Armenian Origins:

An Overview of Ancient and Modern Sources and Theories[1]

Thomas J. Samuelian

The Armenians are an ancient people who live in an ancient land. Their home lies in the highlands surrounding the biblical mountains of Ararat, upon which tradition tells us Noah's ark came to rest after the flood. (Gen. 8:4). In those highlands, the Armenian state has struggled to exist for more than 3000 years, most recently regaining independence in September 1991 upon the fall of the Soviet Union. Armenia's more than 2780-year-old capital, Yerevan, derives its name from the fortress of Erebuni, founded on that site in 782 BC. On Yerevan's streets, the people speak a distinctive Indo-European language upon which their ancestors put the stamp of their identity 5000 or more years ago.

Archeologists continue to uncover evidence that the Armenian Highlands were among the earliest sites of human civilization.[2] Recent excavations in the Armenian Highlands (now Southern Georgia) have unearthed 1.7-million-year-old fossil human skulls exhibiting African ancestry. These fossils are believed to be the remains of the first migration of the human species from Africa, roughly 100,000 years after the emergence of the species 1.8 million years ago.[3] Earlier excavations in the Armenian Highlands have turned up stone tools and the skeletal remains of human beings and animals, such as the hippopotamus, elephant, rhinoceros, tiger, horse, camel, and ox dating to the Pleistocene age, more than 500,000 years ago. The rich variety of volcanic stones, such as obsidian, and metals, such as copper, tin, arsenic and iron, encouraged the early development of tool making, metallurgy, and ceramic pottery. From 4,000 BC to 1,000 BC, tools and trinkets of copper, bronze and iron were commonly produced in the Armenian Highlands and traded in neighboring lands where those metals were less abundant.[4]

---

[1] © Thomas J. Samuelian, 2000 Yerevan, 2nd edition 2004.

[2] *See, e.g.,* Russell D. Gray & Quentin D. Atkinson, "Language-tree divergence times support the Anatolian Theory of Indo-European origin," *Nature* vol. 426 (Nov. 26, 2003) 435-439; Nicholas Wade, "Biological dig for the roots of language," *International Herald Tribune*, (March 18, 2004) 10; Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza, *Genes, Peoples and Languages,* (NY: North Point Press, 2000) 159-165; L. L. Cavalli-Sforza, Paolo Menozzi and Alberto Piazza, *The History and Geography of Human Genes*, (Princeton University Press, 1994) 218; Luigi L. Cavalli-Sforza, Paolo Menozzi, and Alberto Piazza, "Demic Expansions and Human Evolution," *Science*, vol. 259 (January 29, 1993):632-646, 642; John N. Wilford, "Site in Turkey Yields Oldest Cloth Ever Found," *The New York Times*, July 13, 1993, C1, reporting a recent archeological discovery of cloth, apparently woven of linen or other vegetable fibers on a simple loom, at the headwaters of the Tigris in the southwest of the Armenian Highlands.

[3] John Noble Wilford, "Fossil Signs of First Human Migration Are Found," *The New York Times*, May 12, 2000.

[4] David M. Lang, *Armenia: Cradle of Civilization* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970) 50-1, 58-59.

The Armenian Highlands also had a rich variety of native fruits and cereals. Despite the harsh terrain, the Highlands were one of the earliest regions to make the transition from food gathering to food production in the neolithic era, some 10,000 years ago. Evidence of agriculture and animal breeding appeared there shortly after the earliest known Mesopotamian sites.[5] Grapes, apricots, and diverse strains of wheat and barley, not found in Mesopotamia, appear to have served as a basis of commerce between these regions. Winemaking in Babylon and Egypt, where vines are not native, is evidence of commerce with the Highlands as early as the fourth millennium BC. The biblical account of Noah's winemaking (Gen. 9:12) may be an echo of the highland's reputation as a wine and beer making region.[6] Centuries later, Xenophon, the Greek historian of the Persian Wars, notes the Armenians' practice of drinking wine from big bowls through straws, attesting to the continuity of viticulture in the region.[7] The apricot is also native to the Highlands. It came to be known throughout the ancient world as the Armenian fruit. Its botanical name *Prunus armeniaca*, derives from the Roman vernacular for apricot, *armeniacum*, which some scholars have linked to its Akkadian name *armanu*.[8] Similarly, a certain breed of mountain goat native to the highlands was known to the Mesopotamian peoples as *armu*, *armatu*, a name scholars have linked to that of the highlanders, Armenians.[9]

Archeological findings show that the Armenian Highlands were an integral part of ancient Mediterranean and Mesopotamian civilization. Armenia's neighbors–the Hittites, Israelites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes, Persians, and Greeks–preserved fragmentary observations about the Armenian highlanders in texts of great antiquity. These fragments indicate that the Armenian Highlands, with the majestic Mt. Ararat at its heart, were revered as sacred lands by the peoples of the Near East.[10] Like other peoples, the Armenians have left a trail of static artifacts such as tools and textiles, pottery and coins, fortresses, farms, churches and monuments fixed upon the lands where they made their home. They have also continuously written the story of their evolution in such living artifacts as language, legend, religion and community.

Nevertheless, prehistory is of necessity an exercise in reconstruction. Narratives are built upon fragmentary texts and incomplete factual records. Facts, partially perceived, are creatively retold to fit the demands of other interlocking narratives and

[5]Cavalli-Sforza, Menozzi & Piazza, "Demic Expansions and Human Evolution," 642; Colin Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins* (NY: Cambridge University, 1987) 148; Lang, *Armenia*, 60.

[6]Lang, *Armenia*, 67.

[7]Xenophon, *Anabasis*, Bk. IV, Ch. V. 25-31.

[8]Raphael A. Ishkhanian, *On the Origin and Earliest History of the Armenian People*, trans. N. Ouzounian, (Montreal, 1989) 48; Raphael A. Iskhanian, *Bnik hayeren paer ew hnaguyn p'okhar'ut'yunner* (Yerevani Hamalsarani Hrat. 1989) 56.

[9]Ishkhanian, *Origin*, 49.

[10] *See generally*, Artak Movsisian, *Srbazan Ler'nashkharhĕ: Hayastaně ar'ajavor asiayi hnaguyn hogevor ěnkalumnerum*, (Yerevan: RA National Academy of Sciences, 2000).

theories, themselves contingent upon conjecture, fashion, or predilection. Inherent ambiguities are thus tentatively resolved.

For example, over a century ago linguists established that the Armenian language is a separate branch of the Indo-European language family.[11] Armenian, English, French, Russian, Greek, Albanian, Hindi, Farsi, and a hundred or more other languages exhibit striking correspondences in their sound systems, vocabulary and grammar. Statistically, those correspondences could not be random; they could have resulted only if these languages came from a common source.[12] Linguists have adopted the metaphor of a language family for languages so related, calling that common, reconstructed source from which these languages descended, Proto-Indo-European.[13]

That languages develop this way is evident from the historical record of such languages as French, Spanish, Italian, Romanian, and Portuguese. These are relatively new offshoots of the Romance branch of the Indo-European family. Their similarities in vocabulary, sounds, and grammar show that they derived from dialects of Latin during the centuries after the break-up of the Roman Empire (AD 500-1000).

Cognate Chart

English	Latin	Greek	Germanic	Sanskrit	Slavic	Persian	Lithuanian	Armenian
ten	decem	deka	taihun	daça	desentu	dasa	desimt	tasn տասն

Pattern		English		Latin/Greek		Indo-Iranian		Armenian
f-p-p-h		father		pater		pitar		hayr հայր
		fire		pyr				hur հուր
		foot		ped		pad		hetk' հետք
		five		pente		panch		hing հինգ
b-f-bh-b		bear (carry)		fero		bharami		berem բերեմ
		break		frango		bhanakti		bekanel բեկանել
		brother		frater		bhrater		eghpayr եղբայր

[11]H.Hübschmann, "On the Position of Armenian in the Sphere of the Indo-European Languages," [1875] 165-189 *in* W.F. Lehmann, ed. & trans., *A Reader in 19th Century Historical Indo-European Linguistics* (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1967); *see also*, A. Meillet, *Esquisse d'une grammaire comparée de l'arménien classique* (Vienna: Mekhitarist Press, 1936); Robert Godel, *An Introduction to the Study of Classical Armenian* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1975); Sarkis Saryan, *Language Connections: Kinship of Armenian with Sister Indo-European Languages* (Yarmouth, MA: Sarmen, 1982).

[12]*See, e.g.,* Isidore Dyen, Joseph B. Kruskal & Paul Black, *An Indoeuropean Classification: A Lexicostatistical Experiment,* Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, vol. 82, pt. 5 (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1992); E. D. Polivanov, "Even Mathematics can be Useful," 226-272, in *Selected Works*, ed. Leont'ev, ed., D. Armstrong, trans. (The Hague: Mouton, 1974).

[13]*See,* Colin Renfrew, *Language and Archaeology*, 98-119; Winfred P. Lehmann, ed. & trans., *A Reader in 19th-Century Historical Indo-European Linguistics* (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1967); George Cardona, Henry M. Hoenigswald & Alfred Senn, *Indo-European and Indo-Europeans* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1970).

w-v-v-g	wit	videre	veda	gitem	գիտեմ
	wet/water	hydro	voda (Sl.)	get	գետ
	west	vesper		gisher	գիշեր
	wolf	lupus	vrkas	gayl	գայլ
	work	wergon		gorts	գործ
m-m-m-m	mother	mater		mayr	մայր
k-g-ts	kin	genos		tsnil	ծնիլ
	know	gnosis		tsanot'	ծանօթ
	work	(w)erg		gorts	գործ
	mikel (much)	mega	maha	mets	մեծ

Similarly, linguists theorize that some 5000-9000 years ago, before recorded history, the Proto-Indo-European language splintered into dialects, one of which was Armenian. Armenian is nearly unique among the Indo-European languages in that Armenian is a separate branch of the Indo-European language family, unlike French and Spanish, which have a common intermediate source. Its immediate source is Proto-Indo-European itself. The Armenian language dates to the early period of Indo-European differentiation and dispersion some 5000 years ago, or perhaps as early as 7,800 years ago according to some recent research,[14] that eventually spread Indo-European speakers throughout Eurasia from Iceland to India.

This fact about the genesis of the Armenian language is consistent with several competing theories of the genesis of the Proto-Indo-European language family and its earliest speakers.[15] Just where the Indo-Europeans first lived has been the object of lively scholarly debate.[16] Many scholars place the Indo-European homeland in the Armenian Highlands and the plateau of Asia Minor to the southwest.[17] Others believe

---

[14] Nicholas Wade, "Biological dig for the roots of language," *International Herald Tribune*, (March 18, 2004) 10; Gray & Atkinson, "Anatolian Theory of Indo-European origin," 437.

[15] J.P. Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology and Myth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989) 143-147. On the ambiguity of archeological and linguistic evidence generally, *see, e.g.,* Ward Goodenough, "The Evolution of Pastoralism and Indo-European Origins," 253-266 in Cardona, Hoenigswald & Senn, *Indo-European and Indo-Europeans* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1970) 262.

[16] *See, e.g.,* Cavalli-Sforza, *History and Geography*, 264-65; Luigi. L. Cavalli-Sforza & Francesco. Cavalli-Sforza, *The Great Human Diasporas: The History of Diversity and Evolution*, (NY: Addison-Wesley, 1995) 160-161; *The Journal of Indo-European Studies*, Spring/Summer 1985, vol. 13, Nos. 1 & 2; Spring/Summer 1990 (vol. 18, nos. 1 & 2.); J.P. Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans*, 144; Book Review of *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins, Current Anthropology*, vol. 29, no. 3 (June 1988) 437-468.

[17] Johannes Schmidt, *Die Urheimat der Indogermanen und das europaïsche Zahlensystem*, Weimar, 1890; Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language*, 159-60; Thomas V. Gamkrelidze & Vyacheslav V. Ivanov, *Indoevropejskij jazyk i indoevropejtsy* (Tbilisi, 1984); Thomas V. Gamkrelidze & Vyacheslav V. Ivanov, "The Ancient Near East and the Indo-European Question: Temporal and Territorial Characteristics of

that it was in Eastern Europe or southern Russia.[18] Recent research suggests that the original homeland of the Indo-Europeans was near the Armenian Highlands (which is supported by the spread of agriculture from Mesopotamia westward to the Balkans) and that a later dispersion of the Indo-Europeans took place from southern Russia in connection with the development of horse and ox-driven transportation.[19]

Although the Armenians are often peripheral to linguistic theories and historical narratives, the basic story of the origin of the Armenian people is straightforward. It is the story of a people whose ancestors were indigenous to the Highlands, who created a distinct Indo-European language, who called themselves *Hay* and were called *Armenians* or people of *Ararat* (*Urartu, Aratta*) by others.

Scholars agree that names of places and peoples are not conclusive evidence of ethnic identity or continuity. Nevertheless, names can shed light on relationships between ancient peoples. Some scholars believe, for example, that the earliest mention of the Armenians is in the Akkadian inscriptions dating to the 28th-27th centuries BC, in which the Armenians are referred to as the sons of Haya, after the regional god of the Armenian Highlands.[20] Others cite Sumerian inscriptions of Naram-Suen dating to 2260 BC as the earliest mention of the name in a form recognizable as *Armenian*. These inscriptions refer to Sumerian battles with the *Armani*.[21] Hittite inscriptions, dating to 1400 BC, also refer to a land called *Hayasa*, which some historians have linked to the

Proto-Indo-European Based on Linguistic and Historico-Cultural Data," *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer 1985) 3-48; Thomas V. Gamkrelidze & Vyacheslav V. Ivanov, "The Migration of Tribes Speaking Indo-European Dialects from their Original Homeland in the Near East to their Historical Habitation in Eurasia," *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer 1985) 49-91; Ishkhanian, *Origins*, 28; Robert Drews, *The Coming of the Greeks: Indo-European Conquests and the Near East* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1987); Luigi Cavalli-Sforza & Francesco Cavalli-Sforza, *Great Human Diasporas,* 160; Cavalli-Sforza, *History and Geography* 265; Cavalli-Sforza, *Genes, Peoples and Languages,* 159-164; Gray & Atkinson, "Anatolian Theory of Indo-European origin," 437.

[18]Igor M. Diakanov, "On the Original Home of the Speakers of Indo-European," *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer 1985) 92-174. Marija Gimbutas, "Primary and Secondary Homeland of the Indo-Europeans*," Journal of Indo-European Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer 1985) 185-202; Marija Gimbutas, "Proto-Indo-European Culture: The Kurgan Culture during the Fifth, Fourth, and Third Millennia B.C.," 155-198 *in* Cardona, Hoenigswald & Senn, *Indo-European and Indo-Europeans* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970); Gerd Steiner, "The Immigration of the First Indo-Europeans Into Anatolia Reconsidered," *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer 1900) 185-214; Gevorg B. Jahukian, *Hayots' lezvi patmut'yun: nakhagrayin zhamanakashrjan* (Yerevan: Academy of Sciences, 1987) 73-76.

[19]Russell D. Grey & Quentin D. Atkinson, "Language-tree divergence times support the Anatolian Theory of Indo-European origin," *Nature* 426(26 Nov. 2003) 435-439; Cavalli-Sforza, *Genes, Peoples and Languages*, 159-163; Cavalli-Sforza, *History and Geography,* 300, 297, 264-65.

[20]Artak Movsisyan, *Hnaguyn Petut'yunĕ Hayastanum–Aratta* (Yerevan: Depi yerkir 1992) 41.

[21]Ishkhanian, *Origin*, 46; Ishkhanian, *Bnik Hayeren Bar'er,* 56, *citing* B. Hrozny, *Naram-Sim et ses Ennemis: un Texte Hittite, 56-75.*

name *Hay*.[22] Still later, there is reference to a land called *Arme-Shubria*, which some scholars have linked to the name *Armenia*.[23]

In the records of Mesopotamian and Semitic peoples, the region was known by its Biblical name *Ararat* (Hebrew) or *Urartu* (Assyrian, Babylonian). The trilingual inscription at Behistun, carved in 520 BC by order of Darius I, ruler of the Persian Empire, provides a key to the relationship between these names. In that royal inscription, the Persian *Armenia* and Elamite *Harminuia* are translated as Babylonian *Urartu*. According to these inscriptions, Armenia and Urartu (Ararat) are names for the same place.[24] This linkage is further corroborated by the name *Aramu* (King of Urartu, c. 1200 BC), a personal name still widespread among Armenians, and by place names like Yerevan (Urartean *Erebuni*) and Van (Urartean *Bianili*). By the time of Herodotus (5th cent. BC), and other Greek historians and geographers, such as Hecaetus of Miletos (6th cent. BC), Eudoxus of Cnidus (6th cent. BC), Xenophon (5th cent. BC) and Strabo (1st cent. BC), *Armenia* was the established name used by non-Armenians to refer to this country.[25] In Greek legend, the name *Armenia* was linked with the name of one of Jason's Argonauts, Armenios, from Thessaly, who was said to have settled in the Caucasus and to have given the region his name.[26]

In the 5th century BC Herodotus, in his review of the troops opposing the Greeks, noted that "the Armenians were armed like the Phrygians, being Phrygian settlers (refugees)."[27] Whether his comment described all Armenians as Phrygian settlers, or only those warriors he happened to see, is unclear. In 400 BC, Xenophon, a Greek general waging war against the Persians, describes many aspects of Armenian village life and hospitality. He relates that the people spoke a language that to his ear sounded like the language of the Persians.[28] Whether this was the native language of the region, or a vestigial *lingua franca* from the days of Persian rule is unclear. Strabo (64 BC-19 AD) states that throughout the Armenian state consolidated by King Artashes (189-159 BC),

---

[22]G. A. Kapantsyan, *Khajasa - kolybel' armjan: Etnogenez armjan i ix nachal'naja istorija* (Yerevan, 1947); Lang, *Armenia*, 114; *see also*, Eduard L. Danielian, "The Historical Background to the Armenian State Political Doctrine," 279-286 *in* Nicholas Wade, *Armenian Perspectives* (Surrey, UK, 1997) 279, *citing* E. Forrer, "Hajassa-Azzi," *Caucasia,* 9 (1931), and P. Kretschmer, "Der nationale Name der Armenier Haik," *Anzeiger der Acad. der Wiss. in Wien, phil.-his. Klasse* (1932), n. 1-7; and Ghapantsyan (1947); *But see*, I. M. Diakanov, *The Pre-History of the Armenian People* (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1984), 129 (deriving *hay* from *Hatiyos*). Others link *hay* to PIE *poti, which, in accordance with the usual sounds changes from Indo-European to Armenian becomes *hay*, cf. *pater – Arm. *hayr;* Armen Petrosian, *Arami ar'aspelĕ hndevropakan ar'aspelabanut'yan hamatekstum ew hayots' azgatsagman khndirĕ* (Van Aryan 1997) 151.

[23]Lang, *Armenia: Cradle of Civilization*, 114.

[24]Ishkhanian, *Origin*, 74-75.

[25]John A.C. Greppin, "Early Greek Historical Fragments Pertinent to Armenian Matters," *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, vol. 1 (1984) 35-43; Lang, *Armenia*, 112; Ishkhanian, *Origin*, 9-10.

[26]Strabo, *Geography*, XI.4.7; XI.14.12, *see also* Petrosian, *Arami Ar'aspelĕ,* 65.

[27]Herodotus, *History*, 7.73.

[28]Xenophon, *Anabasis*, IV.v.2-9.

the people of various extractions spoke Armenian,[29] although their customs were like the Medes.[30]

These fragmentary observations arouse interest and merit attention because of their antiquity. The Greek historians, though talented and erudite, were not totally free of the binary, Greek/non-Greek world-view. As seen through their eyes, we learn that the Armenians, not unexpectedly, appear to share certain garb, weapons, ways of speaking, and customs with their neighbors. Cultural contact and cultural diffusion provide a sufficient explanation for these isolated similarities between the Armenians, Phrygians, Persians, and Medes. These similarities do not compel a conclusion of common origin, although some scholars have interpreted them otherwise.[31] These fragments are not, and do not purport to be, comprehensive accounts of Armenian prehistory. Such accounts did not appear for another 1000 years.

Early Armenian Prehistories

The first comprehensive histories of Armenia and the Armenians were written, not surprisingly, by Armenian authors after the invention of the Armenian alphabet by St. Mesrop Mashtots in 404 AD. The best known of these accounts is that of Movses Khorenatsi. According to Armenian literary tradition, Khorenatsi is the Father of Armenian History. A contemporary of the Holy Translators who together with St. Mesrop Mashtots translated the Bible into Armenian in the fifth century, Khorenatsi is cited as an authority by Armenian historians, such as Atanas Taronatsi, as early as the sixth century.[32] This history, drawing on Christian and pre-Christian traditions and collective memory expressed in poetry and legend, may provide as good a starting point as any for an exposition of Armenian prehistory.

---

[29]Strabo, *Geography*, XI.14.5-6.

[30]Strabo, *Geography*, XI.13.9; Some scholars have found evidence in the Vannic inscriptions that seems to indicate that bilingualism was common as early as 800 BC and that Armenian was the spoken language at that time. *See* note 45 below.

[31]Diakonov, *Pre-History*, 110; *But see*, R. D. Wilkinson, *Introduction to the History of Pre-Christian Armenia, Society for Armenian Studies Occasional Paper*, No. 3 (Cambridge, MA, 1983) 3-9.

[32]There is some scholarly debate over the exact date of Khorenatsi's history; some place it in the fifth century others as late as the eighth, e.g. Robert Thomson. Certain internal evidence, e.g., passages that parallel later texts and relate to later events, are cited to support the later dating, although these are considered by others to be post-Khorenatsi interpolations and revisions. On the other hand, reference to events, such as Mesrop Mashtots' scolding of Yeznik Koghbatsi for his trip to Greece, which is not mentioned by other Armenian authors who are undisputedly from the fifth century, points to the fifth century dating for Khorenatsi as more accurate. At any rate, it has long been considered the first comprehensive history of the Armenians, and for the purpose of explaining approaches to Armenian prehistory, the date of the text or authorship is not of supervening importance. *See, Movsisi Khorenats'woy Patmut'iwn Hayots'* (Yerevan University Press 1981); Moses Khorenats'i*, History of the Armenians,* Robert W. Thomson, trans. & commentary, "Introduction," (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1978) 1, 60, n. 120; Ishkhanian, *Origin*, 84-88; Armen Ayvazian, *Hayastani patmut'yan lusabanumĕ amerikyan patmagrut'yan mej – k'nnakan tesut'yun* (Yerevan 1998) 132-139.

Movses Khorenatsi's history begins with a genealogy of the Armenian people. Writing after Armenia's conversion to Christianity, Khorenatsi draws on Biblical materials, starting with Adam and linking the Armenians with the Old Testament story of Noah and his three sons Shem, Ham and Japheth (Gen. 9:18-10:32). While Shem, Ham and their descendants moved south to Canaan and Egypt, Japheth and his children multiplied in the Highlands. According to Biblical genealogy, Japheth's first son Gomer had a son Togarmah (Gen. 10:2, 1 Chron. 1:4). Togarmah, called Torgom in Armenian, was identified early on by Armenian and Greek writers as the ancestor of the Armenians.[33] According to Khorenatsi, Torgom begat Hayk, who, according to oral tradition, was the eponymous hero of the Armenian people. For this reason, the Armenians often refer to themselves as *haykazyan*, 'the nation of Hayk.'

Making this linkage between Biblical genealogy and Armenian oral history, Khorenatsi (Bk. I.5) sets forth the following generations:

> Hayk begat Aramaneak
>
> Aramaneak begat Aramayis
>
> Aramayis begat Amasya
>
> Amasya begat Gegham
>
> Gegham begat Harma
>
> Harma begat Aram
>
> Aram begat Ara the Handsome

For many of these figures, Khorenatsi records oral tradition. Unable to verify that tradition, already more than a thousand years old when he wrote it down, he notes:

> Very frequently the people of the older generation of
> Aram's nation recall these events in ballads for the lyre,
> songs and dances. And whether these tales are true or false
> is not our primary concern. Rather to make you aware of
> everything, I include in this book all that comes from oral
> tradition and from books, so that you might appreciate the
> plain fairness of my thoughts . . . (Khorenatsi, Bk. I.6).[34]

In that same spirit, here is a short synopsis of that oral tradition, followed by a summary of various interpretations of the kernels of historical fact these stories convey.

---

[33]Khorenatsi, trans. Thomson, *History*, 73-74, n. 3.

[34] Khorenatsi, 32 (author's translation).

The Story of Hayk and Bel (Khorenatsi, Bk. I.10-12)

Hayk was a handsome, friendly man, with curly hair, sparkling eyes, and strong arms. He was a man of giant stature, a mighty archer and fearless warrior. Hayk and his people, from the time of their forefathers Noah and Japheth, had migrated south toward the warmer lands near Babylon. In that land there ruled a wicked giant, Bel. Bel tried to impose his tyranny upon Hayk's people. But proud Hayk refused to submit to Bel. As soon as his son Aramaneak was born, Hayk rose up, and led his people back to the land of his forefathers, the land of Ararat. At the foot of the mountains, he built his home, Haykashen.

But Bel would not let Hayk's people live in peace. He would not rest until he subdued the freedom-loving Hayk. He taunted Hayk for living in a cold, inhospitable land, and offered Hayk warmer lands in exchange for obedience and fealty. Hayk once again refused. Infuriated, Bel assembled a great army of warrior-giants and marched toward Hayk's domain. Hearing of the impending assault, Hayk gathered his sons and kin, skilled archers and valiant men, and set out from the salty shores of Lake Van to confront Bel.

From the hills, Hayk could see Bel's camp. Bel and his men were well armed with helmets, lances and swords. Undaunted, Hayk's entourage advanced. The earth shook as the titans did battle. Bel had expected an easy victory, but to his dismay, his troops fell into disarray. Before Bel could retreat and regroup, Hayk took aim, pulled his bow taut with his mighty hand and released his arrow. The arrow flew with such force that it pierced Bel's armor, shot through the giant's chest and stuck into the ground behind him. Bel would no longer menace the people of Hayk. Ever since these heroic deeds in defense of the land of his forefathers, the country has been called *Hayk*, and the valley where the battle took place came to be known as *Hayots dzor* (Valley of the Armenians).

The Story of Aram (Khorenatsi, Bk. I.13)

Aram was a hardworking, patriotic man, who, like his ancestor Hayk, was the ruler of Armenia and "thought it better to die for his homeland than to see the sons of strangers trampling his country's borders and foreigners ruling over his kin."[35] (Khorenatsi, Bk. I.13). Armenia was threatened by the Medes from the east, the Assyrians from the south, and the Titans from the west. Aram gathered a host of 50,000 archers and high-spirited men and proceeded to defend the Armenian border against attacks by the Medes. After defeating the Medes in the east, Aram turned to the south.

Ninos had just ascended to the throne of Assyria. Ninos, in his heart, wanted to avenge his ancestor Bel. But to avoid arousing suspicion, he acted as if he respected Aram's hereditary rule. Aram sensed the threat and in combat subdued the giant Barsham on the Assyrian plain, thus securing Armenia from the south.

---

[35] Khorenatsi, 52 (Thomson's translation).

Finally, in Cappadocia, Caesarea and Pontus, he met the challenge from the west. Consolidating his dominion, he ordered the inhabitants of the country to learn the Armenian language. Aram, the brave and powerful, secured the land of his forefathers. And to this day, it is after his name that other people call the country *Armenia*.

The Story of Ara the Handsome and Semiramis (Khorenatsi Bk. I.15-21)

Ara succeeded his father Aram as ruler of the land of his forefathers. He was a very handsome young prince. Ninos, still the ruler of Assyria, did not interfere with his rule. However, when the Assyrian ruler was away, his wife, Queen Semiramis, who had heard how handsomeAra was, determined to have him for herself. But Ara was already married to his devoted wife Nvard. Semiramis sent ambassadors, offered him the throne and showered him with gifts and offers of marriage. Ara refused to satisfy her desires. Furious, Semiramis gathered her army and attacked Armenia. Although she had ordered him taken alive, Ara died in battle, on the plain that bears his name, the Plain of Ayrarat. Semiramis was distraught. She tried to revive him through sorcery, ordering spirits in the form of hounds, to lick and heal his wounds. Nevertheless, Ara was dead and she ordered his body buried. Frustrated, but not out of tricks, she dressed one of her warriors in Ara's clothes and sent him out before the Armenians, saying that she had fulfilled her desires. Spreading rumors that she had brought Ara back to life, she concluded her war with the Armenians.

Semiramis was struck by the charm and beauty of the Plain of Ayrarat, its cool air and pure waters. She decided to build a city upon the plain where she might spend the summers away from Ninevah. The city was resplendent: watered by an aqueduct, it had marvelous palaces, baths, gardens and vineyards. Upon the steep rock slopes above the city, she ordered temples and treasure houses to be carved. On the hard face of the rock, she inscribed many texts and memorials in cunieform script.

Because her children mocked her lust, Semiramis had all killed but one, Ninuas, who grew up to kill her and avenge his brothers. Ara and Nvard had a son, also named Ara, who had a son, named Anushavan. Anushavan was known as Sosanver, because he had been dedicated to the cult of the plane trees, whose murmurings in the wind were used for fortune-telling. Anushavan struggled against Semiramis's son to maintain control over Armenia. Although Anushavan was strong and cultured, he was unable to shake Armenia loose from Assyrian rule. Armenia would have to wait several generations until the reign of Anushavan's descendant Paruyr for its ruling house to re-acquire the status of royalty. In return for helping Varbak the Mede conquer Assyria, Paruyr was elevated to king of Armenia.

Historical Links to Khorenatsi

The stories of Hayk, Aram, and Ara, though embellished through generations of oral tradition, provide invaluable clues to the otherwise spotty historical fragments left by the Akkadians, Sumerians, Hittites, Hebrews, Assyrians, Persians and Greeks.

Khorenatsi's theory that the Armenians descended from Torgom (Togarmah) is consistent with, and derived from, Biblical references to the House of Togarmah, a land known for its horses (Ez. 27:14) in the extreme north (Ez. 38:6). Indeed, Armenia would have been the north hinterlands for the Mesopotamian world of the Old Testament, and the Armenian Highlands were renowned for horse breeding and horsemanship throughout ancient times.[36]

Khorenatsi's stories capture the well-documented northward assaults by the Assyrians upon the land of Ararat which took place from 1300 BC through 600 BC. By way of chronological orientation, Khorenatsi himself tries to link the Armenian kingdom to Biblical references. For example, the prophet Jeremiah is reported to have made this exhortation during the Israelites' war against Babylon in 590 BC: "Command the realm of Ayrarat and the troops of Ashkenaz." (Jer. 51:27). The realm of Ayrarat was taken to refer to Armenia. (Khorenatsi I.22).[37]

Hayk, as the deified archer-forefather-protector, is reflected in the Armenian translation of the Book of Job, where reference to the constellation Orion, the archer, is rendered *Hayk* (Job 9:9). His deification has been linked to the Prometheus story in Greek mythology.[38] Parallels have also been cited from the Sumerian legends relating the battle between Haya and Marduk.[39]

Khorenatsi also relates how the patricidal sons, Adramelek and Sarasar, fled to Armenia after killing their father King Sennacherib of Assyria during his seige of Jerusalem in the time of the Hebrew King Hezekiah. (2 Kings 19:37, Is. 37:38). Khorenatsi considered the Artsruni dynasty of Armenia to be descendants of Sarasar (Armenian Sanasar). (Khorenatsi, II.5,7; III.55). According to Armenian tradition, the two sons settled near the mountain called Sim, which has been identified as a mountain in Sassoon.[40] These two brothers resurface as Balthasar and Sanasar, the heroes of the first cycle of Armenian national epic David of Sassoon.[41] This pair of immaculately conceived heroes were born to the Armenian princess Dzovinar, who had been taken from Armenia to Baghdad by the Caliph. The Caliph decides to kill the brothers, but before he can, they escape to Armenia, and after killing dragons, building cities, and restoring Armenia to prosperity, they return to Baghdad and rescue their mother. In the epic, while the Arabs may have displaced the Assyrians and two thousand years of history may be compressed into a single storyline, the Ararat-Mesopotamian dynamic

[36]Strabo, *Geography*, XI.14.9.

[37] See also, the New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha (RSV), notation on Jer. 1:27 (Oxford Univ. Press, 1977) 986.

[38]Grigor A. Grigorian, *Hay zhoghovrdakan banahyusut'yun* (Yerevan: Luys, 1980) 90-91.

[39] Movsisian, *Aratta*, 47; Artak Movsisian, *Barepasht Ark'aneri Ashkharhakalutyunĕ Tigran Metsits' ar'aj*, (Erevan: Apolon, 1997) 24.

[40]Khorenatsi (trans. Thomson) *History*, 112, n. 3.

[41]Leon Surmelian, trans., *Daredevils of Sassoun* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1964) 28; Hovhannes Toumanian, trans. Thomas Samuelian, *David of Sassoon* (Yerevan, 1999).

persisted in the people's collective memory and remained deep-rooted in the repertoire of Armenian oral tradition.

Khorenatsi also links Armenian history to the story of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, (605-562 BC), who sacked Jerusalem in 568 BC and took the Israelites captive to Babylon. According to Khorenatsi, Paruyr's son Hrachya (fiery eyes) freed the Hebrew leader Smbat from Nebuchadnezzar. Hrachya brought Smbat to Armenia, where Smbat founded a dynasty, from which, according to Khorenatsi, his sponsors, the Bagratuni family, descended.

Ara's story too has echoes not only in other Armenian authors, but also in ancient Greek and Sumerian works. Plato, for instance, in the *Republic*, tells of Er, son of Armenios, who descended into Hades and returned to life.[42] Scholars have also noted parallels to the Sumerian legends of Dummuzi and Inanna, notable among which is the fact that Dummuzi is described as the son of Haya, who in Sumerian texts is described as the god of the people who lived in the Armenian Highlands.[43]

Khorenatsi was not, of course, the only Armenian historian to collect these fragments of tradition and attempt to square them with the available histories of his time. For example, the fifth-century Armenian historian Paustos Buzand relates these and other traditions.[44] Similarly, the seventh-century Armenian historian Sebeos, in the *Primary History of Armenia*, also recounts the stories of Hayk and Bel, Aram, and Ara the Handsome.

The Earliest Kingdoms of Armenia

Khorenatsi's story of Ara and Semiramis provides clues to some of the earliest historical records in the region. The inscriptions at Van, which Khorenatsi attributed to Semiramis, have proved baffling and enlightening. High on the cliffs above Lake Van, archeologists found the cunieform inscriptions of which Khorenatsi had written. Most scholars agree that they are in a non-Indo-European language, usually read according to Akkadian syllabary.[45] By Khorenatsi's time, people had forgotten how to read the inscriptions. The language of the inscriptions, of course, may not have been the locally spoken language even at the time they were inscribed. In fact, certain research indicates that the rulers of Van spoke Armenian, while their scribes wrote in Vannic cunieform.[46] Such bilugualism is quite common − e.g., Latin and Greek inscriptions are found on European and American buildings, Aramaic inscriptions were common during the reign

---

[42]Plato, *Republic*, XL (X.614) (F. M. Cornford, trans., 351).

[43] Movsisian, *Aratta*, 39.

[44]*The Epic Histories Attributed to P'awstos Buzand*, trans. Nina Garsoïan (Cambridge: Harvard, 1989).

[45]Margarita L. Khachikyan, *Khurritskij i Urartskij Jazyki* (Yerevan, 1986); Ishkhanian, *Origin*, 60-62.

[46] Yovhannēs Karageozyan, *Sepagir teghanunner: Ayraradum ew harakits' nahangnerum, (Yerevan: Magaghat, 1998) 50.*

of the Armenian King Artashes (188-159 BC), and Armenian coins, records and literature were often in Greek and Latin before the invention of the Armenian alphabet in AD 405.[47] The language of the inscriptions came to be known by scholars as Urartean, drawing on the Akkadian name for the region.[48]

The inscriptions chronicle the history of the Kingdom of Ararat from 900 to 600 BC.[49] The Kingdom centered on Lake Van and spread north-eastward to the Kur river in the Caucasus, to a place called *Urtekhini*, modern *Artsakh* (Karabakh).[50] The boundaries of the Kingdom of Ararat (Urartu) have been shown to correspond with Armenia Major, as it was later known to the Greeks and Romans.[51] In the north-east of the Kingdom, King Argishti I founded Erebuni (modern Erevan) in 782 BC. Scholars have found a correlation between the succession of kings given by Khorenatsi and those chronicled in the inscriptions.[52] Khorenatsi's Aram may well have been the historical king Aramu, who according to the Vannic inscriptions consolidated the Vannic Armenian Kingdom in 880 BC. Similarly, the king Argishti of the Vannic inscriptions has been linked to Khorenatsi's Ara. The Kingdom appears to have lasted for three centuries. In 600 BC, just before Assyria itself fell to the Medes, the region was incorporated by Darius as the 13th and 18th satrapies of the Persian Empire.

This kingdom and its predecessors have been called various names. The Assyrians for a time called the region, Nairi, "the land of the rivers." According to some scholars, *Ararat (Aratta)* derives from the Indo-European word for *water-river* and was widely used as early as the 28th-27th century BC by Armenia's neighbors to refer to the Armenian Highlands.[53] Other Mesopotamian records refer to the region by the name of its capital on the salt water sea, *Biaini(li)*, the Kingdom of Van, as early as 800 BC.[54]

---

[47]Ishkhanian, *Origin*, 69-70; For pre-Mashtots writing systems of Armenia, see Artak Movsisian, Nakhamashtotsyan Hayastani Grayin Hamakargĕ (Yerevan State University, 2003); Artak Movsisian, Haykakan Mehenagrutyun (Yerevan State University, 2003).

[48]*Ibid.*, 57.

[49]*See, e.g.,* A. H. Sayce, "The Kingdom of Van," *Cambridge Ancient History*, III.i; Chahin, *The Kingdom of Armenia* (NY: Dorset Press, 1987), 31-181, for an account of each king's life and times; Charles Burney & David Marshall Lang, *The Peoples of the Hills: Ancient Ararat and the Caucasus* (NY: Praeger, 1972) 127-164; B.B. Piotrovskii, *The Ancient Civilization of Urartu* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1969); B.B. Piotrovskii, *The Art of Urartu* (London: Evelyn Adams and Macay, 1967).

[50]Strabo referred to this region as "Orkhistena," *Geography*, XI.14.4. In cuneiform inscriptions, the region is called "Urtekhini." G.A. Melikishvili, *Urartskie klinoobraznye nadpisi* (Moscow, 1960) 310. *See also*, Christopher J. Walker, ed. *Armenia & Karabagh: The Struggle for Unity* (London: Minority Rights Publications, 1991) 73.

[51]Ishkhanian, *Origin*, 78.

[52]Chahin, "Some Legendary Kings of Armenia: Can They Be Linked to Authentic History?" *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, vol. 1(1984):45-68; Chahin, *Kingdom of Armenia*, 201-210; Ishkhanian, *Origin*, 83-89.

[53] Movsisian, *Aratta*, 30, *citing* Gamkrelidze & Ivanov, *Indoevropejskij jazyk i indoevropejtsy,* pt. II, (Tbilisi, 1984) 1325.

[54]Karagozian, *Sepagir Teghanunner*, 33; Ishkhanian, *Origin*, 78.

However, *Ararat (Urartu, Aratta)* are the most common in historical fragments. As noted earlier, the historical record about the Armenian Highlands antedates the name *Urartu* by almost a thousand years and the first reference to the region as *Armenia* is reported to be the Sumerian inscription of Naram Suen in 2260 BC.[55] Moreover, these people had reached a level of political coherence sufficient to enter into treaties with the Hittites, as evidenced by the treaty between the *Hayasa* King Hukkanas and the Hittite King Suppululiumas I in 1380 BC.[56] It is not known why the name *Urartu/Ararat* gained currency when it did. Much historical and textual evidence supports the conclusion that *Urartu*, *Ararat*, *Armenia*, and *Hayk* are different names for the same country and people, much as *Britain* and *England*, *Gaul* and *France*, or *Deutschland*, *Allemagne*, and *Germany* are different names for the same country and people.

Bilingual and trilingual inscriptions and variant accounts of common events show that *Urartu*, *Ararat*, and *Armenia* refer to the same people and land. The Behistun inscription from 520 BC, described above, is one such key to the identity of these terms. In that inscription, *Urartu* is translated as *Armenia*. Religious references also corroborate this identity. In an Old Persian inscription, an ethnic epithet reads, "the Armenian, son of Haldi."[57] Haldi was the regional god revered in the Highlands whose name is invoked throughout the Vannic inscriptions as the patron deity of Urartu. In fact, these people were called Haldians by their neighbors. Xenophon tells of Haldi worshippers,[58] and as late as the Middle Ages, people called Haldians were reported to live in the Highlands.[59] Interestingly, in an inscription of Argishti I (785-760 BC), whom some historians have identified with Khorenatsi's Ara, Haldi is described with the Armenian word for god, *astuazi*.[60] Thus, contrary to earlier theories that the Armenians displaced a people called the Urarteans, more recently, scholars have concluded that the Armenians are the Urarteans.[61]

---

[55]See note 17 above.

[56] Danielian, "Historical Background to Armenian State," 279 (noting that this treaty was concluded over 100 years before the treaty between King Hattusili III of the Hittites and the Pharaoh Ramses II of Egypt, which is often considered the first documented treaty in history).

[57]Ishkhanian, *Origin*, 77, Ishkhanian, *Bnik Hayeren Bar'er*, 57, *citing* Melikishvili, *Urartskie klinoobraznye nadpisi*, (Moscow, 1960) 416.

[58]Xenophon, *Anabasis*, V.5.

[59]Chahin, *Kingdom of Armenia*, 115.

[60]Ishkhanian, *Origin*, 77. Scholars have demonstrated that the Armenian word *Astuats* 'God' derives from Arm. *hasdel* (English *fasten*), the Creator or Establisher. *See*, Jörundur Hilmarsson, "On Armenian *astuac*," *Annual of Armenian Linguistics* 4(1983):5-15; Eric Hamp, "Remarks on *astuac*," *Annual of Armenian Linguistics* 5(1984):87-88.

[61]*See, e.g.,* Cavalli-Sforza, *History and Geography*, 218; Ishkhanian, *Origin*, 83; G. B. Jahukian, "O sootnoshenie khajasskogo i armjanskogo jazykov," *Patmabanasirakan handes* (1988), No. 1, 2.

> I have endeavored to trace the languages of Europe to their source . . . and this was Japhetan
>
> . . .
>
> the best method that occurred to me was to follow the migrations of Noah's issue respectively to every place they occupied, when the increase of their numbers forced their departure from Armenia.
>
> . . .
>
> and there is a suspicion of its being related to the Hebrew . . . either as a mutilated dialect of it or as a sister-dialect with that or some more ancient antediluvian tongue.

— James Parsons, *Remains of Japhet* (London, 1767)

As this passage shows, as late as the mid-eighteenth century, before the major breakthroughs in Indo-European historical linguistics, the origin of human beings and of their languages was often presented in a biblical framework, not unlike that of Movses Khorenatsi's a thousand or more years before. However, accounts based on revealed authority waned with the rise of secular history and the discovery of the principles of linguistic relationship, both of which were prompted, in part, by expanded travel and commerce that brought Europeans into contact with new peoples and languages. By 1786, Sir William Jones noted before the Asiatick Society in Calcutta, that the Indic languages bore striking similarities to the ancient languages of Greece and Rome and to the German and English languages that could best be explained by a common origin.[62]

Scientific understanding of the relationship between languages and the hypothesis of a proto-language outpaced archeological findings and theories of pre-history. The proto-language was a necessary (if unattested) construct, but who the speakers of this proto-language were and where they lived could not be solved by the logic of linguistic relations alone. Moreover, important pieces of information, such as the discovery and decipherment of the oldest Indo-European inscriptions, the Hittite inscriptions, were not available when the first theories of the Proto-Indo-European pre-history were being expounded early in the nineteenth century.

Given the geographic expanse covered by the Indo-European languages from Iceland and India, logic suggested that the Indo-European homeland was somewhere near the center of Eurasia, whence the speakers of various dialects of Indo-European radiated and settled. In the early nineteenth century, Johannes Schmidt and others placed the Indo-European homeland in Asia Minor, in proximity to the ancient Mesopotamian civilizations.[63] Later, however, many linguists adopted the premise that the Indo-

---

[62]Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language*, 9-13.

[63]Johannes Schmidt, *Die Urheimat der Indogermanen und das europaïsche Zahlensystem* (Weimar, 1890); Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans*, 182; Ishkhanian, *Origin*, 12; Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language*, 159-60.

European homeland was in Eastern Europe or Southern Russia.[64] More recently, many linguists have returned to the Asia Minor hypothesis, based on archeological and genetic evidence regarding the spread of agriculture from the Asia Minor to Europe. Archeologists and genetic paleontologists, such as Cavalli-Sforza, have discovered patterns of human expansion and settlement that suggest both views may be correct for successive stages of Indo-European migration and together give the full picture of Indo-European dispersion.[65] According to this body of genetic and archeological research, the Near East was the first staging ground for agricultural expansion throughout Eurasia, whereas Southern Russia was a later staging area for expansion associated with the emergence of horse and chariot culture.[66]   In 2003, in the journal *Nature*, Russell D. Gray and Quentin D. Atkinson, using lexicostatics and genetic tree methodologies, place the Indo-European homeland in Anatolia and the dispersion of the Indo-European speakers with the spread of agriculture around 8,000 to 9,500 BC, considerably earlier than most prior theories.[67]

Starting from the premise that the Proto-Indo-European homeland was in Eastern Europe or Southern Russia, scholars, such as Diakanov, Gimbutas and until recently some Armenian scholars, such as Jahukian, hypothesize that the Indo-Europeans, including Armenian speakers, migrated in waves into the highlands, sometime during the 12th century BC.[68] According to this theory, speakers of Armenian were in contact with their neighbors, the Hurrians and Urarteans, with whom, in the course of time, they intermingled.   Then, by 600 BC, when the Kingdom of Van (Urartu) fell to the Medes and then the Persians, an Armenian-speaking community emerged as the ascendant group in the region.

Starting from the premise that the Proto-Indo-European homeland was in Asia Minor, other scholars, such as Gamkrelidze and Ivanov, Renfrew, Cavalli-Sforza, Dolgopolsky, Ghapantsyan, Ishkhanian, and more recently Jahukian, hypothesize that in approximately 3000-4000 BC, the Indo-European speakers began migrating out of the region, leaving behind speakers of Armenian.[69] Gray and Atkinson, using lexicostatics

---

[64]Marija Gimbutas, "Primary and Secondary Homeland of the Indo-Europeans*," Journal of Indo-European Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer 1985) 185-202; Marija Gimbutas, "Proto-Indo-European Culture: The Kurgan Culture during the Fifth, Fourth, and Third Millennia B.C.," 155-198 *in* Cardona, Hoenigswald & Senn, *Indo-European and Indo-Europeans* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970).

[65]"The Gimbutas hypothesis . . . is not really an alternative to the Anatolian origin suggested by Renfrew and others; both hypotheses can be correct." Luigi L. Cavalli-Sforza, Paolo Menozzi & Alberto Piazza, "Demic Expansions and Human Evolution," *Science* vol. 259 (January 29, 1993) 642. *See* Louise Levanthes, "A Geneticist Maps Ancient Migrations," *The New York Times*, July 27, 1993, C1; Cavalli-Sforza, *History and Geography*, 264-65.

[66] Cavalli-Sforza, *History and Geography*, 300.

[67] Gray & Atkinson, "Anatolian Theory of Indo-European Origin," 435.

[68]Diakanov, *Pre-history*, 110; Gevorg B. Jahukian, *Hayots' lezvi patmut'yun: nakhagrayin zhamanakashrjan* (Yerevan: Academy of Sciences, 1987) 74-75; *See also* references at fn. 15above.

[69]*See* references at fn. 17 above.

and computerized genetic tree classification methodologies, date the branching of Armenian and Greek from the Indo-European tree quite a bit earlier to 7,300 BC and the split between Armenian and Greek to approximately 6,500 BC.[70] Advocates of this theory consider words common to both the Semitic and Indo-European word stocks to be evidence of a period of prehistoric contact between the Proto-Semitic and Proto-Indo-European peoples.[71] They also note that the shared Indo-European vocabulary is suited to a mountainous homeland, where agriculture was well-developed, where metal for tools was accessible, where wide variety of grains were cultivated, where herding, in particularly, sheep-herding was common, and where hard woods and metals for wheeled vehicles were abundant.

Although the Balkans might meet many of these criteria as well as the Armenian Highlands, the archeological evidence shows in each instance that agriculture or technology in the Balkans is antedated by that of the Caucasus, or appeared in the Balkans too late fit other facts known about the spread of the Indo-European languages.[72] In addition, Proto-Indo-European loans in Proto-Semitic and Proto-Kartvelian presuppose a period of early contact in the Near East, which is only possible, chronologically and geographically, if the Indo-European homeland was in or around the Armenian Highlands.[73] Thus, according to this theory, the Armenian-speaking community is indigenous to the region, out-surviving the other Indo-European-speaking groups, such as the Hittites.

Other archeological discoveries appear to bear out the Asia Minor hypothesis. Working independently, the archeologist Colin Renfrew has used carbon-14 dating to plot the spread of agriculture from Asia Minor across Europe.[74] His results point to Asia Minor as the place of the earliest settlements of these peoples.

The agricultural evidence analyzed by Renfrew shows a westward migration from the Armenian Highlands through Greece into Europe, rather than an eastward migration into the Highlands. These agricultural data also show movement eastward from the Balkans across the Russian steppes. The evidence of eastward migration contradicts the theory that the Indo-European homeland was in southern Russia, which would imply

---

[70] Gray & Atkinson, "Anatolian Theory of Indo-European Origin," 437.

[71] For an evaluation of Akkadian loan words in Armenian, *see* John A.C. Greppin, "Akkadian Loan Words in Armenian*," Annual of Armenian Linguistics* 10(1989):73-83. Although rejecting Armenia as Indo-European homeland, Greppin finds well-grounded Akkadian etymologies for Armenian *knik'* 'seal, stamp' Akk. *kanniku*, Arm. *kshir* 'scale' Akk. *gishinnu*, Arm. *kmakhk'* 'skeleton' Akk. *kima(h)hu* 'grave'. *See also,* Ishkhanian, *Bnik Hayeren Bar'er*, 76-87.

[72] Thomas V. Gamkrelidze & Vyacheslav V. Ivanov, "The Migrations of Tribes Speaking Indo-European Dialects from their Original Homeland in the Near East to their Historical Habitations in Eurasia," *Journal of Indo-European Studies,* vol. 13, No. 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer 1985) 11-14.

[73] *Ibid.*, 14.

[74] Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language*, 145-165, map. 149; *See also*, Colin Renfrew, "Archaeology, Genetics and Linguistic Diversity," *Man*, vol. 27, no. 3 (Sept. 1992) 445-478 (further explanation of Renfrew's method of linking the spread of culture to migrations of people and the languages they spoke).

westward migration out of southern Russia.[75] Thus, the spread of agriculture, which promoted migration and settlement, provides a context for the spread of the Indo-European languages from Asia Minor through the Balkans to Europe and Eurasia.

Although these theories about the Indo-European homeland continue to spawn debate, for Armenian prehistory, the similarities between them may prove more important than the differences. Both theories presuppose that the Armenian language originated in the Armenian Highlands, that there was multilingualism in the Armenian Highlands, and that Armenian language was transmitted not only from parent to child, but also from neighbor to neighbor, resulting in the Armenian-speaking community of today. Whether the Indo-European languages originated in Eastern Europe, Southern Russia, in Asia Minor, or by stages in all three, the speakers of the Armenian variant of Proto-Indo-European appear not to have displaced, but rather to have descended from the indigenous population of the Highlands. In short, the Armenians are an ancient people native to the highlands around Ararat, who speak a distinct Indo-European language, call themselves *Hay*, and are called *Armenians* by others.

---

[75]Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language*, 97; Ward Goodenough, "The Evolution of Pastoralism and Indo-European Origins," 253-266 *in* Cardona, Hoenigswald & Senn*, Indo-European and Indo-Europeans*, 262.

About the Author

Thomas J. Samuelian holds his Ph.D. in linguistics from the University of Pennsylvania and his J.D. from Harvard Law School. He is the author of numerous books, articles, reviews, and translations in the field of Armenian language, literature, and history, including the two-volume *Course in Modern Western Armenian, Dictionary of Armenian in Transliteration, David of Sassoon (an English verse translation of H. Toumanian's rendition of the epic)*, a translation and retelling of *Yeznik Koghbatsi's Refutation of the Sects,* and a compilation of two volumes of conference papers entitled *Classical Armenian Culture* and *Medieval Armenian Culture*. He published the first complete English translation of the prayers of St. Gregory of Narek in 2001, now available in full-text searchable form at www.stgregoryofnarek.am. Most recently he has headed a multidisciplinary team that produced two computer-assisted language learning programs for modern Western (www.discoverarmenian.com) and Eastern Armenian (www.birthrightarmenia.org/depihayk). For Christmas 2003, he published the first complete, bilingual Armenian-English translation of Charles Dickens' *Christmas Carol*, distributed free to schools and churches around Armenia. Currently, he is working on a collection of Armenian sacred music for use in schools and churches and an educational web-site (www.sharakan.am) with notes, audio, translations, and annotations of Armenian chants.

After teaching at the University of Pennsylvania, where he was Assistant Director of the Center for Soviet and Eastern European Studies, at Columbia University, and at St. Nersess Seminary, he practiced corporate law in Washington, Almaty, and Moscow with Morgan, Lewis & Bockius and Steptoe & Johnson LLP. He served as President of the American Chamber of Commerce in Armenia in 2001-2002. He now lives in Armenia, where he has an international law practice, Arlex International Ltd. and remains active in a variety of public service projects. He can be reached at tsamuelian@arlex.am.