THE ORBELIAN FAMILY CEMETERY EŁEGIS, VAYOC' JOR, ARMENIA

by

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The Orbelian cemetery, located in the village of Ełegis, Vayoc' Jor region, Armenia was surveyed by Michael E. Stone, assisted by S. Bishop in May 2001¹. This was Stone's third visit to this site, prompted by research into the nearby Jewish cemetery. On a fourth visit in September 2002 he verified a number of details. The Orbelian family cemetery had attracted interest from the beginning of research into the Jewish cemetery of Ełegis, by reason of the identity of the tombstones' shapes in the two cemeteries and their similar dates. The decoration of certain of the stones is strikingly similar². In the present article we will present in full all the tombstones in the Orbelian cemetery. A number of the inscriptions on them were published earlier, in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Armenicarum*³. Our publication here provides full details of the tombstones and inscriptions in the cemetery.

The main survey of the Orbelian cemetery was carried out between 6-9 May 2001. The Charles and Agnes Kazarian Eternal Fund sponsored the second season of the larger project dealing with the Jewish cemetery in 2001. That season's work was also supported by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Ben Tzvi Institute for Study of Oriental Jewish Communities, The Foundation for Biblical Archeology and the Israel Antiquities Authority. The assistance, support and encouragement of His Excellency Archbishop Abraham Mrktchyan of the See of Siwnik' of the Armenian

¹ A brief description of Ełegis in this period is to be found in AMIT and STONE, 2002, esp. 68-71. Further references may be seen there.

² *Ibid.*, 88-89, figs. 26-27. The second report on this project is STONE and AMIT, 2006.

³ BARXUDARYAN, 1967 (henceforth: CIA), 113-114, figures 129-131.

Apostolic Church are gladly and gratefully acknowledged⁴. The Jewish cemetery excavation, of which the present publication is a by-product, is a joint project of the Institute of Archeology and Ethnography of the Armenian National Academy of Sciences and the Program in Armenian Studies of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem⁵.

With the support of the Institute of Geology of the National Armenian Academy of Sciences and its Director, Professor Ruben Dirbashian, the services of geologist Dr. Sergei Karapetyan were made available. Geological samples were taken by him and assayed at the Institute. The purpose of these examinations was to resolve the question whether the stone used for the Orbelian tombstones was the same as that used for those in the Jewish cemetery. The detailed geological report was published in the second report on the work in the Jewish cemetery. We cite the most relevant part of the conclusions here: "As a result of the assay, it may be concluded that all analyzed samples are basalt andesites and petrographically are identical with the rocks of the lava-stream on the crest of the right slope of the river southwest of the village Eghegis (sample 4533, point 1). Most probably these very lavas were used for the tombstones of the Jewish cemetery and that of Orbelean princes. And only for one tombstone of the Jewish cemetery a stone from the young stream was used: black porous basalt andesite (sample 4534, point 2)."6

The purpose of this paper is to present the tombstones and their inscriptions. The persons interred in this cemetery cannot be identified in the historical sources. They seem to have been minor members of the Orbelian family, for the chief Orbelians were buried in the metropolitan church in Norayank'.

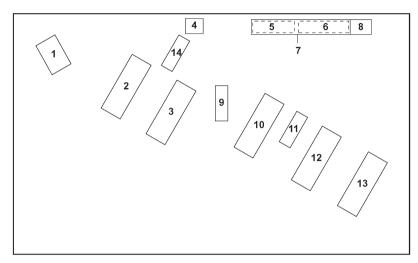
All the tombstones in the cemetery were assigned numbers, and these are shown on Plan 1 below. We refer to them henceforth by those numbers (see Figure 1). All dimensions are in centimeters. In the following H = height; W = width; L = length. The inscriptions that were published in CIA are noted and their CIA numbers are signalled by "= CIA nnn" following our number. Similarly, CIA plates are indicated following the numbers.

⁴ The work in 2002 was supported by the Ben Tzvi Institute, the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, the Armenian Research Center of the University of Michigan (Dearborn), the David Jesselson Fund, the Israel Antiquities Authority and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

⁵ The author expresses his special gratitude to Dr. Aram Topchyan, who assisted in various aspects of this research. His direct contributions are so marked in this paper. Yoav Loeff took all the photographs except for Figures nos. 2, 3, 5 and 11 which were taken by the author.

⁶ STONE and AMIT, 2006, 117-118.





Plan 1 Cemetery of the Orbelian family, Eghegis

Stone 1. Gravestone

Unfinished flat stone that covered a grave. It bears no inscription and does not currently appear to cover a grave.

L $117 \times H 40 \times W 16$

Stone 2. Tombstone of the year 1292 bearing Inscriptions 1-2

The stone is shaped like a pointed arch; the ridge is 21 cm from the bottom. It stands on a two-tiered base. The east corner of the first tier is broken. The dimensions are:

First tier: L $189 \times H 40 \times W 9.5$ Second tier: L $177.5 \times H 59 \times W 5$ Tombstone: L $158 \times W 54 \times H 40.5$

From a height of 21 cm, the width of the stone is reduced by 2.7 cm on each side. Around the flat surface below this reduction are two inscriptions. The first inscription starts on the northern side and has one letter on the western end. A second inscription occurs on the eastern end.

The inscriptions are written in deeply engraved uncial script, using ligatures. The script of Inscription 1 is 13 cm high and average letters are up to 12 cm wide. It is on the northern side of the stone, and its final letter is written on the western end of the stone, ca. 15 cm in from the base and 4 cm in from the western end.

Stone 2, Inscription 1 (Figure 2)

This inscription is on the northern side of the stone.

ԱՅՍ Է. ՀԱՆԳԻՍՏ ԱՄԱԹՈՒՆԻՍ

This is the tomb of Amat'un

Note by Aram Topchyan

The name "Amatun" does not occur in Ačaryan's onomastic dictionary. He has Amadin (from the Arabic name Amad-ad-din), occurring only in a thirteenth–century inscription. The editor of *CIA*, however, reads the same name in that inscription as "Amat" (vol. 3, p. 60, no 159). A certain Amadin Šahurnec'i ruled in the village Herher of Vayoc' Jor. He was a contemporary of Burt'el Orbelian who became "prince of princes" in the year 1300. Another Amadin (Amat?), who died as a boy, is mentioned in a different inscription dated 13468. These persons probably were not buried in the Orbelian cemetery and no other persons with this name were identified.

Stone 2, Inscription 2 of the year 1292 (Figure 3)

The letters are 13-15 cm high and average 5 cm wide. This is by the same hand as inscription 1 and is part of the same array.

P. Shill

In the year 741 [A.E. = 1292 CE].

On the western end, some distance above the single letter, is a "v" shaped incision. The meaning of this is unclear; it might be some sort of mason's mark. A narrower inverse "v" shape is found on tombstone no. T44 from the Jewish cemetery.

[′] Ačaryan, *HAB*.

⁸ See ALIŠAN, 1893, 116, 199; CIA 3, 56, no. 148 and 223, no. 707.

Stone 3. Tombstone of the year 1280 CE bearing Inscription 3 = CIA 327, fig. 130

This tombstone is very similar to no. 2 in shape, being a pointed, Moorish arch. The tombstone is set on a two tiered base made of a separate piece of stone and is not centered on the base: it is 4 cm from northern end, 10 cm from the southern end, 10.5 cm from the eastern end and 9 cm from the western end. It bears two inscriptions, one on the northern side and one on the western end. The inscriptions are numbered in *CIA* as no. 327, plate no. 38. The inscriptions were recollated with the transcriptions in *CIA*.

A running, complex interlace design within a frame may be observed along both sides of the upper part of the tombstone. The interlace continues on the eastern end but not on the western end. The interlace design resembles that on tombstone T9 in the Jewish cemetery, and that on the plaque at the base of the external stairs of the Metropolitan church at Noravank' (see Figures 4-6).

The lower tier of base measures: L $204 \times W$ $72.5 \times H$ 6.5 and the ledge before start of next tier is 5 cm wide. Upper tier of base is L $191 \times W$ $62 \times H$ 6.5. The flat face of the tombstone in 22 cm high and the upper part, beyond the ledge, is sloping, but is a total of 35.5 cm to the spine.

Inscription 3 (Figures 7-8)

The inscription is along the northern side of tombstone 3 and its last three letters are on the western end. It is written in deeply incised Armenian uncial script with ligatures. The letters are 13 cm high on an average and a standard letter is 4 cm wide. The overall written area on the north side is 13 cm high, and 164 cm long. On the western end the writing is 33 cm wide and 14 cm high; the widest letter is 11 cm. The writing is damaged by flaking.

northern side western end

ԱՅՍ Ի ՀԱՆԳԻՍՏ ՍՄՊԱՏԱ ։ Թ ։ ՉԻԹ

This is the tomb of Smpat, in the year 729 [AE = 1280 CE]

Smpat must be a variant orthography of the name Smbat. However, this is not the renowned Smbat Orbelian who held power 1251-1273 and died in 1273. His sepulchre is in Noravank'. Smpat might well be the Smbat who is mentioned in the fragmentary inscription on stone no. 8, although that is not certain⁹.

⁹ Aram Topchyan notes that: "Smbat, father of Hasan, is mentioned on a xač'k'ar (probably from the 13th century), which is inserted into the western wall of the Aldgoc'

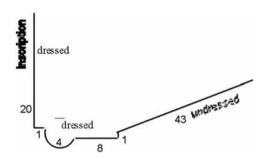
Stone no. 4: Inscription 4 (Figure 9)

This is a triangular fragment bearing an inscription. It seems to be from the same inscription as nos. 8 and 15.5 though it is not a direct continuation them. It is uncertain, however, whether 15.1 and 15.2 come from the same inscription: see below in the discussion of stone no. 15. Three sides of this stone are dressed. At its eastern end is a groove and the corner is rounded. This rounded corner is beneath the inscription and ca. 3 cm from the bottom of the stone. The dimensions are listed here.

East: L 45 cm; H 19-23 (maximum sizes). Bottom: W 43; L 43 (maximum sizes).

South: L 44; H 21.5 (maximum); 7 (minimum) North: L 40; H 20 (maximum); 9 (minimum)

The corner of the stone and its dimensions are illustrated in the following figure. These are identical with those of stone no. 8.



Fragment of an Armenian uncial inscription. The writing extends the whole length of the eastern face. The letters are well engraved and are 10-12 cm high. The inscription does not make a whole word and is probably the end of a local designator.

1668h

Stones 5-7. Two Xač'k'ars Surmounted by a Tympanum

This is a well-known monument that was published in detail in P. Donabédian, "Le Tympan du monument à deux Xač'k'ars à Ełegis." *REArm* 14 (1980), 393-413.

St. Step'anos cathedral, east of Garni and Havuc' T'ar, near the village Elliga, built from 1217: see G. Yovsēp'eanc', *The Xalbakeans or Prošeans in Armenian History*, Antelias, 1969, p. 231 (in Armenian)."

Stone 8. Inscription 5 = CIA 329, fig. 131

This stone is set in the ground and standing next to and east of the complex of nos. 5-7. In shape it is identical with stone no. 4 (see drawing above), but is a complete stone, though the inscription on it is incomplete. The inscription must have continued on another, separate stone. The stone bears an inscription in rounded uncial script, deeply incised. Preceding the text published in *CIA* we can read two additional letters. Another four or five letters precede this, but the stone has abraded and, since the script is so heavily ligatured, it is difficult to restore them. As observed above, this seems to be part of the same inscription as no. 4, but some text is missing between them. It may be inferred that there was an inscribed border all around the complex composed of the tympanum and two xač'k'ars, and these two stones are fragments of it.

Inscription no. 5 (Figure 10)

]นร วกานวุคนอก บบๆนรนอ ๆ[

]AT uncle of Smpat G[

The first two letters read are fairly uncertain¹⁰. This is presumably the same Smpat mentioned in the inscription on stone 4.

Stone 9. Small Tombstone with Relief (Figures 11-13)

This child's tombstone is not in its original position and is not set into the ground. It has no base and its orientation differs from the other tombstones. It has a flat top, two sides sloping out from the top and a ledge along the west side. The dimensions are:

L 81 \times W 21-22 (maximum); 10 (minimum) \times H 27.5. The ledge is 2 cm deep.

The tombstone is decorated all over. A chain pattern has been engraved along the narrow flat top. At the western end is a cross (Figure 11), while on the southern side there is a whirl rosette (wheel of eternity) with 11 spokes, in relief and set in a frame 18 cm square. The rest of this side of the tombstone is divided into two registers. The upper one has five

¹⁰ Aram Topchyan suggests tentatively reading these letters and the preceding signs as 9.759.07. We remain uncertain about this.

contiguous crosses while the lower one is filled with a chain design (Figure 12). The eastern end is blank. The northern side contains a figurative design. In order, from east to west, we observe: a horse, a human figure; a long-necked jug with a cross on its belly and a badly preserved circular design, either an ordinary rosette or a whirl rosette. This complex is 66.5 cm long and 22 cm high (Figure 13).

Such figurative tombstones are not uncommon and Brentjes and Russell have suggested various interpretations. H. Hakobyan gives further examples from Arcax¹¹. Since none of the dated examples seen so far are older than 1559, we date this stone tentatively to the same period, though it remains possible that further, systematic research may show this type to be older¹². We have given some illustrations of additional tombstones of this type from the village of Areni (Figures 14 and 15) and from Noratus, on the shore of Lake Sevan, one of which bears the date 1581 (Figures 16-17). A more thorough investigation of this type of tombstone and its distribution promises to be illuminating.

Stone 10. Inscription 6 of 1303 = CIA 328 and 330

This tombstone is shaped as a Moorish arch. It is set on a single-tiered base that is slightly shorter than the stone itself. The dimensions of the base are 172 cm long, 70.5 cm wide and 2 cm high. The flat band around the lower part of the stone is 21 cm high on the northern side and 19 cm high on the southern side. The lip at the top of the flat band is 2 cm deep. The overall dimensions of the tombstone follow:

H $60 \times$ W $46 \times$ L 173. The inscription is found on three sides of the stone.

¹¹ Brentjes, 1991, suggests that this type of figural tombstone may be as old as the fifteenth century, and cites dated examples of 1559 and 1672. He presents pictures of a number of stones of this type, see his figs. 3-7. Russell, 2001, deals basically with the origins of the theme, which he regards as very ancient. He illustrates a single, undated example from Arcax (plate 3). Hakobyan, 1991, illustrates two examples from Šahumian (17th century, pp. 52 and 55). He observes figures with what may be a wine bottle in a relief on a xač'k'ar that he dates to the 13th century (p. 54) and a mounted figure with a lance found in a similar context on a xač'k'ar of 1203 (p. 51). An additional, undated tombstone of this type from Momik's chapel of S. Astuacacnin opposite Areni is illustrated in our Figures 14 and 15. Two such stones from Noratus, one dated to 1581, are given in our Figures 16 and 17. Another such stone is shown in Plate 35.134 of CIA 2, 117, no. 2 of 1604. It is in the village of Tor, in the Sisian region of Siwnik'.

¹² In a lecture on Sept. 8, 2005 Dr. Hamlet Petrosyan reported on a figured tombstone from Arcax with a partial date of twelfth-thirteenth century.

Inscription no. 6

The inscription is in uncial letters with no ligatures. The letters are 11-13 cm high¹³.

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Southern Side (Figure 18):
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ԱՅՍ Է ՀԱՆԳԻՍՏ ՀԱՉԱՅՐԴԵՂԻՆ
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This is the tomb of Hač'ayrdeł

Northern Side (Figure 19)

ԵՒ ՀԱՍԱՆՊՈՒՂԻՆ ԹՎ ՉԾԲ

and of Hasanpuł. Date 752 [A.E. = 1303]

Western End = CIA 330 (Figure 20):

ԱԾ ՈՂՈ ՐՄԻ ՆՋ

God have mercy. NĴ

The two individuals mentioned are not known. Ačaryan HAB s.v. mentions three persons called Hazardeł but none of them could have been buried in 1303. As for Hasanpuł, numerous Hasans are known, but none is definitely to be identified with this person¹⁴. In the third inscription, CIA reads the two letters as an abbreviation of $\hat{l}_{IP} \partial h_{I} h_{I} \hat{l}_{I}$, a name found in Ačaryan, vol. 4, 99. However, we suggest it is an abbreviated form of something like $\hat{l}_{I} \hat{l}_{I} \partial h_{I} \hat{l}_{I} \hat{l}_{I} \hat{l}_{I}$ "the one fallen asleep, deceased."

Stone 11. Child's Tombstone

This tombstone is on an oval base and has the following dimensions: L 82 cm (maximum); the length of the tombstone itself is 66 cm \times W 29 cm (maximum) \times H 46 cm (overall)

 $^{^{13}}$ The note in CIA under no. 328 says $_{\it unj}$ of $_{\it unique log}$ $_{\it unique log}$ "Now not in situ" which is not accurate, since CIA 330 is from the same tombstone. Therefore, it appears that an error entered the records.

¹⁴ There are numerous Hasans listed in Ačaryan, *HAB*. One of them (Hasan 53), son of Awatarik with his brother Xocʻadeł, presented a piece of land to the church St. Stepʻanos in Vayocʻ Jor in memory of his brother Mxitʻar. The inscription recording this is dated 1292, see ALIŠAN, 1893, 58 (note by A. Topchyan). Observe also the otherwise unknown Amir Hasan buried as a youth in 1331 at Noravankʻ (STONE and VAN LINT, 1996-7).

On the western end is an ornate cross in a frame measuring 13.5×21.5 cm. On the northern side are three crosses in pillared arcades within a frame (Figure 22). The eastern end is blank. The southern side shows a human figure lying down (Figure 21). The feet are not shown and the hands are crossed on its breast. The figure is done in low relief and is within an outline frame. An additional circle around the head produces a halo-like effect. The figure is of a girl, as indicated by the size of the tombstone on the one hand and the garments. The additional line around the head may be a headdress; the figure is clothed in a dress belted at the waist. The belt is made of square links and, perhaps, she has a mantle over her shoulders. On the front of the dress a circle has been carved. The general type of the outline of a human figure on a tombstone is not infrequent in this period. In Figure 23 two examples of similar tombstones from Noratus are shown.

Stone 12. Long Uninscribed Tombstone

This uninscribed tombstone has no base. Its top is gabled and slightly rounded. A flat band runs around its lower part and a ledge differentiates that from the upper, rounded part of the tombstone. A hole at the east end was used for transportation. On the same end, a good deal of damage by chipping has taken place. This stone is very long and, of the first 61 tombstones measured in the Jewish cemetery, one is of the same length (T 23) and only three are longer (T 1, T 2 and T 26). Its dimensions are the following:

overall height $60 \times$ overall width $49.5 \times$ length 163. The band around the lower part is 22.5 cm high; the ledge is 3 cm wide.

Stone 13. Large Tombstone without Base

This tombstone is in the form of a round, semicircular arch. There is a hole through the south-eastern corner of the rock and a piece has broken from it. This is the largest tombstone found in both the Jewish and Orbelian cemeteries. It measures as follows: H $57 \times W$ $51 \times L$ 204. If this reflects the height of an individual, he (presumably) was exceptionally tall for this period.

Stone 14. Tomb Cover

This is a flat rock embedded in the soil. The surface is rough. It measures L $110 \times W$ 57. It is the cover of a tomb which, to judge from open tombs in the Jewish cemetery, was probably a rectangular hole lined with slabs of

gray rock. Presumably, stone no. 1 here is also such a cover, though it is not in its original position. A tomb may exist below this stone.

Stones 15-19. Inscriptions 7-9 in CIA 326, fig. 129

Figure 326 in *CIA* shows five architectural elements. Two are curved pieces of stone with an ornament in the centre and rope designs forming the upper and lower borders. An inscription is on the recessed area between the two ropes (Stones 15 and 16, Inscriptions 7-8). Two further, uninscribed elements, Stones 17 and 18, may be seen to the left of Stones 15 and 16 in the figure in *CIA*. The fifth element, Stone 19, is straight and bears Inscription 9. The shape of the stone and the orientation of the letters suggest a possible relation to inscriptions 4 and 8.

The two pieces of curved stone (Stones 15 and 16) were probably not part of an inscription on a frame surrounding the tympanum. Their shape is different. The present location of the stones is unknown. It is also possible that Stones 17 and 18 belonged to the same array and 15, 16 and 19.

Inscriptions 7 - 9 according to CIA

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7
. ト FUアものUてS トてわれていたやもれて SUPUU トントし... 15
. in the pious princedom of Tarsaič...
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8 ... **2ULUL UP ?-bUUF**... by pure fruits ...

The most famous Tarsayič was the son of Liparit Orbelian. He was entitled "Prince of Princes" probable probable and inherited power after the death of his brother Smbat in 1273. He died in 1290¹⁶. He seems most likely to be the person mentioned here. Another Tarsayič Orbelian (Ačaryan, no. 2) was son of Ĵalal who eventually became primate of Vayoc' Jor, with the ecclesiastical name of Step'anos¹⁷. The expression in the second line is typical of gifts dedicated to a church or monastery. The donor declares that these gifts are the unsullied product of his / her labours.

¹⁵ The first letter, p, in the transcription in CIA is not visible in the drawing or in fig. 129.

¹⁶ Ačaryan, *HAB*, 5, 141, no. 1.

¹⁷ Ačaryan, *HAB*, 5, 141-2 mentions a number of other persons of this name in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, including a Siwnec'i lord of Ełegis in the fifteenth century (*ibid*, 142, no. 6).

Stone 20. Inscription 10 = CIA 331 Xač'k'ar of the Year 1468

ԿԱՆԿՆԵՑԻ ԽԱՉՍ Ի ՓՐԿՈՒԹԻՒՆ ՄՍ ՐԻՆ: ԹՎ: УԺԷ.

I set up this cross for the salvation of Msr in the year 917 [AE = 1468 CE]

Description in *CIS*: "Small and regular, found east of the cemetery, in the burial ground." We were unable to locate this xač'k'ar. Ačaryan, vol. 3, p. 472 notes that this name, meaning "Egypt," occurs in various sources in the onomasticon of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The occurrence in Elegis is older than those he notes.

Stone 21 = CIA 332, p. 114

ԱՅՍ Է ՀԱՆԳԻՍՏ ՄՈՒՐԱԴԻՆ

This is the tomb of Murad

CIA records that this found near the preceding. This stone is not described there. The formula resembles those on stones 2, 3 and 10 above. From the drawing in CIA it may be inferred to be in *erkat'agir*.

ABBREVIATIONS

(details of volumes given below)

CIA Corpus Inscriptionum Armenicarum

HAB Hayoc' anjanunneri bararan

¹⁸ փոքր եւ Հասարակ, գտնվում է տապանատնից արեւելք, գերեզմանատան մեջ CIA, 113.



 $\label{eq:Fig.1} Fig.~1$ General view of the cemetery with Stones 2-12



Fig. 2 Stone 2, Inscription 1



Fig. 3
Stone 2, Inscription 1 (end)



Fig. 4 Stone 3



Fig. 5 Jewish Cemetery T9



Fig. 6 Noravank' Interlace



Fig. 7
Stone 3, Inscription 3, northern side



Fig. 8 Stone 3, western end



Fig. 9 Stone 4, Inscription 4



Fig. 10 Stone 8, Inscription 5



Fig. 11 Stone 9, western end



Fig. 12 Stone 9, southern side



Fig. 13 Stone 9, northern side



Fig. 14
Areni, Astuacacnin Church, undated



Fig. 15
Areni, Astuacacnin Church, undated



Fig. 16 Figured Tombstone, Noratus, 1581



Fig. 17
Figured Tombstone, Noratus, undated



Fig. 18
Stone 10, Inscription 6, southern side



Fig. 19 Stone 10, Inscription 6, northern side



Fig. 20
Stone 10, Inscription 6, western end



Fig. 21 Stone 11, southern side



Fig. 22 Stone 11, northern side



Fig. 23
Tombstone, Noratus, undated

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