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ON THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE SILK ROADS LANDSCAPES IN VAYOTS DZOR IN CC 13TH – 14TH:
NEW METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

Michele Nucciotti*, Elisa Pruno**
Florence University SAGAS Department

*) § 1, 2, 4; **) § 3, 4

1. *The Making of the Silk Road in Vayots Dzor: the project*

Florence University and Yerevan State University started in 2013[1] a joint research archaeological and territorial project in the Armenian region of Vayots Dzor, in order to investigate the impact of long-range Eurasian connectivity in the formation and dynamic development of local medieval landscapes. In six years of fieldwork the joint team covered the area included in a polygon whose vertexes are, to the north, Selim pass, to the south, Arpa river (between Areni and the ruins of medieval fortified village of Hertigh), to the west, the village of Hors and to the east, the area of Arates-Eghegis. This sub-region is characterized by the presence of two branches of international road-connections, whose exploitment in 13th-14th centuries, in the Mongolian period, is materially evidenced by the presence of infrastructures, including the remains of a medieval bridge across the Arpa river, nearby modern Areni and, most notably, by a series of caravanserais (Selim, Aghndjazor and the disappeared Aghavnadzor), dated to the 14th century, and built under the auspices of the Orbelian princes, the local ruling family at the time. Such 'international corridor' is paired by a more typical rural landscape, centered on monastic foundations (among which Arates, Tsaghats Kar, Noravank), villages (like Eghegis, Arpa/Areni or Shatin) and fortresses (as Smbataberd), located nearby productive agro-pastoral areas, and whose formation starts in an earlier period (upstanding structures of 9th century are, for instance, preserved in Eghegis and Arates).
The joint Italian-Armenian team (*fig. 1*) is led by Michele Nucciotti (Florence University) and Hamlet Petrosyan (Yerevan State University) and is devoted to the development of integrated archaeological (Elisa Pruno for production archaeology), historical, architectural (Cecilia Luschi) and geographical (Margherita Azzari) research, globally characterized by a 'Light' approach, i.e. by non-destructive investigation methods. Such a strategy, labelled as 'Light Archaeology', falls into the general context of territorial archaeology and landscape archaeology, albeit, thanks to the use of stratigraphic analyses in the interpretation of upstanding historical buildings, Light Archaeology allows the elaboration of territorial stratigraphic data without using (or not centered on) archaeological excavations (while in landscape and territorial archaeology upstanding structures are investigated with typological and architectural-historical methods only).
The project constitutes the first experiment with Light Archaeology in Armenia and the Caucasus, and expected results include both, advancements in archaeological-historical research about Armenian Middle Ages (cc. 7th-16th), as well as methodological advances in archaeological territorial studies as a whole.
In this paper, the authors, both from Florence University, will particularly focus on the second aspect, presenting the main theoretical and methodological frameworks adopted by the Italian partner of the

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[1] The first cooperation between the two entities dates to 2010, in the framework of EU ENPI program (Nucciotti Segnini 2013), the project is supported since 2012 by Florence University SAGAS Department and Yerevan State University chair of Cultural Studies, from 2014 on the project received support also from the Italian Ministry of Foreing Affairs, as an official Italian archaeolgical mission under the title of *The Making of the Silk Road in Armenia*, directed by M. Nucciotti. From 2017 support was made availabe also from Erasmus+ KA107 mobility program.

project in order to enhance the knowledge on material and historical phenomena observable in the making of medieval landscapes in Vayots Dzor.

2. *Theoretical and Material Landscapes of the Silk Road in Vayots Dzor (cc.13-14)*

Guido Vannini, the first Chair of Medieval Archaeology in Florence, strongly supported and implemented investigations targeting territorial histories (instead of site histories), in order to highlight material effects of phenomena (instead of 'events'), with a strong historical-archaeological perspective. Florence University therefore collected a long record track of medieval archaeology interests and projects in the Euro-Mediterranean region, run mainly between 1980s and present, that in accordance to the above line of research included a considerable amount of territorial investigations, mainly of rural 'feudal principalities' dating to cc. 10th - 15th, in Italy, Jordan and France. As a result of such work, Florence University team became involved with experimenting and implementing methodologies that could support stratigraphic-territorial (and non-destructive) research, within a world-history framework. Based on past experience (and facing new problems), the main theoretical approaches used in the Armenian project go from Light Archaeology (Nucciotti and Vannini, 2019; Brogiolo and Cagnana, 2012, for building archaeology – *fig. 2*), Empires theory (Martinez Gros, 2014), Great and Little Traditions (Redfield, 1962; La Bianca, 2007, 2011), to Tiziano Mannoni's "Archeologia Globale" (Mannoni, 1984; Giannichedda, 1996). Despite, each of such theories implies a peculiar way to look at and to interpret material culture, they do globally contribute to enrich the tool-box of an historical archaeology of medieval Armenia; on the one hand enhancing our ability to identify and follow the tracks of medieval phenomena at local level, while on the other hand allowing a broader geographical and theoretical contextualization of Vayots Dzor into Eurasian history.

2.1 Light Archaeology. As already pointed out, this can be considered a sort theoretical and practical 'big box' of the project, in that it targets the whole territory, instead of single sites, as the object of research. Under this umbrella, in-depth stratigraphic analysis of upstanding medieval architectural complexes and buildings in the project area have been carried out[2], allowing the creation of territorial atlases of masonry types and of stone finishing tool-marks, based on stratigraphic chronologies instead of stylistic analysis. Such chrono-technological atlases have allowed cross comparisons among different buildings, highlighting relevant aspects of their making, to be connected to the know-how of employed builders (master-masons and/or local workforce) and their circuits/deplacements in a given period. Main results include, reassessment of chronology of architectural complexes (as in Arates – Nucciotti Petrosyan e al. 2015), typization of medieval building-sites' organization and strategies, technical characterization and interaction schemes of local and foreign builders, comparison of masonry ashlars and (possibly) locally produced smooth-surface stone artefacts (tomb stones, khatchkars) based on tool-marks recognition (see also below §3). Conclusively, Light Archaeology helped to add to the interpretation process of Vayots Dzor a strong stratigraphic backbone, helping to build an independent historical-archaeological source to be compared against other (also independent) interpretative datasets and approaches, among which art-history, epigraphy, iconographic and ichnographic analysis, and the worlds of written evidence.

2.2 Empire theory. The choice for a global approach to the interpretation of medieval Vayots Dzor was somehow inherent to the project, for the international composition and experience of the Armenian-Italian group, primarily, and for a relevant necessity, specific to Florence University team. This latter was in fact in need to find a useful framework to manage, at a scientific level, project areas scattered in Europe, the Middle East and, from 2013, Armenia. All characterized by upstanding evidence of medieval rural settlement, all designed on princely 'feudal' domains of 10th-15th century[3], all connected to (and crossed by) international and intercontinental road-networks; although globally (and sadly)

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[2] Stratigraphic building archaeology had been emploied in Armenia prior to our project, particularly in the study of the material history of Ereruyk basilica, thanks to the work of N. Montevecchi and C. Toghini (2012), and to the team of P. Donabédian (et al. 2014). Nevertheless, the methology was not used for territorial studies.

[3] Major comparable case studies in Europe and the Middle East were the Crusader-Ayyubid and Mamluk Lordship of Transjordan (Jordan, cc. 12th-15th, research from 1986 to present, Vannini Nucciotti (ed.), 2009) and Tuscan princely domains of counts Aldobrandeschi and Guidi (Italy, cc. 10th-15th, research from 2000 to present, Nucciotti 2006, Vannini and Molducci 2009).

lacking a common general cultural context to make reference to, when attempting (scientifically grounded) comparisons among the different projects.

In order to overcome the issue, several 'global' approaches were considered, starting with Henry Pirenne and ending with Frontiers' theories (Abulafia ed., 2002), as a means to describe and interpret intercultural and cross-cultural relations in the medieval Levant, with a Euro-Mediterranean perspective (Vannini and Nucciotti ed., 2009); although no general theory appeared able to cope simultaneously with Europe, the Mediterranean and (west) Asia. Eventually, a sufficiently helpful reference paradigm, in part building on the studies of medieval world systems (Abu-Lughod, 1987), was elaborated around the concept of Eurasian Middle Ages (cc. 7th-15th). The key element here considered was the Empire theory founded in the work of the Mamluk historian Abd Ar Rahman bin Muhammed Ibn Khaldun (Tunis 1332 – Cairo 1406), and particularly in the introduction of his *Kitāb al-ʿibār*, the *Muqaddima* (tr. Rosenthal, 1958), recently incorporated into a broader theory of imperial regimes by Gabriel Martinez Gros (2014). According to the points raised by Ibn Khaldun (and re-viewed by Martinez Gros), the imperial state was characterized by bipartite societies, the imperial elite and its household minority on one side and the greater majority of productive population on the other. Elites and settled population are, as a general rule, the product of diversified ethnogenetic processes and perform diversified social functions. In particular, imperial (tribal) elites monopolize the military and taxation, while imperial (subject) populations are disarmed and monopolize (or are of necessity forced to limit their activity to) production. A structural tendency towards the 'expulsion of violence' from the Imperial domains, and the need to keep local population disarmed, push the elites to supply the army with 'barbarian' elements, bought as slaves or acquired via political-economic alliances from tribal (especially nomadic) societies living beyond and nearby imperial frontiers. Through this social mechanism, empires aim at maximizing wealth and peace within the imperial space albeit, on the other hand, the enforced inner limitation of violence implies a progressive cultural convergence between imperial elites and subject populace, paralleled by the cyclical substitution of top state ruling classes with barbarian newcomers (often already employed in imperial armies) who take over the state for themselves, pushing down earlier elites towards a disarmed and productive function. Examples of similar cycles are numerous (and a sociological costant), in such regimes. It is sufficient to briefly consider the Islamic empire to have a clear scenario view of this phenomenon (*fig. 3*): Arab (i.e. tribal, barbarian and nomadic) elites ruled over Byzantine and Sasanid populations from the 7th century to the Abbasid breakdown of the second half of 9th century. After that period, in 9th-10th centuries, the Arab Abbasid caliph loses ruling and military powers to (barbarian) Turks in Egypt, the Tulunids, and to Persian Buyids in Iran and Iraq; those latters in turn were subdued and replaced as imperial elites by Seljuk Turks and Seljuk related regimes (including the Kurd Ayyubid dynasty of Saladin) in 11th-12th centuries (and by berber nomadic Kutama tribes supporting the establishment of Fatimid regime in 10th century north Africa). A brief and limited reprise of political and military room for manoeuvre by the later Abbasid caliphs in the Iraqi area, in 12th and 13th centuries, was finally crashed by the (barbarian, nomadic, east-Asian) Mongols in cc. 13th-14th, until Tamerlan and his Turco-Mongol Timurid regime took over Iran and Iraq (among others) between the second half of 14th and the early 15th century. Moreover, on a more general level, thanks to the work of Martinez Gros (2014, pp. 83-98), the very same imperial mechanism can be used to understand social-political frameworks also in eastern Asia, particularly as regards Chinese-Turco-Mongol relations in Sui, Tang (Karam Skaff, 2012) and Yuan periods, from the 7th to the 14th century, highlighting its potential as a key element in global Eurasian medieval history.

Considering Armenians in such a framework we have to ask, first of all, in which macro-group of imperial societies they are to be placed, between the 7th and the 14th century. In brief: are Armenians to be counted among productive and disarmed populations or among militarized imperial elites? Are they 'civilized' or 'barbarians'?

Quite surprisingly, the answer to that question is by no means straightforward. Differently from other cultural groups 'entangled' in foreign regimes, as for instance Jews, Copts or Syriac Christians, whose resiliency strategy totally evolved within empires (Roman-Byzantine, Islamic, then Mongol); Armenians seem to shift their position within and without. While from the 7th to the 9th century they are englobed into the Arab state (Omayyad-Abbasid), they later acquire (or recover) an ample independence in the following Bagratid epoch (884-1045), until Seljuks take control of the Armenian plateau in the 11th-12th c. bringing to the creation of Armenian Cilicia. In parallel, between 1196 and 1203 Georgian-Armenian forces repulse Seljuks from Aragatsotn, Siunik, Shirak, Ani, Bjni and Dvin, leaving space for the establishment of Zakarid monarchy and its associated princedoms, further integrated, starting from 1230s, into Mongol (later Ilkhanid) dominions, until the end of 14th century (*fig. 4*). In such events or

vicissitudes, Armenians play a dual role, they are both civilized, manufacturers, service providers (and taxed) populations of large cities, as it is clearly demonstrated by archaeological-architectural evidence in Dvin and Ani; and, alternately, reigning military-political elites of Armenian or Georgian-Armenian kingdoms and princedoms. They are therefore able to manage the two main functions of Eurasian imperial mechanisms. Moreover, and within the political chessboard of Fatimid Egypt, Armenians acquire top governmental positions and control of the state in the very manner in which tribal imperial elites (like Arabs, Turks, Mongols, etc.) do it. Such was the fate of the Armenian general Badr al-Jamali who, with the *sijill* of 1078, received from the Imam-Caliph al-Mustansir the Dhu l-Fiqar, the sword of state, as investiture of full plenipotentiary Caliphal powers, (Brett, 2017, pp. 207-214) that eventually granted him the establishment of a dynasty of Armenian *wazirs* ruling Egypt until 1163, when the last of them, Ruzzik ibn Tala'i was assassinated (Payaslian, 2007, p. 80).

Summarizing, with reference to the study in Vayots Dzor, Armenians appear in the 13th-14th century to be culturally endowed with a varied and flexible identity and able to perform all possible functions within medieval Eurasian states. A strong tradition, albeit segmented, of Armenian monarchies was available to political elites to make reference to, drawing from the experiences of Bagratid, Cilician and Zakarid kingdoms understood as a single and unified phenomenon; differently from the above mentioned Jews, Copts and Syriacs, moreover, Armenians appear in command of advanced military skills to be used for themselves or to be bargained against a measure of political autonomy (not independence) with imperial superpowers, as the Mongols. Beside this aspect, Armenians, when englobed into 'foreign' imperial regimes, could 'buy their right to survive' through the mastering of productive and service functions, in this case in a similar way to Jews, Copts and Syriacs. Such is the case, for instance, for Armenian builders in 12th-13th century Anatolia, where their craftsmanship was instrumental to the making of Islamic landscapes (Mc Clary 2017) as it had been in Egypt with the building of Cairo's city walls in 1087-1092 (in this case with a strong Armenian accent – Pradines 2018, p. 129). All considered, their resiliency strategy appears extremely rich and flexible, since Armenians were able to rule lands in their own right, or to be politically nested into larger imperial regimes, while providing highly prized craft products and services: almost a *unicum* in Medieval Eurasia.

2.3 Great and Little Traditions. In order to investigate material and non-material constraints underlying local production processes in medieval Vayots Dzor, Great and Little Traditions theory was also used, based on previous experience carried out at the Florence archaeological mission in Petra and Shawbak (Jordan), where it proved particularly useful in analyzing local-vs-allochthonous knowhow in building and ceramic industries of Crusader-Ayyubid and Mamluk epochs (Nucciotti and Pruno, 2016). The core elements of the theory were first elaborated by the American anthropologist Robert Redfield (1947, 1962) for the analysis of Mexican peasant societies in Yucatan, Mexico, understanding rural societies as culturally non-autonomous phenomena.

> **"**As a peasant society is a half-society, so peasant culture is a half- culture. It is fully comprehensible only in relation to the civilization in which it is contained. In order to grasp the compound nature of peasant culture, Redfield employs two important concepts - the great tradition and the little tradition. In any civilization, there is a great tradition of the reflective few, and a little tradition of the largely unreflective many. The societal dimensions of these two traditions are the great community and little community. Thus, the great tradition is the culture of the great community […]. Those two traditions are not mutually exclusive, but interdependent**"** (Obeyesekere, 1963).

Building on those concepts, Dumont and Pocock (1957, p. 39-40) approach peasant culture as a single (little) tradition, interacting with doctrinal and philosophical (largely allochthonous) great traditions. Finally, on a more recent and anthropological-archaeological ground, Oystein La Bianca (2007, 2011) pioneered the use of Great and Little Traditions in the archaeological interpretation of the multi-millennial site of Tell Hesban in the Madaba Plains in Jordan. The study clearly showed that local (folk) communities were characterized by a set of little traditions whose presence is verified in the archaeological record beside (and entangled with) great traditions elaborated by ruling imperial elites[4], in the *longue-durée*. Great traditions spread locally through the phenomenon of "parochialization", the

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[4] Great/Imperial Traditions of Jordan as listed in La Bianca 2007 (pp. 178-183): Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Arabian, Canaanite, Greek/Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Islamic, Crusader (added in La Bianca 2011) and Modern Capitalist great traditions.

downward diffusion to village-level of specific knowhow and architectural forms, from the network of imperial transmission centers (La Bianca 2007 p. 276). Little traditions, despite their function, as practices able to provide food and livelihood security for households and small communities (i.e. a crucial aspect of resiliency strategies), can be modified by the interaction with great traditions, when specific skills are 'downloaded' from an imperial tradition to be incorporated into the community knowhow. Therefore they are not historical constants, although their modification takes place normally on a wide timespan. Experiments of integrating great and little traditions theories with light archaeology of medieval masonries and architectural types in Petra, Shawbak and Kerak (Nucciotti Pruno, 2016; Nucciotti Fragai, 2019), showed how the process may take place also in the building sector, evidencing centuries-long (or millennial) local little traditional wall techniques being reproduced with minimal (but relevant) variations from Nabatean to Mamluk epochs and beyond.

With reference to Vayots Dzor, in the Mongolian period, a threefold level of knowhow linked to the building industry was evidenced by light archaeological analyses. Less refined masonries, with polygonal stone blocks and limited use of mortar and horizontal courses arrangements dating to the 12th-14th century on the ground of ceramic assemblages, appear with a number of variations in the excavated structures around the so-called Zorats church in Eghegis (Melkonian Hakobyan, 2016). Similar masonries are used in the subsidiary structures nearby the Jewish cemetery and for a series of later medieval mills, at the same site (Amit Stone, 2002 and 2006), dating from 13th century onwards. Finally, light archaeology study evidenced a stratification of masonry types of such techniques nearby Zorats (*fig. 5*), placing them in a relative chronology.

On the other end of the production chain, very refined masonries in perfectly squared ashlars with smooth outer surface, appear (with various compositions and finishing tool-marks) in all monumental buildings of the project area, including for instance religious architectures and caravanserais, covering a timespan of around 5 centuries, between the 9th and 14th centuries (*fig. 6*). The chronology of 'polygonal' and ashlar masonries therefore overlaps. Since monuments are all sponsored by local elites, and specifically (directly or indirectly) by the Orbelians in the Mongolian period, with reference to great and little tradition theories, they can be understood of as a great building tradition, characterized by highly specialized groups of masters, specially hired for producing culturally-ideologically oriented architectures that materialized the presence and social status of Armenian elites at urban and territorial levels. Conversely, 'polygonal' masonries materialize the knowhow of a resident community; they are produced and reproduced locally by non-specialized workforce and can be understood of as a little tradition universally available to all community members, and an element of long-term resiliency strategies. In this regard it can be useful to note that studies carried out in Jordan show the likely continuity in Classical and Medieval periods of 'little' building traditions very similar to the ones documented in the same area already in Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (ca. 7000 BC – Nucciotti Pruno 2016); comparisons with ancient and proto-historic structures in Armenia may possibly therefore expose a similar phenomenon in the formation of the medieval polygonal masonries' tradition also in Vayots Dzor.

The higher level tradition, in the project area, is finally represented by imperial (Ilkhanid) architectures. In fact they also are the product of local elites' sponsorship, although, in such cases, Armenian landed nobility operated as a functionary branch of imperial administration. This is particularly evident in Selim caravanserai and in the palace of Hors, where the local prince Cesar Orbelian, incorporated *iwans* along with other 'international' architectural elements (Squilloni, 2020). Besides, Selim caravanserai was equipped around 1330s with a gabled vestibule and a *muqarnas* decorated portal (reminiscent of Seljuk 13th century Sultan Han in Anatolia), in its turn bearing a dedicatory Persian inscription in the name of Ilkhan Abu Sa'id. Conclusively, light archaeology of buildings shows (at the current state of research) a set of three architectural traditions: an imperial great tradition, an Armenian great tradition and a local little tradition. The political nesting of Orbelian dominions into the Ilkhanate (in the considered epoch), made Armenian great tradition to work as a little tradition with respect to the imperial Ilkhanid tradition. That's to say that, from the Ilkhanate point of view, Armenian monumental tradition was a localized and culturally specific phenomenon out of a number of similar ones (other cultural areas), embedded into the vast imperial space. At a lower scale, Armenian great tradition, promoted, funded and spread by territorial aristocrats and the church, worked its proper role in respect to the local little tradition. The latter one shows elements suggesting slow changes along a secular (maybe millennial) history of building tradition, while Armenian great tradition builds ideologically and politically oriented landmarks; whose style and formal elements point outside the local but 'within the Armenian': for instance towards Ani, like the architectures of St. Asvatsatsin in Arates (Nucciotti Petrosyan, 2015) or to Cilicia, like the

settlement structure of Hertigh, so similar to a medieval Mediterranean *castrum*[5]. Concluding, great and little traditions allowed to better focus material and immaterial constraints underlying the building industry of medieval Vayots Dzor and to bridge light archaeology and empire theory at an operational level.

3. *Global and Light Archaeology in Vayots Dzor: between theoretical approaches and first results*

   Since the mid-Eighties in Italy "Archeologia Globale" (here: Global Archaeology), emerged as a new archaeological point of view, following Tiziano Mannoni's theory and practice[6]. He defined the methodological practices of *archeologia globale* as the research carried out in an entire established territory, on the basis of all the accessible sources: the direct ones, that means landscape archaeology, stratigraphic building archaeology and excavation, and indirect sources, that means oral tradition, writings, maps and so on (Mannoni *et alii*, 1984). To exactly define what Global Archaeology is, first of all it is necessary to clear the path of a possible misunderstanding: global archaeology cannot be referenced to, by semantic analogy, to the definition of global history, that, in a very general point of view, emphasizes the study of processes that transcend regions, nations, and even any single civilization, to reflect on a global scale. Global archaeology instead aims to recognize and interpret any material sign left by human activities. So Global Archaeology concerns mainly two elements: 1. historical problems and 2. territory (in our research in Armenia, they are unified in the landscapes produced by the Silk Roads in Vayots Dzor between 13th and 14th century) as in Light Archaeology point of view. More specifically then, Light Archaeology is specially linked to the stratigraphic analysis of historical buildings, which is carried out by applying the same stratigraphic method of excavation (Harris, 1979) to architectural artefacts (Brogiolo, 1988). The result is a sort of constructive identity card of the buildings[7], therefore chronological, but also technological. The monastery of Arates *(Fig. 7)*, one of the most famous of the entire region, was chosen as pilot site (Nucciotti *et alii*, 2015) at the beginning of the project. The choice aimed to construct the *atlas* of masonry and stone-finishing tool-marks but, first of all, using the stratigraphic method, the complex has been analysed to understand the timeline of the construction of every buildings (hereinafter named CF, "corpo di fabbrica" that means 'individual building'). The monastery complex is composed by "three main buildings […]: the church of St. Sion, dated to the 9-10 century (CF1), the church of St. Astvatsatsin (CF4), the Mother of God, dated to the 11 century and the *gavit* CF3, dated to 1265-70 (to 1270 on the basis of epigraphic materials), and almost collapsed (Nucciotti *et alii*, 2015, p. 495). The main goal of the research has been clarify the constructive sequence of each building (*fig. 8*): the church of St. Sion (CF1) has been built at the beginning, then its north-west chapel (CF2) and based on stratigraphic analysis of upstanding structures all other chapels appears to have been added in a later period, i.e.: the N/Western chapel (CF2), with access from the first bay, by the semi-pillar; the S/Eastern chapel, located in the presbytery area, with access from south (CF8 or UF 3) (*Fieldreport* 2019). At the opposite chronological side there are CF5 and, the last one to be built, the *gavit*, CF3. The second example concerns the artefact production, particularly the production of funerary monuments from two cemeteries in the Eghegis area, the Orbelian (*fig. 9*) and the Jewish cemeteries (*fig. 10*) (Stone-Amidt, 2006; Nucciotti-Pruno, 2020; Nucciotti forthcoming), that partially covered the same period (13th-14th c.). The main question we tried to answer has been whether the artefacts' production centres were the same for either cemeteries, or whether they were diversified (technologically). The main aim is to reconstruct the operational chain to identify the organization of the production (Mannoni-

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[5] In this regard, outside the territories of Armenia proper, the use of 'Armenian great tradition' can be a key for understanding the ideological meaning of 1087-1092 Cairo city walls too, where Armenian stonework used for city gates and north and south city walls, was stratigraphically linked to mud brick walls used in the east and west elevations of the palace-city. As the brilliant conclusion of Stephane Pradines (2018, p. 138) highlights: "The Cairo fortifications are in fact a complete social phenomenon in that they reflect the society and hierarchy of the people living at that time. In fact, the monumental stone gates are not only reminiscent of the power of the Caliph or the vizier, but also of the Armenian officers; while the mud-brick city wall is more rooted in the vernacular traditions of Upper Egypt".

[6] Tiziano Mannoni (1928-2010) has been a very important archaeologist in Italy and his researches have been in Mediterranean area and covered a large span of time. Following his research fields it is yet possible to reconstruct the most innovative and relevant approaches of the archaeology during the last century about the study of landscape, the environment, the archaeometric approaches to the artifacts (pottery, stone) and many others like the mensiochronology to date the brick buildings (https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiziano_Mannoni).

[7] *Archeologia dell'Architettura* is a field of Italian Medieval Archaeology research, based, again, on the outcome of a pioneer study carried out in '970s by Tiziano Mannoni, that propose the attempt to embed the stratigraphic theory in the study of historical buildings, extending the principles of site- formation-process to the architectural-formation-process. The methodological definition has been carried out in the Eighties, when it was finally possible to establish a standard set of techniques for the stratigraphic investigation of historic buildings. An achievement of particular importance since, for the first time, a non-destructive archaeology could build reliable stratigraphic sequences at territorial scale with the translation of the Harris's paradigm (Harris 1979) in upstanding structure (Brogiolo, 1988).

Giannichedda, 1996)[8]. The results of the analysis showed that funerary monuments from the two cemeteries were made of the same lithotype and were worked using the same tools (as clearly visible in *fig. 11*). The epigraphic evidence, on the contrary, shows marked differences between Orbelian and Jewish inscriptions at the technological level, since they appear executed with distinct (in dimensions and shapes) 'writing' tools. The artefacts therefore seem to belong to a single workshop, while the epigraphic inscriptions appear to be added later and by different craftsmen, in culturally-specific fashions marking a distinction among the two social groups.

4. Some Conclusions

In conclusion, the integrated use of Light Archaeology, Empire theory, Great and Little Traditions and *Archeologia Globale*, in Vayots Dzor, allowed a renewed interpretation of material and immaterial constraints in the formation of built environments in a rural area crossed by the Silk Roads in 13th 14th cc.. At a territorial level, the displacement and concentration of imperial 'Ilkhanid' architectures along the international connection roads, paralleled by the localization of major local settlements and political centres (like Eghegis), monasteries and Orbelian burial sites (Eghegis and Noravank) in minor and tributay valleys, appears as a consistent materialization of Mongolian-Armenian political relations at the time. As the Orbelians ruled their lands and people according to the inner principles of Armenian medieval (and Christian) society, they did it under the umbrella of the Mongol empire, for which and within which they performed specific functions. The territory was then set to provide diversified services in relation, on one side, to the empire (granting and managing international connectivity for the Ilkhans – *fig. 12*) and, on the other, to support local social-cultural Armenian structure. Orbelians then, behave as Mongolian officers as regards infrastructuring the Silk Roads with caravanserais, bridges etc., between Selim and Arpa/Areni, while, on the other side and in other parts of the territory, they styled themselves as fully determined Armenian lords (even kings), facilitating the growth of Eghegis, supporting family monasteries and creating a royal image for their family in Noravank. Through these theorethical lenses, therefore, Vayots Dzor shows its potential as an interesting case study not just for Armenian history or for the history of Republic of Armenia, but also for Eurasian medieval civilization at large.

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[8] A more common field of this kind of research is applied to the pottery production, as we can see in Peackok (Peackok, 1982) where this autor define the different scale of production in the Roman world.

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