

Armenian Pleistocene Rock Art as Origin of the Universal Visual Motifs of the Indo-European Myths

Vahan VAHANYAN* and Gregori VAHANYAN**

Abstract: *In Armenia and in the South-Eastern Anatolia (Turkey) detected and interpreted the Pleistocene (Upper Palaeolithic) images from the some artifacts – vishap (dragon) stones and rock arts images, which are illustrating the main motifs of the Indo-European myths. These conclusions do not contradict the linguistic, archaeological, historical, geological and epistemological data.*

Biblical mountains of Ararat, to the author's opinion, are the main source of origin of early knowledge, ideas, myths, cultural traditions and visual art language not only for the Indo-European civilization. They really are keeping important information and knowledge in the form of rock art documents describing the ideological content and the types of transformation of main cultural ideas and traditions. They are characterizing the identity the local community of genetically related tribes of early hunters and gatherers, the development of intercultural cooperation and origin traditions of the tribes of the Pleistocene civilizations. They are characterizing the influence, transformation and distribution of the main motifs of myths, legends (gods - thunders, tree of life, tree of knowledge, early forms of cross and swastika, house and "golgotha", motifs of mount, birds and snake, hunter and scorpions, heaven and earth, the trinity, the four parties).

In Armenian Upper Palaeolithic rock art, we can find many prototypes of the universal art archetypes, "primitive religion" symbols, "artistic production" and the origin of the iconography for the different religions systems until the Christian art as a reflection of palaeo-ethnic traditions in keeping with eco-social-cultural changes.

The purpose of this article is to draw attention to the rock art of the biblical mountains of Ararat (Upper Palaeolithic), which indicate a continuation of the basic common proto-Indo-European mythological motifs and symbols. The interpretation of such visual artifacts that describe the main motives of the common Indo-European mythology explains the ancient world view, an early form of religion and origin of proto-Indo-European language. This is related to the content of images of the rock carvings (Upper Palaeolithic), found in Turkey (south-eastern Anatolia – western Armenia) and eastern Armenia. Therefore, early sanctified religious, historical, and cognitive-epistemological tradition of rock art (Upper Palaeolithic) Ararat mountain is included in the range of the main sources of reconstruction of the proto-Indo-European mythology, in general its visual symbolism and the origins of European culture.

Keywords: Pleistocene art; myth; symbols; dragon; Ararat.

* Ph.D. student, Yerevan Academy of fine Art.

** Prof., Russian-Armenian State University, "KareDarar" Rock art research center, Armenia
– gregor@concourt.am

Résumé : L'art rupestre arménien du Pléistocène comme origine des motifs visuels universels des mythes indo-européens

En Arménie et en Anatolie du Sud-Est (la Turquie) ont été détectées et interprétées des images de quelques artefacts du Pléistocène (Paléolithique supérieur) – vishap (dragon) – et de l'art rupestre, qui sont des illustrations des principaux motifs des mythes indo-européens. Ces conclusions ne contredisent pas les données linguistiques, archéologiques, historiques, géologiques et épistémologiques.

Les montagnes d'Ararat biblique, selon l'opinion de l'auteur, sont la principale source des premières connaissances, idées, mythes, traditions culturelles et langage des arts visuels, et pas seulement pour la civilisation indo-européenne. Elles recèlent vraiment des informations importantes et des connaissances sous la forme de documents d'art rupestre décrivant le contenu idéologique et les types de transformation des principales idées et des traditions culturelles. Ils caractérisent l'identité de la communauté locale des tribus génétiquement liées des premiers chasseurs-cueilleurs, le développement de la coopération interculturelle et les traditions d'origine des tribus des civilisations du Pléistocène. Ils sont la caractérisation de l'influence, la transformation et la distribution des principaux motifs des mythes, des légendes (dieux-tonnerre, arbre de vie, arbre de la connaissance, premières formes de maison, de croix et svastika, et « golgotha », motifs de la montagne, oiseaux et serpents, chasseurs et scorpions, ciel et terre, la Trinité, les quatre parties).

Dans l'art rupestre paléolithique supérieur arménien, on peut trouver de nombreux prototypes d'archétypes de l'art universel, symboles de « religion primitive », « production artistique » et l'origine de l'iconographie pour les différents systèmes de religion, jusqu'à l'art chrétien comme reflet des traditions paléo-ethniques en harmonie avec les changements éco-socio-culturels.

Mots-clés: art du Pléistocène ; mythes ; symboles ; dragon ; Ararat

Perhaps for 10,000 BC on the biblical mountains of Ararat has been the largest eruption (<http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov>). The entire Araratian valley turned into a Golgotha. The basic values of Araratian civilization, its cultural monuments, almost all the flora and fauna have been destroyed. It is difficult now to judge the dating and the impact of a huge meteorite in the area adjacent to Mount Ararat. However, it remains an irrefutable fact that this event is not mentioned in historical literature. The meteor crater is on the Iranian border with Great Ararat and Little Ararat in the background, as well as parasite volcanic cones visible between the two large volcanoes (Bible and Spade 21.3, 2008, www.arcimaging.org). Consequently, the lack of information demonstrates the antiquity of this event, which in effect was catastrophic. It is possible that the fall of the meteorite has contributed to the unprecedented scale of the destruction, the eruption of volcanoes and earthquakes, as well as climate change, and flood.

Geologists believe that the mountains of Ararat in the third millennium BC, the newly awakened and there was major volcanic eruption. Under the pyroclastic flows, found

rock carvings, some of the Early Bronze Age artifacts and the remains of human bodies. Around the Ararat mountain in the south-eastern Anatolia (Turkey) and modern Armenia detected, but but not studied petroglyphs Upper Palaeolithic and Neolithic period. The Shengavit culture, the culture of Metsamor and Agarak (5000-3000 BC), located approximately 30 km. to the mountains of Ararat (near the Yerevan city) ceased to exist. Causes of death of those crops are not known. However, one should take into account the estimated dating of the last eruption on Mount Aragats (3000 BC \pm 300 years). The 4095-m-high main edifice of Aragats is dissected by glaciers and is of pliocene-to-Pleistocene age, the youngest lower-flank flows have not been precisely dated, but are constrained as occurring between the end of the late-Pleistocene and 3000 BC (Kharakianian *et al.* 2003). Aragats is standing right in front of Mount Ararat, 40 km. from the capital of Armenia.

Volcanic eruptions in Turkey and Armenia

<http://www.volcano.si.edu/world/region.cfm?rnum=01>

Turkey: Mount Ararat (10,000 BC, Eastern Turkey), Süphan Dagi (8050 BC, Eastern Turkey), Erciyes Dag (6880 BC \pm 40 years, Central Turkey), Girekol, Göllü Dag, Hasan Dagi (620 BC, Central Turkey), Karaca Dag, Karadag, Karapinar Field (6200 BC, central Turkey), Kars Plateau, Kula (volcano, most of the Kula volcanoes are Pleistocene in age, between about 1.1 million and 10,000 years old), Nemrut Dagi, Tendürek Dagi, Acigöl-Nevsehir (2080 BC \pm 200 years), central Turkey, thirteen scoria layers from local tephra erupted between about 11,000 and 4300 years ago were found in sediment cores in the late Pleistocene.

Armenia: Aragats (3000 BC \pm 300 years), Tskhouk-Karckar (Syunik, 3000 BC \pm 300 years), abundant petroglyphs, burial kurgans, and masonry walls were found on flows of the older two age groups. Vardeniss volcanic ridge (2000 BC \pm 1000 years), the mid-Pleistocene Porak volcano lies in the Vardeniss (782-773 BC), and some petroglyphs were interpreted to depict volcanic eruptions (Karakhanian *et al.* 2002). The volcanic field straddles the Armenia/Azerbaijan border. The Gegham Ridge, located in west-central Armenia between the capital city of Yerevan and lake Sevan, contains a broad concentration of lava domes and pyroclastic cones of Pleistocene-to-Holocene age. Last known Eruption 1900 BC \pm 1000 years.

From the Greco-Roman and Armenian mythology

Through his identification with the Hephaestus of Greek mythology, he came to be considered as the manufacturer of art, arms, iron and armor for various gods and heroes, including the thunderbolts of Jupiter. He was the son of Jupiter and Juno, and husband of Maia and Venus. His smithy was believed to be situated underneath Mount Etna in Sicily (Italy). As the son of Jupiter, the king of the gods, and Juno, the queen of the gods, Vulcan should have been quite handsome, but, baby Vulcan was small and ugly with a red, bawling face. Juno was so horrified that she hurled the tiny baby off the top of Mount Olympus. Vesuvius has a long historic and literary tradition. It was considered a divinity of the genius type at the time of the eruption of 79 AD: it appears under the inscribed name Vesuvius as a serpent in the decorative frescos of many lararia, or household shrines, surviving from Pompeii. An inscription from Capua to IOVI VESVVIO indicates that he was worshipped as a power of Jupiter;

that is, Jupiter Vesuvius. In Arabic Aetna called "Mountain of Fire". It is the largest active volcano in Europe. In Greek Mythology, the deadly monster Typhon was trapped under this mountain by Zeus, the god of the sky.

Armenian historian of the Middle Ages M. Khorenatsi wrote that the dragons (fire-breathing snake –vishaps) lived at Mount Ararat. Ararat is the place where a lot of fire, where the king of dragons. Vishapakar (Dragon Stone), the first processed stone sculpture –a cultural monument with images of fish, snakes and birds (no later than 5-4 millennia BC by N. Marr) served as a stone signal, warning local residents about the possible dangers of avalanches, a fire, poisonous gases, etc. Monuments such a culture, are found primarily in Armenia, in Geghard mountains in Javakheti (Armenian-populated region of Georgia), in Egypt, Mongolia and Azerbaijan.

Even in ancient Armenian various gods and heroes traditionally identified with the gods and heroes from Greco-Roman mythology. V.V. Ivanov (1990) archaic Greek-Armenian-Aryan myths and earlier, common Indo-European –the beginning of IV millennium BC.

In the study of New Zealand scientists R.D. Gray and Q.D. Atkinson (2003) showed that the age PIE language reaches from 7800 to 9800 years. It was at this time from a common stem separated fathers Hittites –the people who created a highly developed civilization of Asia Minor, competing with Babylon and Egypt. Ancestors of the Armenians and Greeks were separated about 7300 years ago (Gray & Atkinson). In the reconstruction of Indo-European culture, mythology, visual symbols and language family the Armenian rock art (Upper Palaeolithic) and, accordingly, language have a special role. Famous "Anatolia" and "The Kurgan" theories of origin of the Indo-European language community –are quite compatible with each other. Difference lies in the terminological level, given that the Kurgan and Anatolian theories does not take into account such scientific documents and historical phenomenon, as rock art from the biblical mountains of Ararat relating to a complex integrated linguistic and cultural, mythological and religious component of Indo-European community.

The origins of iconography basic Common Indo-European mythological types

Among the most ancient motives, having a common Indo-European roots, the motive of the thunder, motives of a dragon and fish, as well as the world tree, the tree of life, tree of knowledge of good and evil, the mountains –the house of God, fire, Mother of God, the eagle and the lion, the horse, the veneration of the child, family, father, land, water, sky and sun. The author's demonstrated that the common Indo-European group of the main motives of myths and describing their rock art images and symbols are identified in the Araratian rock carvings (Upper Palaeolithic). These symbols are on the basis of early iconographic schemes in the visual arts of ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, Sumer, Akkad, Babylon, Hittite, Greece, Assyria, Persia, Egypt, Urartu and prehistoric Europe.

The cradle of PIE language was there, where dominated a common language space for common Indo-European motifs and their symbols (archetypes of rock art). The calculation of the informative and information-visual motifs indicators may be based on the complex invariant methods and criteria developed by the authors. Any word,

idea or thought, respectively, and pictorial motif, symbol or sign can be described and evaluated by the indicators of informative, information-and integral index of virtual intellectual capital. The calculation of the index of the virtual capital of visual motifs (archetypes of the rock art) adequate semantics of language constructs and speech will reflect the level of thinking and pattern recognition algorithms based on the known formation laws of logical and imaginative thinking (Vahanian & Stepanian 2005). Preliminary investigations and calculations of synthetic models of the common PIE visual motives are testifying about their very early origin and development. At the same time we observe the following pattern –the development of one factor influences the development of another, and so continuously, *ceteris paribus*. Only a natural disaster or fighting of civilizations could lead to stop an historical process of continuous development of intellectual capital and knowledges of the Araratian origin of the common Indo-European cultural civilization.

The table shows the main elements of the common Indo-European motifs, identified in Armenian and south-eastern Anatolia (Turkey) rock arts.

N	Motives	Archetypes	Motives	Archetypes
1	God – Father, hunter, archer	+	Tree of life	+
2	King Scorpion and scorpion	+	Tree of knowledge of good and evil	+
3	The god of thunder, fire and lightning	+	World and cosmic tree	+
4	Hero fighting with a dragon	+	Calvary	+
5	Vishaps (dragons) fishes –as motifs destructive forces of nature	+	Heavenly spirit, an angel-fertilizer	+
6	Eagles, birds and its battle with the dragons, serpents, snakes (vishaps)	+	Winged disk	+
7	Biceps and a horned snake and fish	+	Solar disk	+
8	Sky, ground, water and underworld	+	Sun and the heavenly fire	+
9	Fight between good and evil, the eternal confrontation, twins and antipodes	+	Boat and boats with spirals	+
10	Lions, bulls and deers	+	Cross and a swastika	+
11	Virgin, father and son, a christening in a cradle	+	Eight-pointed cross and stars	+
12	Mother goddess	+	Slanting cross	+
13	Birthes, creations	+	Horse, horseman	+
14	Step mountain, house, volcano, "glhatun"	+	Constellations, zodiac signs	+
15	Hidden knowledge about natural disasters and their artistic description	+	Evil spirits, devas, dark forces	+
16	Temples, churches and buildings	+	Combined motives	+

Tabl. 1. Common Indo-European motifs and archetypes in the Araratian petroglyphs (rock art)

Conclusion

1. The Araratian rock art archetypes and vishapakars (dragon stones artifact) clearly and dispassionately findings confirm that the majority of their symbols, signs and motifs: creation, top and bottom, the sky and underground dragon, snake, sun, cross, tree of life, world tree, earth, the four corners of the earth, death and immortality, both

past and future, right and left, crossing, center, senior and junior, spiritual and material, the human family, Eden, fire and thunder, plant and animal, love and life, suffering and struggle, faith and work, goals and aspirations, dual relations, cause-effect relationships –it is the "main parts of the picture of the common Indo-European world", the factors of the cognition (the sources of many epics and legends, myths and legends), ideology, art and architecture including ornamental art.

2. In fact the mythological aspect of the Aaratian rock art associated with a description of the natural and social forces and the presence of models of heroes-"gods", the fighting between them and their enemy (clear models of the monster, dragon, snake, lion, and bull), the distribution areas and functions in the world between them. In the major mythological motifs the world tree acts as the intermediary link between the universe (macrocosm) and the man (microcosm) and is a place of their intersection. The image of the world tree in the rock art, vishapakars (dragon stones) and crosstones found in the Armenian highlands provide a holistic view of the world –the definition of man's place in the universe, its role in the world.

3. In the cultural development of the concept of the world tree has left traces in many cosmological, religious and mythological ideas, reflected in the Indo-European languages, especially in Armenian, in legends, songs, verbal texts of various kinds, in the poetic imagery in rock drawings, in ceramics, architecture in relief ornamentation, in the planning of settlements, in the ritual, play, dance, as well as a number of features of the human psyche. In 2000-1000 BC the world tree, the cosmic mountain and cross were one of the most popular symbols and signs in the art and culture of Sumer, Akkad, Hittite, Assyria, Persia, and Urartu, next to them are depicted not only the gods, and kings. The tree of life depicted on the royal crown in ancient world in Asia Minor. In the middle Ages the world tree was widely used as a means to illustrate the whole, consisting of many elements and became the basis of tribal symbolism, family and land emblems, and thereafter as a basis for the state heraldry, Christian exterior and interior architecture of the temple and church buildings in Armenia.

Old temple, church is a place rebirth, resurrection, salvation. Religion immemorial sanctify all spheres of human existence, all was directed to ensure that he realized his life as a particle of common life for all. According to the more ancient pre-Christian notions church building was a decrease in recurrence of the universe, a microcosm. The temple was a symbol of heaven and earth, Eden and hell. And so the stories in the Christian Armenian churches are universal, retain more echoes of the common Indo-European ideological motives, symbols and signs, which are identified in the archetypes of rock paintings and vishap stones and finally, in crosstones. Christian churches in Armenia are the models of the three-dimensional iconography in the world, space, mountains, the tree of life, tree of knowledge of good and evil, cosmic tree of peace, an important link (interface) between the microcosm with the macrocosm, the entrance way from the man to the god (father) and from the creator to man.

4. Ancient Greek poetry, dedicated to the gods, Hegel called the "thinking visionary, and the ancient religion "the religion of beauty". The latter "represents both the internal and external sides' infinitely inexhaustible object that attracts its grace and charm. The 'thinking visionary and the ancient religion "the religion of beauty" gives the most adequate description of the content and form of frozen harmony of the Araratian mountains rock art.

5. Rock Carvings from the South-Eastern Anatolia should be more fully explore, digitize, and enter with the rock drawings of Armenia and other countries in computer database for comprehensive comparative research, for developing more adequate models describing the linguistic, epistemological and geographical maps of the cultural, ethnic and anthropological community. It should also organize international expeditions to search for and study of preserved visual artifacts in the mountains of Ararat and to identify them under the patronage of UNESCO experts.

6. "...My amiable, he says, today I was in a strange country, near the mountains, rising very high above the ground, top of which seemed covered with ice. It was said that this land of Hayk. While I was staring at the mountain, at the very top of her appeared seated woman in a purple robe, with a sky-blue cloth, large-eyed, buxom and rosy, she suffered giving birth. Stunned, I stared at this spectacle, and the woman suddenly given birth to three perfect in form and nature the heroes, the god's sons. The first of them jumped on the lion and ran to the west, and the second –on leopard– headed north, and the third, the same bridled monstrous dragon, fast attack on our country" (M. Khorenatsi, *History of Armenia*). The myth is not the barren fantasy, but in essence –the real truth, as amended by the imagination and designed to lead the vital functions of the team (M. Gorky). The thought of Aristotle "...a form is a goal, and finished that reached the goal..." suggested for the rock art.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Fig. 1-2. Dragon –vishap.



Fig. 3. The god of thunder, fire and lightning.

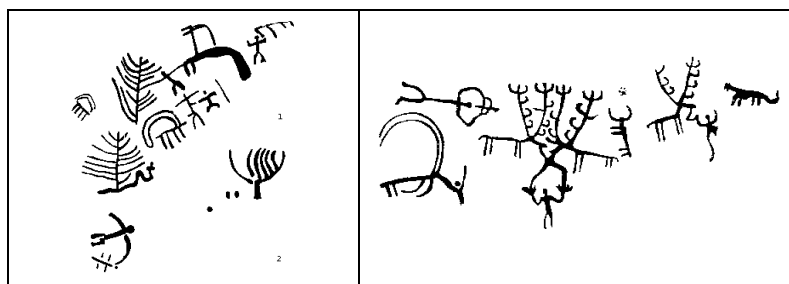


Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 4-5. The tree of life.

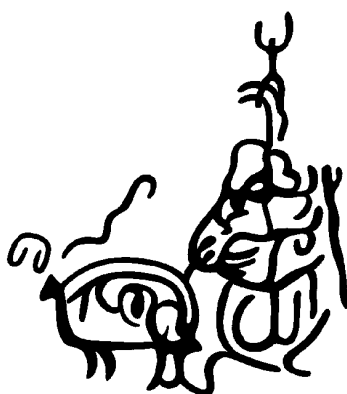


Fig. 6. Union of Heaven and Earth.



Fig. 7. The heavenly spirit, an angel (fertilizer).



Fig. 8. Combined motif of the synthetic art –all the world.

Myth about the myths of the mountains of Ararat is a conception of life, the sun, creation, Adam and others. The huge sun (his rays are as the hairs and hands) fertilizes the land, give life. The circle on the top of the mountain is symbol of the highest point of the mountain, and head-born of the hero (model of god). Sitting on his haunches the angel with a divine halo around his head, fertilize the earth, animal figures and sprouting seeds symbolize the creation of animal and vegetable world. Four lines characterize the stages of creation.



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

Baptism in the cradle (Fig. 9) –Father (large winged cross), Virgin (squats), and Son of God (small cross) in the cradle. Above the cradle can be seen the symbol of moon. There are also some visible symbols of the birds, of the dog or jackal, the eagle and the bull – cow, the pound and star.

Vishapakar –dragon stone from Yeghegnadzor (Fig. 10), eight-pointed cross with eight fruits, two winged angel– the symbol of infinity, the head of horned bull, the circle– a wreath and equal-cross. Crosstone (Fig. 11), 1569, (depicted heavenly family: the Virgin and Child, the parent pair of birds, a bull's head and lion, as well as the Father with symbols of the sun and the moon. They have human faces).

The symbol of the earth (fruits of the earth to the stylized cross) has a circular shape and is located on three-tiered stone (a model of the mountain –pyramid and ziggurat). This structure reflects the first space level of the model of cosmic tree. The second level is represented a model of eight-pointed cross –the symbol of the tree of life, tree of knowledge of good and evil. A third level is a heavenly world with heavenly family, Father-God, the Virgin and son, surrounded by the sun and moon.

The temples

In the rock art in Armenia identified images –plans of huts and shacks, temples and other. Straight, parallel lines, segments on the "temple" are the stone stairs. Zigzag-shaped, wavy lines describe the source of water. The plans are divided into sections that could be used for different purposes (dormitories, tombs with crosses, storage space for seeds, food, for animal livestock and poultry). The entrance to the temple look like the symbol of the vulva (the abstract sign female reproductive organ). This style signs accented in "Venus" and later at the Madeleine bas-reliefs. The vulva sign, the huts and shacks plans are parked in Le Ferraz and Abri Castanet (Dordogne) in France in Tito Bustillo cave, Asturias (Spain). They are very reminiscent of Armenian rock symbols and sign.

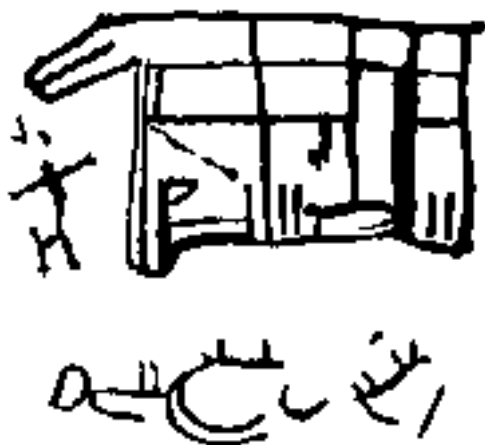


Fig. 12. Archetype of the oldest temple.

REFERENCES

- BROUSOV V., 1916. *Sphinxes and vishaps. Some features of the ancient culture of the Caucasus.*
- GAMKRELIDZE T.V. and IVANOV V.V., 1990. "The Early History of Indo-European Languages". *Cientific American*, March: 110-116.
- IVANOV V.V. and TOPOROV V.N., 1980. "Indo-European mythology". In *Myths of the World: Encyclopedia. M. Part I.* pp. 527-53.
- MARR N., 1990 *Armenian culture. (Its origins and prehistoric context, according to linguistics).* Introd. Prof. Ganalanyan O. Yerevan, Armenia.
- GRAY R. D. and ATKINSON Q. D., 2003. "Language-tree divergence times support the Anatolian theory of Indo-European origin". *Nature* 426: 435-439.
- TOPOROV V.N., 1980. "World Tree". In *Myths of the peoples of the world: Encyclopedia. M. Part I,* pp. 389-406.
- VAHANYAN G. 2007. "Armenian rock art. Rock Art in the Frame of the Cultural Heritage of Humankind". In *XXII Valcamonica Symposium, Darfo Boario Terme (BS), 18-24 May, Italy.*
- VAHANYAN G. and STEPANYAN A., 2005. "The processes of knowledge and thinking". Papers at the *International conference "World of Rock Art".* Moscow: Institute Archaeology and Ethnography of the Russian Academy of Science.
- VAHANYAN G. and VAHANYAN V., 2009. "Intercultural relations between Old Europe and Old Armenia". In *XXIII Valcamonica Symposium 2009, Italy Making history of prehistory, the role of rock art, 28 October-2 November 2009.*
- VAHANYAN G. and VAHANYAN V., 2006. *Stone Annal of Civilization.* Yerevan: Nzhar. Monograph.
- VAHANYAN V. 2009. About the cultural communications of proto Armenians with Iranians and Indians, Egyptians and inhabitants of the Old Europe. Armenia: ArcaLer. (In Russian).
- VAHANYAN V., 2009. "The epistemology and the linguistic-historical comparative analysis of the Armenian and world rock art and visual artifacts". In *XXIII Valcamonica Symposium 2009, Italy, Making history of prehistory, the role of rock art, 28 October-2 November 2009.*