
CLASSICS OF ARMENOLOGY

Johann Heinrich Hübschmann **(1848- 1908)**



In the history of linguistics, the beginning of the 19th century was marked by the foundation of historical-comparative linguistics. From the very beginning of the foundation of this method, the origin and kinship of the Armenian language has been the focus of linguists' attention. German scholars have made a great contribution to this field, especially at its beginning. Heinrich Hübschmann holds a special place among them.

Hübschmann was born on July 1, 1848 in Erfurt. He studied Oriental philology at Jena, Tübingen, Leipzig, and Munich, in 1876 he became professor of Iranian languages at Leipzig, and in 1877 professor of comparative philology at Strasbourg.

Hübschmann combined his teaching work with prolific scientific activity. In the first year of teaching at the University of Leipzig (1875) he published an article "The Position of the Armenian Language among Indo-European Languages". This small work opened a new chapter in the history of Armenian linguistics. Hübschmann briefly referred to the several previous attempts to determine the place of the Armenian language among kindred languages and showed the drawbacks of the views expressed, especially highlighting Müller's point of view. Examining some of the Armenian words referred to by Müller as proof of the hypothesis that the Armenian language had Aryan origin, Hübschmann with the help of phonetic laws, showed that they were foreign elements in the Armenian language, borrowed from Persian.

He found out that Armenian was a separate linguistic branch. He believed that the Armenian language could previously have occupied an intermediate position between Indo-Aryan and European dialects, and therefore had some peculiarities of both.

The work "The Position of the Armenian Language among Indo-European Languages" caused a lot of stir among linguists. Many disagreed with his opinion. In a relatively short period of time, however, Hübschmann's theory received a wide response and had its followers among both Armenian and foreign scholars.

In 1876 Hübschmann's article on pronunciation and transliteration of the Armenian language was published in the German-Eastern Journal. Criticizing Lepsius's Hübschmann did something new. Based mainly on information about the pronunciation of foreign (Greek, Persian) proper names in Armenian, Hübschmann defined the phonetic pronunciation of Grabar, the classical Armenian language, thus creating a scientific transliteration for Armenian.

Hübschmann's name was widely known in the scientific community. In 1877, the young scholar was invited to give lectures simultaneously from two universities - Graz

and Strasbourg. Hübschmann preferred the latter and since 1877 became a professor of comparative philology at the University of Strasbourg, a position which he held for the rest of his life. At the University he gave lectures in comparative grammar of ancient languages. The topics of his lectures were Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Gothic, Church-Slavic, Avestan Iranian, Armenian and Persian grammars, works of Persian and Armenian authors.

In 1882 in Leipzig, a 44-page study by Hübschmann "The spelling of Iranian and Armenian languages" (*Die Umschreibung der iranischen Sprachen und des Armenischen*) was published, where the author tried to give a definitive transliteration of Armenian letters.

The most valuable in Hübschmann's scientific heritage - the result of his Armenian studies - is "Armenian Grammar", which, unfortunately, has never been finished. This work is considered a cornerstone of the study of the historical grammar of the Armenian language.

In his work, Hübschmann explored words borrowed into Armenian from Persian, Arabic, Assyrian and Greek, as well as words whose origin he considered unknown. In connection with a particular etymology, Hübschmann raised questions about the kinship of the Armenian language. In his "Grammar" Hübschmann also specified proper names, because he discovered that their study helped fully interpret the influence of languages on each other.

In 1893 a small study "Armenian Proper Names" was published in Strasbourg and in 1904 the work "Ancient Armenian toponyms" was published. Armenian translations of these two works were published first in "Handes Amsorya" and then in a separate book.

The scientific value of these works is difficult to overestimate; "Ancient Armenian toponyms" is considered not only etymological research, but also "geographical theory of Armenia". It includes the study of provinces and regions of Armenia, etymology of Armenian toponyms from ancient times.

Hübschmann also studied Armenian vowels. In 1898, the "Chronology of Armenian Vocal Laws" (*Zur Chronologie der armen. Vokalgesetze*) was published, in which the author, representing the phonetic laws of the Armenian language, tried to find out the time of the change of Armenian vowels' orthography.

Hübschmann was also closely associated with Armenian cultural centers. In 1903 he visited the Mekhitarists Congregation on St. Lazar's Island. Here, for his fruitful scientific activity in the field of Armenology, he was elected an honorary member of the Armenian Seminary.

Needless to say, Hübschmann was well acquainted with the history and geography of Armenia. And Hübschmann's research was mostly related to linguistics, but he never missed an opportunity to reflect on the culture of the Armenian people and its history. He valued not only the Armenian language and culture, but also the Armenian people and their cheerful spirit.

Throughout his academic career, Hübschman not only made Armenian the main subject of his research, but also became one of the best teachers of the Armenian language in Europe.

The 11th International Conference of Orientalists was held in Paris on September 5-12, 1897. For the first time a separate section was devoted to the culture of Iran and Armenia. A.Meillet was one of the active organizers of the section. Hübschman was elected head of the section.

Hübschman cared very much about the Armenologists, generously sharing with them his knowledge and giving them time.

He became tutor of H. Acharyan, who throughout his activity remained close to the scientific beliefs of his teacher and in his scientific works devoted to the comparative study of the Armenian language, unconditionally believed in this indestructible theory.

The results of almost forty years of tireless and consistent work were more than thirty studies by Hübschmann in which the Armenian language was studied in accordance with the level of Indo-European studies of the time being.

Hübschmann's scientific heritage has made a great contribution to the historical-comparative-typological study of the Armenian language, and it will play a unique role in the future.

The great linguist had established a number of phonetic laws that served not only to separate and characterize the Iranian-Armenian linguistic branches from each other, but also to compare the Armenian and the nearest languages.

During his scientific work Hübschman was engaged not only in Armenology, but also in the work of Armenian linguists.

Hübschmann died on January 20, 1908 in Freiburg, near Breisgau.

Thus, Hübschmann was the first to show in 1875 that the Armenian language was not a branch of the Iranian languages (earlier assumed so because of the immense amount of Iranian influence on Armenian throughout its history) but an entirely separate Indo-European branch in its own right. He used the comparative method to separate the Iranian loanwords, which make up the majority of Armenian words, from an older layer of native Armenian words.

Selected bibliography of J. H. Hübschmann

1. Zur Casuslehre, München, 1875.
2. Über die Stellung des Armenischen im Kreise der indogermanischen Sprachen, «Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung der indogermanischen Sprachen», 1875, Bd 23.
3. Iranische Studien, 1879, Bd. 24.
4. Die Umschreibung der iranischen Sprachen und des Armenischen, Leipzig, 1882.
5. Armenische Studien.I, Leipzig, 1883.

6. Das indogermanische Vokalsystem, Strasbourg, 1885.
7. Etymologie und Lautlehre der ossetischen Sprache, Strasbourg, 1887.
8. Persische Studien, Strasbourg, 1895.
9. Armenische Grammatik. I. Teil. Armenische Etymologie. I. Abteilung: Die Persischen und Arabischen Lehnwörter im Altarmenischen. Leipzig, 1895.
10. Armenische Grammatik. I. Teil. Armenische Etymologie (Bibliothek indogermanischer Grammatiken. Band VI), Leipzig, 1897.
11. Altarmenische Ortsnamen, 1904.