

EXPRESSION

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**THE FUNCTION OF ART:
MEMORIZATION, COMMUNICATION, IDENTIFICATION AND WHAT ELSE?**

EDITORIAL NOTES

THE FUNCTION OF ART: MEMORIZATION, COMMUNICATION, IDENTIFICATION AND WHAT ELSE?

Charles Mountford, a pioneer in native Australian studies, about 80 years ago, observed an Aboriginal young man from Arnhem Land while he was painting the image of a kangaroo in a rock shelter. He asked him why he was making the painting and the reply was something like: "How can you catch a prey if you do not paint it first?" The artist's motivation was that of empathic magic:

owning the image granted to own the prey. The same motivation was attributed by scholars like the Abbé Henri Breuil for the paintings of Altamira and other Paleolithic caves of Spain and France. But could such motivation concern all the artistic expressions of early man? Some images, like those of the fat ladies in Paleolithic Europe (cover image), the Wandjina cloud-spirits in the Kimberley, (Australia),



Rock painting of Kimberley, Australia.

A Wandjina spirit producing rain and living in the clouds. According to the local Aboriginal people the painting was made by the spirit itself as a testimony of its presence. The small cave in which this painting is located is considered to be a holy place.

What is the function of this image? (Anati Archive, AUS0027wara)

the Moai of Rapa Nui, (Easter Island), or the Ancestral Spirits of the Plain Natives of Arizona (North America), are unlikely to have been made for the same reason. What was their function? In places like Valcamonica, Italy, a number of Iron Age rock engravings turned up to have been produced for didactic purpose: they were used for teaching myths and traditional memories to prepare young candidates for initiation rites. Some painted surfaces of hunting-gathering populations in Tanzania look like depictions of literary tales, events or myths, accounts, and many rock art sites around the world appear to be receptacles of various motivations, to enhance the sanctity of the site, to have didactic functions, to represent cult images, myths, or to commemorate subjects or events. Prehistoric art appears to have had as many different purposes as those of more recent written literature, religious and not, historical or imaginary, aimed at memorization, communication, magic, commemoration, recording, affirmation of cultural or ethnic entity and more.

The definition of such functions may vary from site to site and from one cultural background to another. Much has been written on the topic of motivation for art creation and in an old book of mine I listed 12 major theories and hypotheses expressed by researchers in the last hundred years (Anati, 2003: *Aux Origines de l'Art*, Paris, Fayard).

Direct information from the field, by people having ideas about the sites they are studying, is useful for reaching an overview on an important question: What was the function of art for those that made it? Why did they produce art?

E.A.

Front page:

Venus of Laussel, Marquay, Dordogne, France. This bas-relief represents a mature woman. She holds a horn in her hand, which has thirteen marks (made by three different tools) in groups of six, four and three. On her right hip there is a forked bâtonnet symbol. On the left, at the bottom of the reproduced rock surface, there is a damaged part of the bas-relief, with traces of a vertical animal figure. What is the message behind this image? What was its function?

EDITORIAL NOTE

EXPRESSION magazine is published by Atelier Research Center in cooperation with UISPP-CI-SENP, the “International Scientific Commission on the Intellectual and Spiritual Expressions of Non-literate Peoples” of the UISPP, Union Internationale des Sciences Préhistoriques et Protohistoriques.

The goal of **EXPRESSION** is to promote knowledge and ideas concerning the intellectual and spiritual expressions of non-literate societies. It is an open forum in conceptual anthropology, welcoming contributions. Colleagues having something to say will find space in this e-magazine, which is reaching people of culture and academic institutions in over 70 countries. Papers should have precise goals, conceived for this kind of audience, and possibly well illustrated. Letters on current topics and short notes are welcome and may be included in the section “Discussion Forum.” Authors are fully responsible for their ideas and for the information and illustrations they submit.

Publication in **EXPRESSION** magazine does not imply that the publishers and/or the editors agree with the exposed ideas. Papers are submitted to reviewers for their evaluation, but controversial ideas, if they make sense, are not censured. New ideas and concepts are welcome; they may awaken debates and criticism. Time will be their judge.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS IN THE 2018 CONGRESS OF UISPP

The papers included in this issue may be presented in the above congress. Authors should confirm their intent to attend the Congress.

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SIXTEEN WONDERS OF WORLD VISUAL ART

Vahan Vahanyan (Armenia)

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1. Genesis

Figure 1 shows various layers, cognitive illustrations of chronological divisions, projections on a plane, showing days, according to the multidimensional picture of genesis in biblical chronology. The first four days are marked with four curves at the bottom of the figure.

The first day: the creation of light and darkness ("And there was evening and there was morning", Genesis 1:1-5). Light appears and its curves descend (Fig. 1).

The second day is the creation of the dome ("God called the dome sky", Genesis 1:6-8). Armenian hieroglyphic or ideographic symbols of heavenly and earthly domes (spiral and circle with hooks) are depicted from the right. The sun is depicted stylized (divine in its beautiful nature) with its curling rays, a "spurt of waves", reaching the earth, its water surface coming from the sky.

The third day is the creation of the dry land and earth, the waters and vegetation. The figure depicts the dry land, a double-peaked mountain, the sea and vegetation.

The fourth day is the creation of lights in the dome of the sky ("God made the two great lights - the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night - and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness." Genesis 1:14-17). This is presented as the sun in the sky.

The fifth day is the creation of reptiles, fish and

birds, presented in the form of symbols of fish and birds.

The sixth day is the creation of animals and man ("Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." Genesis 1:24-26). The sixth layer is presented as the depictions of a goat and a man. The birth of the son of God, the cultivated hero, the first man (Vahagn), is presented in the image of a stylized figure of a man, born near the double-peaked volcanic mountain (*glxatun*); there is a circle atop it, his fingers and toes are wide open. The figure depicts an angel in a squatting position. The heavenly semicircle above his head symbolizes fertilization and fertility.

The seventh day is blessing and sanctification of the seventh day, the whole picture in a synergy of all its layers and days.



Fig. 1. Genesis: rock art (8th-4th millennium BC), Gegham Mountains, Armenia.

2. Illustration of the motif of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the tree of life

This is a unique depiction, illustrating the motifs of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life. For the first time a prehistoric man used the visual form of describing natural phenomena in the form of a stylized tree on the body of a serpent (modeling lava, volcanic eruption). The picture demonstrates the knowledge of the ancient people regarding the world and the forces of nature.



Fig. 2. Illustration of the motif of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the tree of life: rock art (8th-4th millennium BC), Gegham Mountains, Armenia.

3. Hero archer, Hayk the archer, in the Old Armenian tradition

This is a stylistically and compositionally unique depiction of a hero (in the Armenian tradition Hayk, who defeated Bel), defeating the forces of evil, chaos, and darkness.



Fig. 3. Hero archer, Hayk the Archer in the Old Armenian tradition: rock art (8th-4th millennium BC), Gegham Mountains, Armenia.

4. Constellation Cepheus and Draco

The petroglyph depicts the images of the constellations of Cepheus and Draco (S. Petrosyan).

5. Swastika-shaped hero, fighting a heavenly bull; Vahagn fighting a dragon

The hero, swastika-shaped, left-facing, carries death to an enemy (the dragonslayer, thunderer, Vahagn in the Armenian tradition). Harmonic and remarkably symmetric in its shape and content, the man-shaped swastika symbolizes and embodies the unity of the forces of nature – thunder and lightning, fire and flame, earth and water. The composition reflects the features of the hero, such as courage and bravery,



Fig. 4. Constellation Cepheus and Draco: rock art (8th-4th millennium BC), Armenia.



Fig. 5. Swastika-shaped hero, fighting a heavenly bull; Vahagn fighting a dragon: rock art (8th-4th millennium BC), Armenia.

valor, resolution, and volition. This motif is transformed into the picture of Hayk (Fig. 3). In Armenia various crosses are widespread: *arevkhach* (sun-cross), *kerkhach* (crooked-cross), *chankakhach* (hook-cross), *khachatev* (winged-cross), *armnkakhach* (arm-cross), eternity sign, the cross of war (*paterazmakhach*), shaped as swastikas. Right-facing and left-facing swastikas are identified, which are mostly depicted in the Geghama and Syunik Mountains, on weapons, armor, jewelry, and cult and household items.

6. Depiction of the spherical earth in throes

The petroglyph "Genesis" illustrates the earth (Fig. 6). This shows the level of cognitive abilities of the ancestors, who presented the earth as a sphere with a winged cross (symbol of birth and growth). It is in the throes of the birth of the moon. Human figures, illustrating the four races, the four cardinal directions, hover equidistantly over it. It is widely known that at different times there were various theories about the shape of the earth. The church rejected the sphericity of the earth.

"And He (God) created it (the earth) on water" (Psalm 23:2). Shirakatsi stated the spherical

shape of the earth. "I think the earth is of an egg-shaped form," he wrote, "the ball-shaped yolk is in the middle, the egg-white is around it and the eggshell surrounds everything; the same way the earth is in the centre like the yolk, air is around it like the egg-white and the sky surrounds everything like the eggshell." [3] In this way Shirakatsi expounds his view on the shape of the earth, contradicting other points of view (including the Bible).

"Some good pagan philosophers," he wrote,



Fig. 6. Depiction of the spherical earth in throes (Ararum) and birth of the moon: rock art (8th-4th millennium BC), Armenia.

“state that it [the Earth] is of spherical shape. The others [state] that it is a six-sided cube – raised up and fixed in the middle of the sky...” [3] “Thus, the upper sky, which the Greeks call ether and the Chaldeans dense fire ... enclosed in itself, its indivisible essence, natural composition, like the vault, by proper coverage of plain round (form) it stretches around the spherical earth (with its) incessant and inseparably fast rotation, invisible materiality, cognized only through the mind.” [3]

In *Geography* Shirakatsi sharply criticizes the approach according to which the earth has a quadrangular flat form and is located on the sea: “Insane pagan philosophers state that wall-shaped sea surrounds the earth, and the earth, like an island, is located in the middle of sea, and water rests in the air.” “It is said that ocean surrounds not only the hot zone but the earth itself. In his *Christian topography* Constantine of Antioch states on this basis that the Ark came from the eastern countries. Ptolemy states that it is not ocean that surrounds the earth. “And that is a right statement,” states Shirakatsi.

The question of the spherical shape of the earth is closely related to the problem of the antipodes. Christian cosmography denied the existence of human beings and living creatures on the opposite side of the earth. Shirakatsi writes: “according to the prophets, the Holy Scripture and church teachers, there are no creatures inhabiting the lower part (of the earth), but I admit existence of the antipodes.” [3] Following this view, he tells of a dream of how he met the sun and asked him about the antipodes, and the sun answers that there are no antipodes on the opposite side, as it “gives light only to the mountains, ravines and lifeless caves”.

Following the ancient scholars, Shirakatsi states that the sensual realm and all things are composed of the four elements, earth, water,

air and fire. All animals, plants, trees, fruits, and man also comprise compounds of these four elements. According to him, the world is a specific composition of mixed elements. These elements have both created and acquired features. Their diversity depends on size, heat, cold, water, and dryness. “And he (the Creator) forms the four: first is fire, second wind (air), third earth, fourth water... They interact due to the common qualities they share. The nature of fire is heat and dry, air – heat and wet, water – cold and wet, earth – cold and dry. While interacting, they (the elements) acquire the qualities of each other.” [3].

7. Metaphysical (natural philosophic) illustration of volcanic eruption and solar eclipse

Shirakatsi presents nature in motion and conversion: all things with no exception are in motion and are changeable; through time, the existing old units decompose and new ones are formed. “Creation is the beginning of decomposition; and decomposition is the beginning of creation. And due to this opposition the world is created.” [3] In the material world nothing can be created or destroyed, rather, it transforms from one form to the other.

This petroglyph is a unique composition, in an expressive eloquent form, in an unambiguous style, stylized and abundant in its content. The elements of the figure creatively represent the concept of the oldest motif of a serpent/dragon fighting the sun in its terminal phase, depicted as an illustration of a solar eclipse: the sun is in the jaws of the serpent (the sky is ideographically depicted). The other half of the serpent does black deeds on the earth; it symbolizes lava flow on the earth that sows death, destroying the animals (depicted as deer and plant elements). These visual imprints of knowledge about the world and natural phenomena illustrate profound the cognitive abilities of the early hunters and herders.

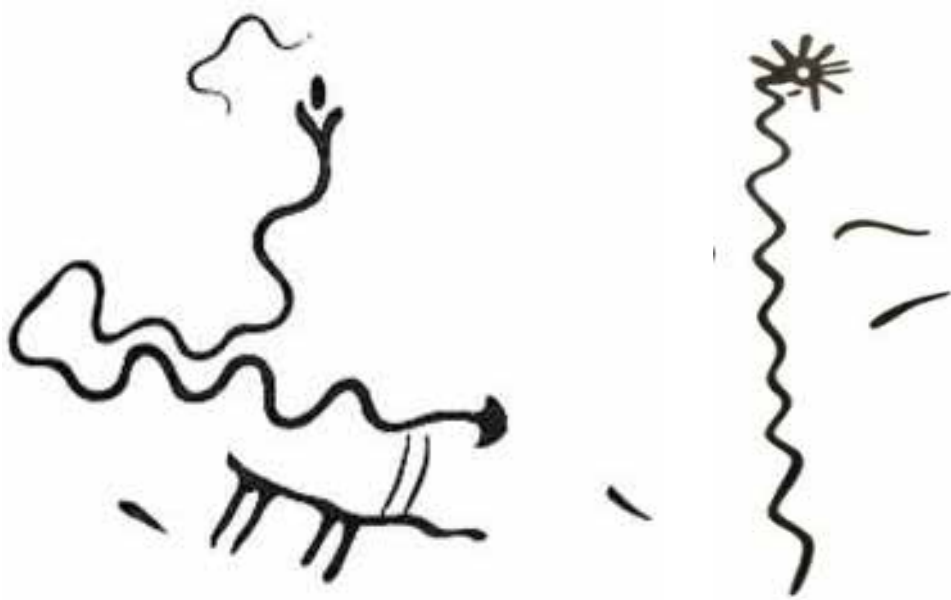


Fig. 7. Metaphysical (natural philosophic) illustration of volcanic eruption and solar eclipse: rock art (8th-4th millennium BC), Armenia.



Fig. 8. Hero sitting astride a huge lion: rock art (8th-4th millennium BC), Armenia.

8. Hero sitting astride a huge lion

Here are shown the strength, mighty power, and athleticism of the hero, who distinguishes himself in battle against the mighty lion. The main features and character of the invincible hero is outlined with fine artistic taste. His formative plastic and almost perfectly balanced figure symbolizes a matchless example of a winner, who has performed a heroic deed, defeating the previously unconquered king of the beasts. The hero is standing in his glory with his legs wide apart. The great artist managed to reflect a new alliance, a synthetic image of the hero and the conquered lion. It bends its huge front paws in a sign of obedience, recognition of might, and the strength and power of the hero. The lion moves forward its neck of incredible length and size, which underlines the absolute obedience of the predator.

"Today I was in a foreign country, near a mountain rising high above the earth. Its top seemed to be covered with ice. They say it was the land of the Haykids [the Haykazunis]. As I stared at the mountain, a woman came into sight sitting atop it in a crimson/purple dress with a sky-blue veil, she has got big eyes and was strapping and ruddy; she was in travail.

Astonished, I stared at the sight, and the woman suddenly gave birth to three god-like heroes perfect in their shape and nature. The first one jumped on a lion and rushed to the west; the second one made his way to the north on a leopard; the third one, riding a dragon monster, attacked our country." [2]

This is the cosmic model of worshipping the sky - the father, the creator (Fig. 10). The first man is depicted in a unique stylized form, illustrating the concept of the motif of the world tree, the home from which the spirit arises. The figure is characterized as having an integral character, reflecting the unity of spiritual and material natures, illustrating the integral picture of the world. He is created "in the image and likeness".

9. The spirit of the first man, the kneeler

The petroglyph is an artistic description of the three-component cognitive figure of a man in a synthesis of home, with a visual corporeal shell and invisible spirit. Halves of the sacred apple are depicted on the trunk of the tree of spirit, symbolizing the harvest. From the man's corporeal shell (namely, from his chest) arises the tree of the spirit, which is transformed into



Fig. 9. Spirit of the first man, the kneeler: rock art (8th-4th millennium BC), Armenia.

the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Biblical Adam eats the apple – the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and he is punished, deprived of immortality.

The trident atop the tree of spirit of the first man reminds us of the symbol of the trinity (as well as the Old Armenian ideogram “𐎎”, the symbol of royal power and immortality) and characterizes man’s power. He tends to the house in heaven from the house on earth.

10. Man symbolizing the unity of the houses in heaven and on earth

“The perception that the heaven and the earth gave birth to the god of thunder is quite natural” (Max Muller). The hero with a bow and arrow and a snake-shaped long phallus symbolizes the unity, connection, and interaction of spiritual and material worlds, the kingdoms of heaven and earth. The picture emphasizes the exclusive role of a man (motif of the song “Birth of Vahagn”), hovering above the earth: first, he is in the centre of the composition; second, he combines the heavenly and earthly worlds; third, he is the result of a union. The role of man

is presented as the main systematical factor of macro- and microcosm as an artistic model of the triple notion of birth, death and resurrection.



Fig. 10. Man symbolizing the unity of the houses in heaven and on earth: rock art (8th–4th millennium BC), Armenia.



Fig. 11. Antipodes and the equilibrium law: rock art (8th–4th millennium BC), Armenia.

11. Antipodes and the equilibrium law

This shows a confrontation scene in the animal world, displaying the eternal struggle and the role of man mastering flora and fauna, judging the plant and animal worlds. The picture expresses man’s power, emphasizing the dominance of spiritual values and knowledge. This worldview gives human activity an organized, conscious, and purposeful character.

12. Tsovinar

Thus, after the very first great flood the earth was formless and empty, and the spirit of God (the eye of God) was hovering over the waters seeking something. What was he seeking? And God said, “Let there be light”, and there was light. And all the dark waters were lightened and first God saw the goddess of water sources, Tsovinar, who was conceived from water and gave birth to two sons.

And when God saw Tsovinar and her sons, His spirit rejoiced and exulted, and He said: “Water will be the origin of life this time!” Tsovinar called her sons Sanasar and Baghdasar. And after God arranged the vault, He did all that is known. And when the Creator proceeded to the creation of man, Tsovinar asked the



Fig. 12. Tsovinar: rock art (8th–4th millennium BC), Armenia.

Almighty not to inhabit the earth with horrible beasts, aggressive monsters and cyclops this time, and to create man in His own image, as there is no more beautiful and perfect being than He is. And she asked to embed a piece of divine light and spirit and to evoke thought in man, which originally and eternally will serve in immortal and perfect harmony what He created. The entreaty of the goddess of water sources was after the Creator's own heart, and He created man, choosing water (the primary element of Tsovinar) as the basic constituent of his essence.

Later, He gave body to Sanasar and Baghdasar, and placed them in the centre of the Ararat plain, calling them Sis and Masis. And He told Tsovinar, queen of waters, "As there is Surb Sar (holy mountain) named after Sanasar, my throne on the earth will rest on his shoulders, and men I have created will inhabit the whole country at the foot of the mountain and will

spread across the world." [1] Tsovinar Tsovyan (Armenian "*marine*") is the spirit of thunder in Armenian mythology, the personification of lightning and heat lightning. According to myths, Tsovinar is a furious fiery woman, who rides a fiery horse in the sky during thunder; she sends people life-giving rain or harmful hail.

Astghik (Armenian "*little star*") is the goddess of love and water sources in Armenian mythology, beloved of Vahagn. Her major temple in Ahtishat (located north from Mus, a city in modern Turkey) was called Vahagn's bedroom. According to myths, every night beautiful Astghik had a swim in the Euphrates (where it flows from a narrow rocky ravine in the Gurgur region). To admire the naked goddess, the young people lit fires on Mount Daghonats (Taron mountain, located in modern Turkey). To hide from them, Astghik covered Taron valley with fog and mist.

According to the Armenian calendar, in the middle of summer (by the end of the old year and on the eve of the new year) the Vardavar (Armenian "*vard*", rose or water) festival was held. On the day of this festival people presented roses to the goddess, released doves and sprinkled water on each other.

13. Baptism in the cradle and the fertility symbol

The petroglyph entitled "Baptism in the cradle" is a unique expression of knowledge and the creativity of human genius. The thinker artist depicts his vision of the world on the stone: the relationship of the godfather (sun god, creator shown by the big cross on the left) with his son, his messenger on the earth (the small cross in the cradle). The godmother, sitting in a squatting position, is holding the cradle with a cross, the newborn. In Armenian tradition, this godmother is Saint Maruta, singing a lullaby.



Fig. 13. Baptism in the cradle and the fertility symbol (on the right side, at the top of the image): rock art (8th-4th millennium BC), Armenia.

The big cross symbolizes the father (in Armenian tradition Mets (Big) Mher from the epic poem "Daredevils of Sassoun"), and the small cross is Little Mher, who entered the rock and did not come out. The cow symbolizes life (full mammary glands symbolize prosperity). According to old customs, the Khachapashts baptized their children in a cradle. A lyre is depicted on the left side, a little star and cows on the right side of the composition.

*In travail were heaven and earth,
In travail, too, the purple sea!
The travail held in the sea the small red reed.
Through the hollow of the stalk came forth smoke,
Through the hollow of the stalk came forth flame,
And out of the flame a youth ran!
Fiery hair had he,
Ay, too, he had flaming beard,
And his eyes, they were as suns!*

14. Relief depiction of Vahagn on a stele from Commagene

After his birth, Vahagn fights and defeats vishaps (origin of the epithet "vishapaqagh", vishap slayer). Vahagn fighting a vishap symbolizes the battle against the consequences of volcanic eruptions and avalanches, the "thunder fight" of the god against the evil personification of storm, whirlwind and thunderstorm clouds (vishap-demon).

During the Hellenistic period Vahagn was identified with Zeus and Heracles. Vahagn is the first man. In his honor temples were built in Ashitshat, Aghevakan, and Little Aghbak (in modern Turkey). According to Shirakatsi, it was Vahagn who confronted the Semitic god Bel.



Fig. 14. Relief depiction of Vahagn on a stele from Commagene



Fig. 15. Dragons/vishaps and a solar eclipse: rock art (8th–4th millennium BC), Armenia..

15. Dragons/vishaps and a solar eclipse

In Armenian mythology, vishaps are dragons, chthonic creatures. They have a zoomorphic (frequently serpent-shaped) and anthropomorphic appearance, personifying volcanic eruption, avalanche, thunderstorm, whirlwind or thunderstorm clouds. According to myths, a big Vishap swallows the sun, which results in an eclipse. Vishaps inhabit high mountains, large lakes, the sky and the clouds. Rising to the sky or descending beneath (into lakes), they rumble, sweeping away everything on their way. A thousand-year-old Vishap can swallow the whole world. Frequently during thunder the old Vishaps rise to the sky from high mountains or lakes, and the sky-Vishaps descend to the earth.

The myths about fighting a dragon are based on a widely spread mythological motif of chaos fighting cosmos. According to the Christian approach, the myths about vishaps have undergone modifications. The vishap-slayer Vahagn was replaced by the angel Gabriel and other angels: they fight vishaps, who together

with evil spirits try to swallow the sun during thunder (fiery thunder clouds symbolize the fiery vishap bodies, thunder their cry, and lightning Gabriel's arrow or angels' crook). Angels raise vishaps to the sun, whose rays incinerate them and they fall to the earth.

Vishaps are beasts who seize water sources; they make people sacrifice girls. Fighting vishaps, the heroes liberate water sources and girls. In the epic poem "Vipasank", vishaps live at the foot of Masis.

16. Hamspyur flower (Haoma), the twelve month-brothers

The start of the Armenian calendar is associated with Hayk (according to Shirakatsi). Armenian chronology starts in 2492 BC, denoting the date ("the cycle of Hayk") when Hayk defeated Bel. The names of the Armenian months correspond to the names of Hayk's sons and daughters. Shirakatsi wrote that Navasard, Ori, Sakhmi, Meheki, Aregi, and Mareri were Hayk's daughters, and Tre, Kakhots, Arats, and Rirots his sons.

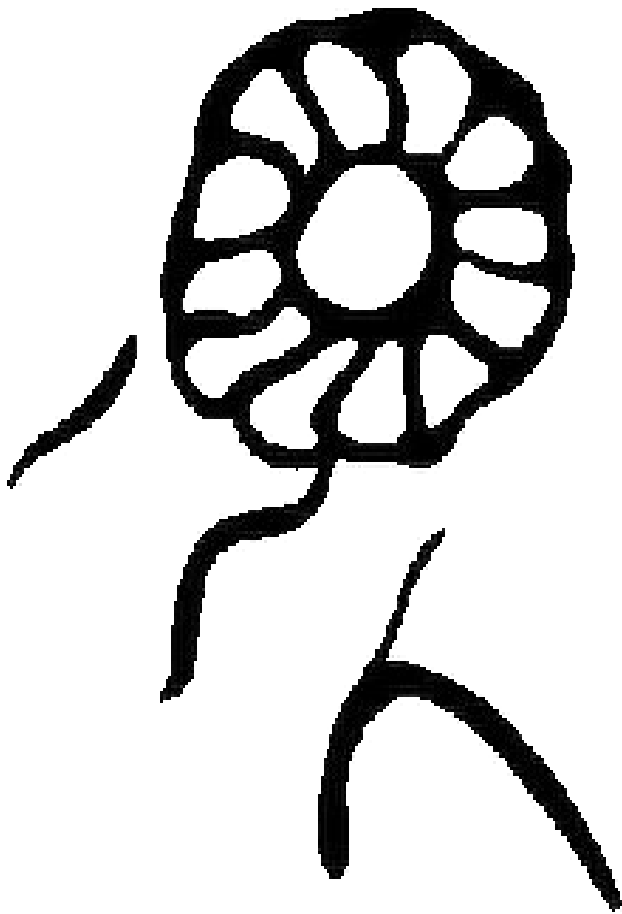


Fig. 16. *Hamaspur flower (Haoma), the twelve month-brothers: rock art (7th-4th millennium BC), Armenia.*

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