts. The VDSRS surveys recovered ceramics from the settlement on its slope (Figure 5), which are contemporary with the thirteenth–fourteenth-century assemblages from our excavations at Arpa (Babajanyan & Franklin, 2018). Like many settlements dated by the List on the basis of Orbelyan's *History*, any earlier dating must await excavations and material corroboration.

The Boloraberd complex

The observations of our travellers also demonstrate the complex ways that different groups live within the medieval landscape, and the ways that medieval ruins, fragments, and objects are made meaningful through time. This includes not only the

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Figure 5. *The slopes of the Selimberd settlement, with a medieval carved stone cross* (khachkar) *in the foreground.*

'proper' recording and conservation of sites, but also various popular practices of commemoration, and the transformation of architectural ruins into dispersed art objects and relics.

The Boloraberd complex consists of Spitakavor monastery (also called St Karapet hermitage; Supplementary Material no. 910 and Figures 1 and 2: point 50) and Boloraberd-Proshaberd fortress (Supplementary Material no. 90 and Figures 1 and 2: point 49). Spitakavor monastery is located on a plateau on the south-facing slope of the Teksar mountain range, between two ravines (Figure 6). The fortress is located 1 km to the east, on a conical rocky hill in a dominant position looking southwards over the canyons (Figure 7). The fortress was given its popular name, Proshaberd, because it lies in the historical land of Sarkołovk' (Srkłonk') mentioned by Step'anos Orbelyan as part of the hereditary lands of the Proshyan princely family (Orbelyan, 2015: 260; see also Hovsepyan, 1928: 204).

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Figure 6. *The Spitakavor monastery.*

Figure 7. *The Boloraberd-Proshaberd fortress from the north-east. Image available at https://ama100.am/am/monuments/regions/Vayots-Dzor-Province/Պռոշաբերդ.*

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Jalalyanc' describes the monastic complex and environs and notes that, because of the rose trees growing in the surroundings of the monastery, the *tačik*s (the Turkish-speaking population) called the monastery Gyul-vank or 'rose monastery' (Jalalyanc', 2016: 346). He admires the monastery's sculptures that depict both religious and secular scenes. The latter include a portrait of the founders of the monastery, Prince Eachi Proshyan, described as 'a majestic and venerable old man stately seated', and his 'lovely' son Amir Hassan II (Uvarova & Kuchuk-Ioannesov 1916: 123; Jalalyanc', 2016: 345). Decades later, Kajberuni found that sculptures described by Jalalyanc' as belonging to the northern wall had fallen and been moved inside the church. During twentieth-century explorations at this monastery, numerous fragments of architectural decoration were removed and transferred to museums. While compiling the corpus of epigraphs for the DHV in 1939, Barkhudaryan found the portrait of Eachi and Amir Hassan fallen and arranged for transport of it and other fragments to the History Museum of Armenia (Barkhudaryan, 1967: 94). By 1940 the Proshyan portrait had been registered in the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, where it formed part of an exemplary collection of medieval art. One fragment from Spitakavor, a depiction of the Apostle Peter, remains in the Yeghegnadzor Regional Museum. These sculptures resemble those of the church of Noravank, built by Burtel Orbelyan in the fourteenth century, and are attributed to the school of the sculptor and architect Momik (Hasratyan, 1984; Matevosyan, 2017: 61–63).

Walking through the ruins to the south of the church at Spitakavor, Kajberuni remarked on a fourteenth-century *khachkar* (carved stone cross; see Figure 5 for an example at Selimberd), upon which he stood, and relates a story told by his guide. A few years earlier, a Russian policeman had removed the stone with the intent to take it to his house, but he suddenly lost his wits before reaching home. The man was only cured with the return of the *khachkar* (Kajberuni, 2003: 252). This account of the stone's imagined agency, and Kajberuni's broader attention to the accounts of villagers living with medieval remains, and especially *khachkars*, resonates with both medieval and ongoing discussions about the diverse ways monuments are given meaning through practice. As the art historian Abraham Shahinyan observed, medieval popular customs around *khachkars* frequently bore little to no relationship to the original intent or content of the carved monuments, mirrored in the diverse traditions attached to *khachkars* in Vayots Dzor and other regions in the twentieth century (Shahinyan, 1984: 62–63). Many such practices are evidenced in the robust tradition of shrine (*matur*) construction in Vayots Dzor, which was recorded by the VDSRS across the survey area (Babajanyan & Franklin, 2021: 408). These shrines make use of fragments of *khachkars* and/or architecture, attesting to intimate and informal veneration, including the lighting of candles and offering of sacrifice *(matał)*. The sites of Boloraberd provide a useful example of the diverse ways that medieval sites are fragmented, moved, reconstructed, and made meaningful.

Tanahat or Gladzor

Located in the centre of the VDSRS survey area north of Yeghegnadzor (Supplementary Material no. 100 and Figure 1: point 55), is a monastic site consisting of a renovated church and the remains of the walls of a monastic establishment and settlement (Figure 8). This monastery has been given multiple names (Tanahat, Tanat, Gharavank, Gladzor) as successive generations of scholars

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Figure 8. *The Tanahat monastery. Image available at https://ama100.am/am/monuments/regions/Vayots-Dzor-Province/Tanahat-monaster.*

debate its identity; the outcome of these debates has interesting implications for the history of Vayots Dzor as a place, as each version links this hilly landscape to different political and historical narratives.

The original narrative comes from Orbelyan, who linked one of two stories about monasteries called Tanahat—both with churches dedicated to the eighth-century martyred bishop Step'anos—to the region of Vayots Dzor (Orbelyan, 2015: 75). Jalalyanc''s discussion of the site of Tanahat begins with and centres on Orbelyan's account, which he uses to conclude that the ruins located north of Yeghegnadzor are the 'tomb of Step'anos of Syunik', a version corroborated by the 'traditions of the inhabitants' (Jalalyanc', 2016: 398–99). The account continues with a description of the inscriptions of St Step'anos' church, which Jalalyanc' recorded as he walked around and inside the building. Among these recorded inscriptions, most name only the church, but Jalalyanc' notes one or two that identify the monastery as 'Tanad' (Jalalyanc', 2016: 400, 401), including the dedicatory inscription by T'ačer in the tympanum above the entrance. These inscriptions are confirmed and the name corrected to 'Tanat' by the DHV (Barkhudaryan, 1967: 82, no. 224, 76, no. 209).

Kajberuni reached Tanahat on a day exploring sites around Bashkend (Vernashen) and after ascending the Boloraberd-Proshaberd fortress (see above). He observes that the architecture at this site is entirely built of black stone, which explains the name (Gharavank) given by the local Turkish speakers and their Armenian neighbours. He notes the state of the site, including that the ruins of the *gavit* (narthex) of the church were being used as a threshing floor (Kajberuni, 2003: 258). In considering the history of the site, he juxtaposes the marvellous account provided by Orbelyan with the history of construction and patronage he

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himself can reconstruct from the inscriptions on walls and gravestones. A significant part of Kajberuni's text is then dedicated to correcting Jalalyanc"s earlier account of the inscriptions at the site, including page-by-page corrections of the wordings recorded by that traveller (Kajberuni, 2003: 264).

Writing in 1904, Lalayan notes the change in names between what he understands from Orbelyan and the place names noted by the Turkish population living around Malishka at the turn of the twentieth century. He makes a brief observation connected with the village then called Ortakend, that 'to the north-east up the canyon is the thirteenth-to-fourteenth-century renowned Gayladzor or Gladzor monastery (*menastan*), which is now called Gharavank' (Lalayan, 1904: 271). Lalayan is thus the first to make the connection between the site called Gharavank by local people and Tanahat by historians with the historical Armenian centre of Gladzor.

The existence of a monastery or university (*hamalsaran*) known as Gladzor is reported in textual sources on artistic and scholarly life including numerous manuscript colophons. These sources are commemorative inscriptions added to manuscripts by their curators, copyists, and/or owners. Several colophons mention being written at a place called Gladzor, including those written in the so-called Gladzor Gospel (UCLA Armenian MS 1; Mathews & Sanjian, 1991). In a colophon dated 1377, the lady Vaxax, granddaughter of Tarsayič' Orbelyan, records her ownership of the book (Matthews & Sanjian, 1991: 190), attesting further to the links between place and political culture in medieval Syunik. The possibility of a centre of artistic and literary production at Gladzor being definitively located is thus a key question in the rooting of Armenian medieval cultural history within physical landscapes and the built heritage.

In 1956, Avetisyan argued for identifying Tanahat with the medieval university of Gladzor, linking his reconstructed history of Gladzor University to the connection made by Lalayan (Avetisyan, 1956: 85). This is bolstered by references in a series of colophons, which Avetisyan argued link the name Tanahat to Gladzor through a third medieval name for the place, Aghberc' Vank (Matevosyan, 1984: 552, 663). However, the DHV disregarded the connection as merely a guess, noting Lalayan's lack of supporting evidence (Barkhudaryan, 1967: 72). In their own discussion of the site, the editors of the DHV stress the non-overlap of epigraphic references to Tanahat at the site and the references to Gladzor in the colophons of manuscripts.

In 1969–70, excavations at the site of Tanahat, led by Igit Gharibyan, cleared the foundations of multiple buildings, including three churches, and added nearly fifty inscription fragments to the corpus from the site. The published ceramics from the excavations—which include sgraffito splash ware bowls, underglaze-painted fritwares, stamped tablewares, and plain red-slipped redwares (Gharibyan, 1983: 81–100)—suggest a thirteenth–fifteenth century date for the site when compared with assemblages from elsewhere in Vayots Dzor. On the basis of excavated grave markers bearing the names of medieval writers, artists, and teachers (Gharibyan, 1983: 149–50), the excavators confidently identify Tanahat with Gladzor.

The results of the excavations and the 'settling' of the debate had ramifications in local and national relationships with the site and its surrounding landscape. In October 1984, the Armenian Soviet government sponsored the celebration of the 700th anniversary of the founding of Gladzor University. This celebration was held at the site of Tanahat, accompanied by a folk-life festival attended by hundreds of thousands of people, including Soviet officials. Commemorative events were also held in the purpose-built Momik Park in the town of Yeghegnadzor. For this event, the site of

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Tanahat itself was conserved, the church buildings were reconstructed, and a museum of the monastery and monastic life was created on the road between the town and the monastery. These events and place-makings cemented the site's identity within local memory and in national discourse.

The Yeghegis settlement

Like many archaeological surveys, the VDSRS is marked by lacunae, exemplified by major medieval sites that continued to be occupied and then covered by villages inhabited today. This presents challenges, as our material (such as the assemblages housed in the Yeghegnadzor Regional Museum) depends on chance finds by villagers, but also gives opportunities to gain insights into the emergence and development of ideas of material history and national identity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as evidenced by our travel accounts. An excellent example of this is the settlement of Yeghegis, on the north-eastern branch of the tributary of the same name (Supplementary Material nos. 130–41 and Figures 1 and 2). The region around the town of Yeghegis-Alayaz contains dense artefactual, architectural, and epigraphic remains, making up part of the 'Armenian artistic pantheon' associated with the Orbelyans and the artists under their patronage (Tamanyan, 1974: 43).

Upon arriving at Yeghegis from the south-west, Jalalyanc' paused his narrative to remark at length on the profound, wild beauty of the canyon, and the benevolent bounty of the landscape watered by sparkling streams. This natural beauty provides the context for the settlement itself, specifically the 'entirely wonderful and lamentable ruins, among which are magnificent stone-built churches of sublime, solid architecture' (Jalalyanc', 2016: 347). Jalalyanc' deploys the Romantic juxtaposition of sublime ruins and nature to frame a critique of the inhabitants of his day, who are 'others': the town is *tačkabnak*, occupied by Muslims. The traveller continues his description, decrying how 'the ruins of the exquisite palaces and houses of our princes are now the homes of owls and the dens of beasts' (Jalalyanc', 2016: 347). This critique, influenced by medieval tropes of lamentation crafted by Orbelyan and others, is picked up decades later by Kajberuni, who remarks on how the present-day village was built on the medieval ruins, with the villagers keeping their animals within the walls of the monastic sites and pulling the ashlars from the walls to build their houses and line the floors of their barns (Kajberuni, 2003: 220). We can thus see a tension already in the nineteenth century between the lifeways of living people, and a concern to preserve the landscape associated with a valued past, a tension also exacerbated by the perceived ethnic differences between the villagers on the one hand, and the travellers and their medieval ancestors on the other.

Layered within these travel accounts, information emerges about a major piece of now lost medieval monumental art. This piece (Figure 9), said to have lain in the scattered ruins between the medieval churches of Yeghegis, is a semicircular stone fragment similar in proportions to a tympanum inset and carved with inscriptions—'A blessing upon the portal of Tarsayič' and his wife Mina Khatun, in the year of the Armenians 743 (1274)' (Jalalyanc' 2016: 350)—that surround a rare portrait of a medieval Armenian prince and even rarer depiction of a princess, namely Tarsayič' Orbelyan and his wife Mina Khatun of the house of Hasan Jalal Dola (and so one of Jalalyanc"s ancestors). Kajberuni (2003: 222) reported that he buried the stone to preserve it. Using that information, Lalayan began his search for the object with excavations, but ultimately located the fragments within a village house wall, and promptly photographed it (Lalayan, 1916: 68–69).

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Figure 9. *Portrait of Tarsayič' Orbelyan and Mina Khatun. Reproduced by permission of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, Yerevan (Lalayan, 2021: fig. 29).*

This photograph (Figure 9) is now the only visual record of this remarkable piece of thirteenth-century art, which by the time of the DHV was reported as lost (Barkhudaryan, 1967: 115–16).

The history of Yeghegis as a site of medieval memory is entwined, like Tanahat, in the wider history of Soviet Armenian nation-making in the later twentieth century. Original surveys in Yeghegis were carried out in 1957, and the buildings were reconstructed using local basalt, beginning with Zorats church in 1971–72 (Tamanyan, 1974: 46), followed by the nearby St Karapet (St Nshan) in 1976; the intent and result of this work was to enhance Yeghegis as a 'little open-air museum' where a visitor might encounter fragments of Armenia's medieval history at every step (Tamanyan, 1977: 40). The 1970s and 1980s also mark a period of Turkish emigration from Vayots Dzor, as evidenced by local memory and dates on markers in Muslim cemeteries recorded by the VDSRS. Over recent decades, Yeghegis has continued to be investigated by interdisciplinary and collaborative researchers (Amit & Stone, 2002; Melkonyan & Hakobyan, 2016). A secondary effect of these excavations and clearings is the erasure of the Muslim occupation encountered by Jalalyanc' and Kajberuni, and the creation of a picturesque medieval Armenian village with a cosmopolitan past.

Shativank

Our final example is the monastic site of Shativank, or Shatini Vank, located within a depression in the mountains to the east of

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Shatin village (Supplementary Material no. 155 and Figures 1 and 2: point 82). This small monastery, an excellent example of the medieval Armenian 'hermitage in the world', is only a few kilometres from the villages on either side but is invisible from the valleys, and before the twentieth century was accessed by a winding, steep path up a narrow canyon. In addition to documenting the complex dating of sites from mentions in Orbelyan's *History*, the layered textual discourse attached to this site illustrates a long tradition in Armenia of constructing ideas of heritage from 'natural' as well as 'cultural' sites, blending the distinction between the two.

The complex comprises the central St Sion church, a three-nave basilica constructed in 1655 by the merchant Hakob Julayec'i, with an attached vaulted open *gavit* or narthex to the west, as well as residential and auxiliary structures and a tower-shaped granary. The site is enclosed by a rectangular defensive wall, fortified with semicircular towers along its southern façade. The main gate is in the middle of the western defensive wall, with a secondary entrance in the eastern wall. Two-storey vaulted buildings run along the entire length of the southern enclosure wall, housing cells for congregants on the upper floor and refectories and other structures on the ground floor.

The site is a temporal outlier in our discussion; the foundation inscription on St Sion church dates that building to AD 1655 (Barkhudaryan, 1967: 160). However, the monastery is dated by Barkhudaryan and others to the tenth century, based on a passage in Step'anos Orbelyan that describes the founding of a hermitage (*anapat*) by Hakob, bishop of Syunik under the reign of Smbat Bagratuni (Barkhudaryan, 1967: 155). According to this account, the bishop was struck by the remoteness and natural beauty of the location and built a church of dressed stone decorated in multicoloured paintings; furthermore, Smbat and his brother Sahak endowed 'all the mountainside extending down to the river with its many gardens and fields' (Orbelyan, 1859: 304, 2015: 135). Orbelyan relates that the founding of this monastery 'in the valley of Ełegyac' above the village of Vostin' (Orbelyan, 2015: 135) took place in the year 378/AD 929.

Jalalyanc's description of Shativank is matter-of fact, laying out the dimensions of the buildings in paces, and noting the visible inscriptions (Jalalyanc', 2016: 346–47). Kajberuni's account of Shativank is much fuller and remarkable for its awareness of the landscape around the site. Walking up the steep path from the river valley below, Kajberuni describes relict gardens and orchards on the mountain path to Shativank. He notes to either side 'the re-wilded (*vayrenac'ac*) gardens of this forest, which once belonged to Shatini Vank, and were cultivated and cared for by the hands of that now-extinct monastery' (Kajberuni, 2003: 199). His musings on these former gardens frame them as a kind of 'ecological ruin' resonant with present-day conversations on natural-cultural heritage, as he reflects that such plantings are all that remain of people who left 'no history, monument, name or tradition' and that have become instead the habitat of bears, partridges, and other wild things (Kajberuni, 2003:199; DeSilvey, 2017; Bangstad & Pétursdóttir, 2022). Kajberuni expresses frustration at being unable to locate evidence for the tenth-century founding of the site; all the epigraphic evidence dates to the seventeenth century or later. The 1916 reports of the Russian expeditions to Vayots Dzor describe a visit to Shativank. The expedition recorded several inscriptions as well as the plan of the church, noting that the monastery was entirely abandoned, except for a single elderly monk keeping bees among the ruins (Uvarova & Kuchuk-Ioannesov, 1916: 83).

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The historical visitors to the site of Shativank have in common an interest in the well-preserved water mill within the site, which was powered by a stream that had changed its course towards the south since the early modern period (Kajberuni, 2003: 204). The remains of this mill and possible relict fields bring us back to the cultural duality of the hermitage in medieval and early modern Armenia. While apparently isolated in its bowl-shaped valley, Shativank was connected to the world through agriculture and by hydrological as well as travel infrastructure. A prime example of the latter is the stone-built Tsaturi bridge, over the Yeghegis river to the south-west of the site (Supplementary Material no. 165 and Figure 1: point 89). The ruins of its western end and a partial arch of this monument were located by the VDSRS in 2015. Tsaturi bridge was constructed in 1666, according to an inscription recorded by Kajberuni; this inscription (now lost) records its building by Sargis *vardapet*, in the name of Hakob the patriarch and the Persian Shah Suleyman (Barkhudaryan, 1967: 163; Kajberuni, 2003: 205).

In 1985, excavations were undertaken at the monastic complex with the primary objective of clearing the site of debris (Mkrtchyan, 1985), bringing to light partially visible structures that had collapsed. The recovered assemblage, currently housed in the Yeghegnadzor Regional Museum, predominantly consists of ceramics dating to the thirteenth–eighteenth centuries. In 2020–21, as part of the 'Conservation, Partial Restoration, and Area Improvement of the Shativank Monastery' project, partial excavations were conducted within the complex by Babajanyan and Azatyan. The arched hall of the main gate was revealed, and the space between the narthex and the western wall was cleared from north to south, exposing building façades that extended from east to west (Figure 10). The materials recovered provide insights into the continuous occupation of the complex between the thirteenth and the

Figure 10. *Excavated area at Shativank.*

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eighteenth centuries, in two distinct phases: a) late thirteenth century to the end of the fourteenth century and b) seventeenth–eighteenth centuries. The assemblage predominantly comprises ceramic building material, including roof tiles and water pipes, alongside household items such as storage jars, tableware, and oil lamps. A small collection of liturgical vessels, including candlesticks and fragments of book bindings dating to the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries, was also recovered.

Epigraphic research demonstrated that Shativank underwent various interventions since Barkhudaryan's visit in the 1950s–60s, including instances of collapse and excavations. During this period, the recorded number of inscriptions has fluctuated: Barkhudaryan initially documented thirty-three inscriptions (Barkhudaryan, 1967: 156–61, ins. nos. 463–86), including those deciphered by Kajberuni that were not preserved by his time. The excavations in 1985 and 2020–21 yielded fourteen new inscriptions, found on the lower rows of the walls of St Sion. However, certain inscriptions deciphered by Barkhudaryan are now known to be 'lost' beneath new collapse events. It is critical to note that this extensive archaeological research produced no evidence to support the tenth-century foundation date based on Orbelyan's account. More research is thus required to justify the date of AD 929 given for the site on the Monuments List.

Discussion and Conclusions

In the examples presented, we have set out to share some of the interdisciplinary methodology of landscape archaeology in Vayots Dzor, through which we sift through layers of textual information as we analyse site distributions, surface materials, and excavated sequences. The ways that knowledge about the landscape has been compressed and decontextualized over time can lead to contradictions in our data, which must be addressed through careful research and discussion. Nonetheless, ambiguities remain; for example, we create categories for sites and monuments that have disappeared from the physical landscape and exist only as references in the literature. In some cases, such as the inscription on the now-collapsed wall at Karkop monastery, we must rely on the version of that text compiled by our travellers' accounts on the basis of Orbelyan's record. At the same time, we must maintain an awareness that, in the thirteenth century, Orbelyan treated the epigraphic record as a subject for creative, frequently politically motivated, elaboration. Our methodological treatment of these sources is thus interdisciplinary, navigating between literary and historical readings as well as material evidence. We also share our travel account authors' awareness that technological change makes new and different 'readings' possible. For instance, while appreciating the accounts of Kajberuni, Lalayan deplored 'mistakes in the copy of epigraphs which are inevitable as [Kajberuni] copied without a tele-negative photo lens' (Lalayan, 2021: 483). But even photographs are not failsafe, as Lalayan later lamented the theft of 300 of his photonegatives (Lalayan, 2021: 483). These century-old reflections give context to our integration of older data with satellite imagery, digital photography, and landscape modelling.

Among the many issues that remain to be explored are the practices and events through which people currently living in Vayots Dzor perceive and interpret the archaeological landscape. This has implications not only for our survey methodology, as we continue to ask local villagers about their memories of place names and site locations, but also for the maintenance of the landscape. Cultural meanings accrue to these historical places, especially structures

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that might be perceived as a church or shrine, in a complex relation to the 'real' or 'true' meaning of the sites (Antonyan, 2021: 376). Parts of the medieval and early modern historical landscape are still in active use, from churches that have been re-consecrated, to bridges that are still driven over, to *khachkars* that have been incorporated into shrines and buildings or redeployed as public statues. Heritage sites in Vayots Dzor are still destinations for pilgrimages, whether pilgrim trails to Shativank, or pilgrimages to the grave of the anti-Bolshevik military leader Garegin Nzhdeh at Spitakavor.

These ongoing practices have implications for intersections of archaeological and historical research on the one hand, and for national heritage discourses on the other. Jalalyanc' cites the early medieval historian Movses Khorenatsi, who articulated that his mission was to show that 'though we are now small, and starkly constrained in numbers, nevertheless in our country many brave deeds were yet done' (Khorenatsi cited in Jalalyanc', 2016: 24). Such a project to create material narratives of national history also runs up against the reality of mobility in history, from before the Middle Ages to the present. The archaeologist Igit Gharibyan (1983: 14) pointed out that, although the residents of Gladzor village 'remembered' the location of the medieval monastery, this was in fact impossible due to the relocation of Armenian, Persian, and Turkish-speaking populations following the Treaty of Turkmenchay. Our team has learned to resist an impulse in survey archaeology to privilege as an independent source the 'timeless folk memory' of village people since the latter have access to the Monuments List and will frequently pull a copy of Kajberuni or other text off the shelf to support their identification of a site or place with a name known from Orbelyan. That said, local people in Vayots Dzor retain memories and practices that are not documented in the official hermeneutics of heritage in this landscape. Rather than invalidate either local knowledge or the work of archaeologists and heritage managers, our intent here has been to illustrate how archaeology, heritage records, and local memory in Vayots Dzor overlap in shared long-term processes of making meaning in and with landscapes.

Supplementary Material

The supplementary material for this article can be found at http://doi.org/10.1017/eaa.2025.8.

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Superposition textuelle, mémoire du paysage et lieux médiévaux à Vayots Dzor, Arménie

*Les récits de voyage présentent des avantages mais aussi des défis en prospection archéologique. Cet article concerne une étude de cas basée sur une enquête de terrain (*Vayots Dzor Silk Road Survey *ou VDSRS), qui a pour but de reconstruire le paysage médiéval (Xe au XVe siècle apr. J.-C.) de Vayots Dzor en Arménie en « fouillant » les récits relatifs à son paysage. Les connaissances sur cette région au Moyen Âge reposent essentiellement sur un texte fondamental de l'évêque Step'anos Orbelyan au XIIIe siècle. Des voyageurs parcoururent la région à partir du milieu du XIXe siècle, et ces expéditions leur permirent d'établir des liens entre les lieux visités, les inscriptions relevées et les événements et lieux rapportés par Orbelyan. Au moyen d'exemples de sites recensés par la VDSRS, les auteurs explorent comment l'accumulation de ces sources créent un savoir local qui informe les archéologues et les gestionnaires du patrimoine. Ils invitent à une réflexion sur l'influence que la mémoire locale, l'archéologie et le paysage physique ont sur la formation de lieux.*
Translation by Madeleine Hummler

Mots-clés: archéologie du paysage, Arménie, patrimoine, méthodologie des enquêtes, Moyen Âge, récits de voyage

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Textschichtung, Landschaftsgedächtnis und mittelalterliche Orte in Vayots Dzor, Armenien

Reiseberichte bieten sowohl Vorteile als auch Herausforderungen bei archäologischen Geländeforschungen. Die Verfasser des Artikels versuchen anhand einer Fallstudie, welche auf die Ergebnisse der Vayots Dzor Silk Road Survey *(VDSRS) beruht, die mittelalterliche (10. bis 15. Jahrhundert) Landschaft von Vayots Dzor in Armenien durch die „Ausgrabung" von Textquellen zu rekonstruieren. Die Kenntnis dieser Gegend im Mittelalter stützt sich vor allem auf einen grundlegenden Text, der im 13. Jahrhundert von Bischof Step'anos Orbelyan verfasst wurde. Die Region wurde ab der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts von Reisenden besucht, die Verbindungen zwischen den erkundeten Stätten, den aufgenommenen Inschriften und den von Orbelyan dokumentierten Ereignissen und Orten herstellten. Anhand von Beispielen aus der VDSRS erforschen die Verfasser, wie sich diese Quellen ansammeln und lokales Wissen über Orte schaffen, das Archäologen und Denkmalspfleger informiert. Sie plädieren für eine Überlegung über den Einfluss, der das lokale Gedächtnis, die Archäologie und die physische Landschaft auf die Ortsformation hat.* Translation by Madeleine Hummler

Stichworte: Landschaftsarchäologie, Armenien, Denkmalpflege, Methodologie der Geländeforschungen, Mittelalter, Reiseberichte

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