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# ARMENOLOGICAL HERITAGE

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## KAMILLA VASILYEVNA TREVER (1892-1974)

Kamilla Trever was a prominent Russian and Soviet Orientalist, historian, numismatist, who specialized on the Caucasus, Central Asia and Iran. She is the author of several monographs like "Sassanid Metal", Moscow-Leningrad, 1935 (co-author I.A.Orbeli), "Monuments of Greco-Bactrian Art, 1940", «Essays on the history and culture of Caucasian Albania in the IV century BC — VII century AD», Leningrad, 1959, "Sassanian silver. Collection of State Hermitage", Leningrad, 1987 (co-author V.Lukonin, published posthumously) and about 100 articles.

K.Trever's «Essays on the history and culture of ancient Armenia (II century BC – IV century AD)», Leningrad, 1953 (in Russian) is a fundamental study where the author discusses crucial problems of Armenia of Classical period, particularly those connected with the pagan temple at Garni. The second part of her study deals with ancient Greek and Latin inscriptions found during excavations in different parts of Armenia.

Below is introduced the chapter from this study dealing with the cult of Mihr, one of the supreme gods of ancient Armenian pagan religion (77-95).

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### ON THE CULT OF MIHR IN ARMENIA

The problem of religion and cults of ancient Armenians is so complex and equally undeveloped that even a small essay, without prior special research, seems an almost impossible task. However, this problem need to be discussed, otherwise more or less satisfactory explanation to the provenance of Garni temple could not be suggested.

The study of the forms and decoration of the Garni temple in comparison with written sources leads to the conclusion that it was dedicated to Areg-Mihr, the ancient Armenian Sun-god. The identification of the image of this god and its place in the Armenian pantheon is possible only after the preliminary although brief examination of common problems confronting scholars who deal with religious beliefs of ancient Armenians, and the critical overview of those methods through which they are resolved in general studies devoted to these problems.

The problem of religious beliefs of ancient Armenians before the adoption of Christianity is very important for the correct understanding of the ancient culture of Armenia with its epic and arts, ideology, and identification of roots of surviving phenomena which were preserved until recently in everyday life and folklore of modern Armenians.

With which sources possess historian who gets started with the study of ancient beliefs of Armenian people?

**Written sources.** The largest number of information regarding the gods, their temples and statues is preserved in the "History" of Movses Khorenatsi (V-VI centuries)

and in the study by Agatangeghos who, according to tradition, was the secretary of Trdat III who had converted Armenia into Christianity. Some dispersed information are extant in the studies of Pavstos Buzand (late IV century), also by Elishe, Łazar Parbeci and Eznik – authors of the late V – early VI centuries.

Movses Khorenatsi reports about the existence of information regarding ancient gods in passing, in the course of historical narrative without going into explanations and interpretations, using the data which was kept in folk memory and was reflected in epic tales, also “temple books” which were used by him; as to western and eastern authors, he mentions Olymp, Bardetsan, Mar-Abas Catina. It is impossible to reconstruct the coherent picture of the whole pantheon given the fact that Movses Khorenatsi did not seek to do it.

The situation is different in the case of Agatangelos,<sup>1</sup> who is regarded by historical tradition as an eye-witness or even participant of the implementation of Christianity in Armenia. His study – the history of Trdat III, mostly contains the story of pagan Trdat who was converted into zealous Christian; this topic gave him reason to provide us with interesting very information regarding the cult of some gods, mostly Anahit, about temples and statues which were destroyed by Trdat, treasures of temples which were given to Christian churches which usually were erected on the place of the destroyed temple. Despite the value of the information kept in the study of Agatangelos, they suffer from one-sidedness based on Christian worldview of the author and thus could not reconstruct the picture of Armenian pantheon.

As it was mentioned above, other Armenian historians of the V-VI centuries provide us only with fragmentary data whereas some of them (Elishe, Łazar of Parbi, and Eznik) from the position of Christian officials, who were first of all interested in the denial of pagan dogmas and opposing them the Christian teaching.

Classical authors also had preserved some dispersed information regarding the beliefs of Armenians, mostly Strabo, Diodorus, Plutarchus, and Cassius Dio. It must be said that the listed authors mention only very few deities of ancient Armenia, mostly Anahit, Aramazd, and Mihr. These authors were focused on external cultic manifestations of these beliefs – the problem of temples, statues etc.

The second category of sources is the epic, folk tales, where were preserved mythical images, echoes of ancient beliefs and rituals.<sup>2</sup> In the “History” of Movses Khorenatsi, as it was mentioned, were used some epic songs as, for example, the tale of the birth of Vahagn. The folk epic about the heros of Sassun contains many echoes and songs of ancient fairy tales, mostly about the god Mihr-Mithra who in the epic is bifurcated into two persons – Elder Mher and Lesser Mher, his grandson (see below).

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<sup>1</sup> This ancient text which exists in its Armenian original, in antiquity was translated into Greek and, perhaps, its title “Agatangelos” (“Evangelist”) was made personal name of the author.

<sup>2</sup> M. Abeghian, *Der armenische Volksglaube*, Leipzig, 1899.

Ancient rituals and customs which survived until recently in some regions of Armenia also reflected ancient mythical beliefs reincarnated as game songs, dances, sayings now often already lost their sense.

As to archaeological data, until recently for the period from the II mill. BC to the III century AD we possess only with some occasional materials and scattered findings which could not provide us with any coherent picture, and those individual crumbs which archaeologists and historians are able to reveal are the more valuable. Until now the only archaeological object of this period is the fortress of Garni with its temple, walls, settlement, and also necropolis where excavations and study had started in 1950; the first finds promise to elucidate the problems of religious beliefs and cults.

Attempts to reconstruct combined picture of religious beliefs of ancient Armenia had been initiated still in the mid-XIX century by N.O.Emin, professor of the Lazarev institute, the French scholar-Armenologist V.Langlois, and Gh. Alishan, prominent Armenologist and Mechitarist.

In the book of V.Langlois<sup>3</sup> appeared in 1859 and devoted to numismatics of ancient Armenia, is collected the information from written sources about the religion of ancient Armenians. Based on this information he defines Armenian pagan religion as a syncretism of Zoroastrianism, Greek pantheon, Scythian “superstitions” and, finally, local deities. In this essay and all consecutive studies we encounter one and the same phenomenon – the attribution of local Armenian pantheon on the last place among those which allegedly comprises the picture of religious beliefs and cults of ancient Armenians. The reason of this is that V.Langlois was the son of his time and the illusion of “great cultures” of Mediterranean and Near East defined his scientific consciousness. As philologist, he compared data preserved by different authors and sometimes had achieved some interesting results, but could not succeed to generalize them. Thus, for example, collecting information about Aramazd he found in the Greek text of Eusebius (IV century AD) such correspondence to the image of this god - τὸν δε Βηλον, ον Δία μεθερμηνεύουσι “Bel whom Greeks call Zeus”, and in the Armenian translation (V century) of Eusebius’s text it turned out to be an addition “... Bel whom Greeks call Zeus and Armenians Aramazd”.<sup>4</sup> Here we encounter a vivid example of the fact that Greek authors and Armenian translators were trying to adjust to the image of Classical and Mesopotamian pantheon ancient local Armenian deities, but V.Langlois did not arrive to such suggestion and treats this phenomenon as “syncretism”.

The book of N.O.Emin published in 1864<sup>5</sup> is the first generalizing study on this topic. Thinking that at the heart of religion of ancient Armenians lays dualism, Emin looks at the whole assembly of the gods to whom worshipped in ancient Armenia – local, Iranian, and Babylonian from this angle. Individual chapters are devoted to Greek,

<sup>3</sup> V. Langlois, *Numismatique de l'Arménie*, Paris, 1859, p. III-XIII.

<sup>4</sup> V. Langlois, *Numismatique de l'Arménie*. Paris, 1859, p. IV.

<sup>5</sup> N.O.Emin, *An essay on the religion and beliefs of pagan Armenians*, Moscow, 1864.

Syriac gods, and also to *devs* and demigods. He touches upon also on the problem of rites, temples etc.

This study is a great contribution for his time, great compendia of information accompanied by the critics of studies written on this topic, mostly the study by Injijyan<sup>6</sup> and the poem by Arsen Bagratuni.<sup>7</sup> According to N.O.Emin, they give “the most perverse concept about the mythology of ancient Armenians” since the authors were trying to “by all means see monotheism or the worship of one true god in ancient Armenia bequeathed by their ancient compatriot Noah and his immediate descendants who came out of the arch after the flood and had settled down on the foothills of Ararat”.<sup>8</sup>

The novelty in the study of N.O.Emin was that he had made use of not only written sources, Armenian and Classical, but also materials of Armenian language and the results “which were achieved by European science in the field of the history and archaeology of ancient East and presumably Western Asia”.<sup>9</sup> Later in the book he mentions also the significance of cuneiform inscriptions of Van where figures the “name of some Armenian deity – “Haldia””.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, the study of N.O.Emin now is outdated, however, this is the first summary of all information on the problem of ancient Armenian’s religion. Worthy to note its basics, namely a desire first of all to find out the question who among the deities of Armenian pantheon could be regarded as local Armenian later for some reasons pushed aside, a view<sup>11</sup> which even modern scholars do not always follow.

In 1895 appeared the study of Mechitarist Gh.Alishan,<sup>12</sup> which was profoundly used by H.Gelzer, representative of bourgeois science serving at the end the XIX century the interests of colonial policy in the East, hence could never satisfy some basics of N.O.Emin. The study of H.Gelzer appeared in 1896.<sup>13</sup> One of its first provisions attracts attention, that is the argumentation that “the deities of a people are representatives of different historical periods through which passes its self-consciousness”; but this thesis was not neither developed nor confirmed in his study. In the work were not shown any “historical periods”, and the development of “self-consciousness” reflected in the change of its religious beliefs were not revealed as well. Actually, the study of Gelzer is a typical spawn of bourgeois historical science where in the preface is said as “one of the greatest historical truth” that “national life of a people is developed through the struggle of ethnic antagonism”,<sup>14</sup> i.e. one of the most specific “theses” of the imperial policy of imperialism.

<sup>6</sup> Լ.Ինձյան, *Archaeology*, P. III, Venice, 1835, Ch. XX (in Arm.).

<sup>7</sup> A.Bagratuni, *Hayk* (epic poem), Venice, 1858 (in Arm.).

<sup>8</sup> N.O.Emin, *Loc.cit.*, p. 9-11.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13-14.

<sup>12</sup> Gh.Alishan, *About ancient beliefs of Armenians*, Venice, 1895 (in Arm.).

<sup>13</sup> H. Gelzer, *Zur armenischen Götterlehre*, *Sitzungsber. d. Sachs. Ges. d. Wissensch.*, Bd. II-III, 1896.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Twice in his study Gelzer on various occasions says that during his historical period Armenia “did not have culture since he didn’t have neither script nor literature”<sup>15</sup> (this is about Armenia of the II-III centuries AD). Since he refers to Armenian historians and Classical authors he could not have been unaware that during this period Armenians used Aramaean and Greek script, that in the II century AD Bardetsan got acquainted with the archives of Armenian kings at Ani-Kamakh, that Plutarchus tells about literary works of the king Artavazd II, that in the I century BC in Artashat was performed “Bacchae” of Euripides. In 1896 all this not only could but should have been known to H.Gelzer, but anyway he considered necessary to represent Armenians as undeveloped, uncultured nation who was busy only with agriculture and gardening and bartered jewelry from Asiatic tradesmen.

According to such vision in regard to Armenians begins his consideration of Armenian pantheon with a chapter “Iranian influence” and ascribes to this group all main Armenian gods; to Syriac and Hellenic influence also are given separate chapters, and in the chapter “Local Armenian deities” figures only the god Vanatur as specific national god of Armenians and their supreme deity.<sup>16</sup> But the deity Vanatur never existed in Armenian pantheon; the name Vanatur, i.e. “hospitable” is nothing else than the epithet of Amanor, the deity of first fruits whose festival was performed, as it is told by Agatangelos, in Autumn.<sup>17</sup>

It is completely unclear how could Gelzer leave aside Mihr, Anahit, and Vahagn, and declare as the supreme national god the local hospitable-god Amanor who was casually mentioned by Agatangelos (and only by him)?<sup>18</sup>

On the more high level is written the study by the Moscovite scholar R.R.Shtakelberg,<sup>19</sup> but methodologically it is a step back compared with the study of N.O.Emin. The matter is that as the very title of the article shows, it is built on an absolutely unacceptable thesis, i.e. that the main core of ancient Armenian religion was Iranian origin.<sup>20</sup> For this reason the author step by step compares Armenian and Iranian images, cults, rites in order to conclude that the most characteristic feature of the religion of Armenians was its allegedly Iranian origin. Holding this position, he does not set itself a task to find out local Armenian core, free it from layering and shells, true or attributed. Like Gelzer, he mentions only the god Smanor(?), i.e. Amanor<sup>21</sup> of Agatangelos and the Aralezes (winged dog-headed deities) are recognized as

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 100, 147.

<sup>16</sup> H. Gelzer, Loc.cit, p. 132-133, 147.

<sup>17</sup> Agatangelos, § 150 (translation: V. Langlois, Collection des historiens de l'Armenie, t. I. Paris, 1868).

<sup>18</sup> H. Gelzer, Loc.cit., p. 147-148.

<sup>19</sup> R.R.Shtakelberg, About Iranian influence on the religious beliefs of ancient Armenians, Works of the Eastern Commission of the Moscow archaeological society (Eastern antiquities), v. II, issue II, Moscow, 1901.

<sup>20</sup> Indeed, here R.R.Shtakelberg uses the term “Iranian” in its broader sense, like “Iranian languages”, but not in its narrow sense meaning only Persia.

<sup>21</sup> By R.R.Shtakelberg it turned out “Smanor” instead of “Amanor” since in the Armenian alphabet the capital letter S-U is very similar to A-U.

Armenian deities.<sup>22</sup> He does not agree with N.O.Emin who accepts some relationship between the “religion of pagan Armenians with Zoroastrianism but rejects the borrowing of Armenian gods”.<sup>23</sup> This correct point of view of N.O.Emin shares N.Adontz who mentions that Armenian sources give reason to assert that for ancient Armenians was stranger the cult of Iranian gods, and were known only Iranian names.<sup>24</sup>

Among books published during the last decade first of all must be named the studies of G.A.Kapancyan, particularly his voluminous work “The cult of Ara the Handsome”,<sup>25</sup> “Hittite gods by Armenians”,<sup>26</sup> where he raises the question of the “genesis of Armenian pantheon in general”, and corresponding chapters of “Hayasa – the cradle of Armenians (ethnogenesis of Armenians and their primary history)”.<sup>27</sup>

The study “Hittite gods by Armenians” is wider than promises its title since it consists of two main chapters - “Hittite gods by Armenians” and “Iranian gods by Armenians”. The first chapter where as “Hittite” is named “all the common that is connected with ancient cultural world of Asia Minor and part of the Near East”, is of great interest; here for the first time are revealed ancient roots of certain religious beliefs of Armenians, roots that are common for them and for those peoples of Asia Minor with whom they were connected since ancient times. This part is a great contribution in the history of culture of ancient Armenia.

The second chapter “Iranian gods by Armenians” (Anahit, Nane, Aramazd, Mihr, Tir, Vahagn) causes some confusion; judging by its title and the list of gods, the main Armenian pantheon in its totality, like R.R.Stakelberg, is recognized as Iranian. But in practice the main Armenian gods in this chapter also are considered by the author from the point of view of local origin, besides that, are traced modifications undergone during the period when the historical situation first pushed against Iran then brought closer to it and its culture, when Armenian gods who had similar functions with one or the other Iranian deities were assigned with Iranian names. G.A.Kapancyan gave to this chapter a name which does not fully correspond to its actual content. It would be more correct to entitle as “Armenian gods who received Iranian names”, and show in addition how the local Armenian deities in certain historical situation and corresponding social environment got closer to Iranian gods at the same time preserving their content and image of Armenian deities; in fact “the gods of every individual people were national gods whose authority did not go beyond borders of national region which they protected”, as wrote F.Engels.<sup>28</sup>

In the study “Hayasa – the cradle of Armenians” G.A.Kapancyan holds the same terms, i.e. he speaks about Hittite gods in Armenia and Iranian gods, but at the same

<sup>22</sup> R.R.Shtakelberg, Loc.cit., p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> N. Adontz, *Histoire arménienne*, vol. I, Paris, 1946, p. 391.

<sup>25</sup> The book was published in Yerevan in 1945 in Armenian.

<sup>26</sup> Yerevan State University publication, Yerevan, 1940 (in Russian).

<sup>27</sup> Academy of Sciences of Armenian SSR publication, Yerevan, 1947.

<sup>28</sup> F.Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach, K.Marx and F.Engels, *Studies*, v. XIV, p. 674.

time quite clearly sets out his main thesis when he speaks about Iranian and Semitic names of gods, but “by contents are hidden and figure ancient local deities and cults ...”<sup>29</sup>

That in the process of formation of Armenian people took place hybridization and assimilation of tribes, spoke still in the V century Movses Khorenatsi,<sup>30</sup> when setting himself a task to write the history of “our people, kings, and nakharar clans and families who [descended] from whom, what each one them did, and which of various tribes [is] indigenous [literary “domestic”, i.e. “local”] and native, and which are of foreign origin but naturalized [lit. domesticated]”.<sup>31</sup>

It is about the period when Armenian people was being formed and when some Median and Iranian tribes also were assimilated with Armenians and when Armenian language was enriched at the expense of lexicon of these Iranian tribes. S.T.Yeremyan who traces the paths of the formation of Armenian language mentions that, among other things, “the hardest task is to reveal borrowed words from Old Persian and Median languages, since a significant part of Armenian-Iranian lexical correspondences occurred at the expense of those Median and partly Persian tribes who were assimilated with Armenians contributing to the vocabulary and grammar of Armenian language. It is a serious task which should solve Armenologists-linguists. They will appear in a completely new light “Iranian” religious pantheon of ancient Armenians and many such “Iranian” factors in the field of culture and superstructure phenomena in general”.<sup>32</sup>

After the review of main studies dedicated to ancient beliefs and cults of Armenia it should be mentioned that a summarizing study dedicated to the history of religion of ancient Armenians has not been written yet. Such study is necessary in the construction of which should be considered the fundamentals of F.Engels: “All religions of antiquity were primal-tribal, and later national religions which emerged from social and political conditions of each people and were closely intermingled with them”.<sup>33</sup>

It should be mentioned also that in none of the listed studies dedicated to religious beliefs of ancient Armenians was not made an attempt to sort through the great number of deities, demigods, *devs*, and ghosts whose names has reached us but whose nature in most cases remain unknown. The impression is obtained that all these deities were worshipped simultaneously by all population groups at the same period and on the same territory, which in fact, indeed, was not the case and could not be.

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<sup>29</sup> G.A.Kapancyan, *Hayasa – the cradle of Armenians*, Yerevan, 1948, p. 98.

<sup>30</sup> Movses Khorenatsi, Book I, Ch. 3 (transl. of I.A.Orbeli).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. also N.O.Emin, *The History of Armenia of Movses Khorenatsi*, p. 221, n. 5.

<sup>32</sup> S.T.Yeremyan, *Towards the ethnogenesis of Armenians*, p. 105.

<sup>33</sup> F.Engels, *Bruno Bauer and early Christianity*, K.Marx and F.Engels, *Studies*, vol. XV, p. 607.



The goal of this essay, as it was mentioned, is not the study of religious beliefs of ancient Armenians in its entirety; here should be discussed briefly only the question of the cult of Mithra since to that deity was dedicated, in all probability, the temple at Garni.

G.A.Kapancyan regards Mithra as being one of Iranian gods and thinks that he displaced the local god Ardi.<sup>34</sup> G.A.Kapancyan's clarification that in Armenia under Iranian names "are hidden and existed local deities", undoubtedly regards to Mithra also.

The problem of the origin of Mithra generally is more complicated as it may seem in a cursory look. As it is known, in Achaemenid Iran he is mentioned for first time around 400 BC. In the "Gathas" – oldest part of the Avesta, Mithra is absent at all, but a "Median god Mithra" was known already in the VII century BC, according to the presence of his name in the list of gods which was found in the library of Ashshurbanipal.<sup>35</sup> But before that, in the mid-II millennium BC the name of Mithra is mentioned in the treaties between the Hittite king and the country of Mitanni,<sup>36</sup> by which we have the right to conclude that this god was worshipped by the peoples of the Near East since ancient times,<sup>37</sup> which is quite natural taking into account his solar life-giving nature. In some periods and by some peoples he changed his name, his cult image, thus there is no reason to regard him as Iranian god.

The name of "Mithra" mainly accompanies the solar deity by the peoples of Asia Minor and Mesopotamia<sup>38</sup> (I leave aside the problem of Mithra in India and Central Asia which goes beyond the scope of this brief essay).

In the numerous pantheon of Urartian gods we did not find the name of Mithra, and here the Sun-god has a name Ardi. In Armenian milieu this name (in the form Mihr or Mehr)<sup>39</sup> the earliest mention of Mithra's name occurs in the second century BC Greek inscription of Armavir; A.I.Boltunova and Ya.A.Manandyan took it as the name of Armenian king, but it is hardly possible to arrive at such conclusion taking into account the fragmented state of the inscription and ambiguity of its content. But the very fact of the existence of Mithra's name (in the form of Μίθρας) in the II millennium Armavir inscription proves that not later than the II century BC, as it was mentioned above, and not earlier than the IV century BC to the ancient local god Ardi was given the name Mithra-Mihr.

<sup>34</sup> G.A.Kapancyan, Loc.cit., p. 59.

<sup>35</sup> N. S. Nyberg, *Religion der alten Iranier*, Leipzig, 1938, p. 334.

<sup>36</sup> B. Hrozný, *Histoire de l'Asie antérieure*, Paris, 1947. — P. E. Dumont, *Journ. Amer. Orient. Soc.*, № 67, 1947, p. 251.

<sup>37</sup> V.V.Struve pointed it out to me that the name of some Syrian Mtršme mentioned in one Egyptian text, probably of the XIX century BC, must be interpreted as "Mithra heard" which indicates on the worship of Mithra in the XIV century BC also by the Semitic speaking people (M. Burchardt, *Die altkanaanäischen Fremdwörter u. Eigennamen im Aegyptischen*, 1909, P. II, p. 29, № 544).

<sup>38</sup> About the cult of Mithra in Asia Minor and Mesopotamia see: E. Wüst, *Mithra*, PWK, and also Fr. Cumont, Loc.cit., vol. I, p 9; vol. II, p. 76f. and 464f.

<sup>39</sup> G.A. Kapancyan, *Hittite gods by Armenians*, p. 59: "Mihr, originating from ancient Miura".

The main data which let one to speak about special honor enjoyed the Sun-god by Armenians existed in the study of Movses Khorenatsi. There is said that the semi-mythical king Vagharshak “erected a temple in Armavir where he placed statues of Sun and Moon and his ancestors ...”.<sup>40</sup> In this text attention is drawn to the fact that the historian, speaking about the cult of the Sun-god in ancient times, does not call him Mithra but uses one of his local names – Aregakn. These statues of Sun and Moon were destined to be repeatedly displaced.

Further Movses Khorenatsi tells that the king Yervand, transferring his capital city to the newly built Yervandashat, “to the north of it he built a smaller city similar to his own on the River Akhuryan and called it Bagaran which means “there are placed altars”, and moved there all gods of Armavir. And having built temples he appointed his own brother Yervaz as chief priest”.<sup>41</sup>

In this story should focus on the name of the new city – Bagaran which in text of Khorenatsi is treated as the next: “here he erected altars” (in Armenian *bagin*).

According to some scholars, the root *bag* is one of the oldest Iranian names of the god Mithra,<sup>42</sup> but maybe in those times this word already denoted the concept of “god”: Bagastana in Persia, Bagadania in Cappadocia, Bagaïos in Phrygia etc.,<sup>43</sup> which correspond to Armenian Bagaran.

When at the beginning of the II century BC Artashes I became king and built a new capital city Artashat, according to Movses Khorenatsi he “erected there a temple and transferred to it from Bagaran the statue of Artemis and all gods of his ancestors, but the statue of Apollo put up outside the city on the (big) road”.<sup>44</sup> In this information of the historian is spoken about the statues of the same two deities which were mentioned in connection with the temple of Armavir, namely the Sun and Moon but it is remarkable that, speaking about the II century BC, he does not call them by their Armenian names (Aregakn and Lusin), but perhaps, taking into account the familiarity of Armenians with Hellenic culture in that period or following his source, uses Classical names – Apollo and Artemis.

As it is known, already in the times of Euripides began to identify Apollo with the Sun-god Helios and after Apollo-Helios with Mithra about which testify the Greek inscriptions of Antiochus of Commagene whose family, by the way, stemmed himself back to Yervandunis. The tomb of this king on the mound of Nemrut-dağ<sup>45</sup> is decorated with colossal statues of Aramazd-Zeus, Apollo-Mithra-Helios-Hermes (as it is stated in the inscription), the king Antiochus himself and Commagene – the goddess of the country. Besides that, there are also three reliefs on which the king depicted himself, in

<sup>40</sup> Movses Khorenatsi, Book II, Ch. 8.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., Ch. 40.

<sup>42</sup> H. S. Nyberg, Loc.cit., p. 353.

<sup>43</sup> See „baga“ - PWK.

<sup>44</sup> Movses Khorenatsi, Book II, Ch. 49 (About the temple of Apollo outside the city see p. 57). By Emin here is wrongly translated as „at a distance“.

<sup>45</sup> K. Humann und O. Puchstein, Reisen in Kleinasien und Nordsyrien, Berlin, 1890, p. 281ff.

one case along with Aramazd-Zeus, on the next one with Veretragna-Heracles, and on the third – with Mithra-Helios. Is of special interest the relief where Antiochus is depicted with Mithra;<sup>46</sup> on the backside of the relief is engraved an inscription:<sup>47</sup>

Βασιλεύς μέγας Αντίοχος  
θεός δίκαιος έπιφανής  
φιλορώμαιος και φιλέλλην  
ό εγ βασιλέως Μιθραδάτου  
Καλλινίκου και βασιλίσσης  
Λαοδίκης Θεας Φιλαδέλφ[ης]  
’Απόλλωνα Μίθρην ’Ηλιον  
’Ερμην

“Great king Antiochus, god, righteous, glorious, friend of Romans, friend of Greeks [from the family] of the king Mithradates Callinicus and the queen Laodike – the ... [honored or erected] statues of Apollo-Mithra-Helios-Hermes”.

On this inscription Mithra, like on two similar inscriptions carved on the mentioned statues, also bears the names of Apollo and Helios which vividly illustrates the culture of the peoples of Asia Minor and neighboring countries of that period when attempt to reconcile religions of the East and West elaborated these syncretic images.

On the turn of the I century BC and I century AD Strabo, speaking about the cult of the Sun-god by the Persians, clarifies: “’Ηλιον δν καλούσι Μίθραν<sup>48</sup> “Helios whom they call Mithra”. Dedicatory inscriptions which are found in the Mithreums and studied in the work of Cumont, usually declare: ‘’Ηλίω Μίθρα ανικήτω “To Helios-Mithra invincible”.<sup>49</sup>

At the end of the II century AD in one of the texts Clement of Rome is told about names by which the pagans call their gods and among them he mentions also ‘Απόλλωνα τον ’ήλιον . . . γονην οντα του Διος, ον και Μίθραν έκάλεσαν..., that is “of Apollo-Helios ... originating from Zeus, whom along with Mithra they call ...”.

In view of the above, we can conclude that, the image of Mithra, still in the I century BC merged with the god Helios-Apollo, as is seen in the inscription of Antiochus of Commagene, in the II century AD continue to be perceived under this threefold appellation.<sup>50</sup> But it does not follow from this that Mithra was absorbed by Helios-Apollo, that he had lost his significance as one of the supreme Armenian deities: “National gods could tolerate other national gods by them, and in the antiquity this was common, but by no means above them”, points F.Engels.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Tab. XXXVIII, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 321.

<sup>48</sup> Strabo, Book XV, Ch. 3, 13.

<sup>49</sup> Fr. Cumont, Loc.cit., v. II, p. 106, № 75 and p. 119, № 149.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. F. Saxl, Mithras, p. 77-78.

<sup>51</sup> F.Engels, Bruno Bauer and early Christianity, K.Marx and F.Engels, Studies, vol. XV, p. 607.

Agatangelos tells about Mithra in the story how at the end the III century AD, converting Christianity, Gregory the Illuminator was destroying temples and statues of ancient Armenian gods, mostly that of Aramazd, Anahit, and Mihr.

About the temple of the latter and other mentioned gods Agatangelos (in the Armenian text of his study) tells how Gregory the Illuminator proceeded “to the temple of Mihr whom call the son of Aramazd, in the city of Bagaric in the language of Parthians, and destroyed it to the ground. He gave the treasures to the poor, and lands dedicated to the church”.<sup>52</sup>

From this story it becomes clear that Mihr was regarded as the son of Aramazd. We are not intended to focus on the name and origin of Aramazd in this essay, we just want to notice that in the image of this god under its Iranian name “was hidden and existed” an ancient local god which is named by Eusebius (in the Greek text and its V century AD Armenian translation) as Bel-Aramazd-Zeus on the territory of Armenia, perhaps eventually assending to ancient Hayk.

Returning to Agatangelos’s text should be mentioned the second essential argument, the name of the city where the temple was located – Bagaric (containing the same term “baga”),<sup>53</sup> which is called by Parthian word in the study of Agatangelos. In the Greek text of Agatangelos in this passage instead of Mithra figures “Hephaestus son of Zeus”. The presence of Hephaestus, one of the Greek gods here, probably, could be explained by the fact that translator was aware of Mithra’s multiple names and his identification with Helios-Apollo-Hermes, and since he wrote or translated the text from the Armenian into Greek, apparently he considered it necessary to change the name of the god with Greek equivalent. Perhaps, here we deal with the continuation of the same phenomenon which is mentioned in the Greek inscription of Trdat I found in Garni where at the beginning of the text the name of Mithra is replaced by Helios.

The possibility of other explanation is not excluded, i.e. that in Bagaric the image of Mithra actually was intermingled with image of the god-blacksmith Hephaestus who also was connected with fire. In fact, we find Hephaestus not only by the Greek translator of Agatangelos, Movses Khorenatsi also speaks about him in the story Tigran II’s dealings who had put a statue of Hephaestus in Bagaric.<sup>54</sup> If in this case we do not deal with copying from one author by other, then, it is possible that Movses Khorenatsi speaks about the statue which was destroyed along with the temple during the spread of Christianity.

Concerning the issue of Mithra’s temples we shall note that the temples of this god in the East, particularly in Armenia are significantly different from the temples-crypts, the so-called Mithraeums in Rome and Western provinces of Rome. This could be explained by the fact that in the West Mithraism was alien phenomenon brought by

<sup>52</sup> Agatangelos, § 134 (V. Langlois, Collection des historiens anciens: et modernes de l’Armenie, t. I, Paris, 1868).

<sup>53</sup> About the worship of the Sun-god Mihr “in the place Baga-aric (literary – “settlement of the god”) in the province of Derjan (modern Mamakhatun) on the Euphrates River“; cf. G.A.Kapancyan, Hayasa – the cradle of Armenians, p. 86.

<sup>54</sup> Movses Khorenatsi, Book II, Ch.14.

returning Roman soldiers, hence his cult could not display local, consecrated by tradition peculiarities in architecture and rites, as it was in Eastern countries. From this point of view western Mithraeums and eastern temples of Mithra were not studied yet. We can say only that in the East also Mithra's temples differ from each other by some specific peculiarities in relation to historical situation where they came into existence, from local building traditions of one or the other people. A vivid illustration of this are the temples of Mithra in Dura-Europos (Mesopotamia) and in Niha (Syria).

The temple of Dura-Europos is closer to western Mithraeums but it still is different from them in that it is a terrestrial temple (without crypts) and the architecture of its cultic niche had slightly different appearance (a staircase and door leading to the niche which separates niche with the relief from general hall).<sup>55</sup> Roman legions located at Dura-Europos (IV Scythica, XVI Flavia Firma, III Cyrenaica etc.) who were restoring the temple and who had left their inscriptions in the Mithraeum<sup>56</sup> in other buildings were participants of the spread of Mithraism in the West where this "soldier's religion" quickly has taken root, but its external layout of the cult, since it was brought from outside, took those standard shapes which are seen in the Mithraeums of Germany, Italy, France, England, Switzerland etc.

The temples of Mithra in the West were not only different from luxurious temples of Garni, Niha and Perge<sup>57</sup> built by different kings of Armenia, Syria, and Asia Minor in terms of quality, they were distinguished also by their social content and class assignment. Temples built of stone with columns and sculptural decoration were erected by kings and his entourage and served him and his court, and ordinary Mithraeums of the West were built of mud brick and serve wide scope of population and Roman legionnaires as well. The ideological content which was invested into the cult of Mithra by both of them also didn't match.

Returning to the cult of Mithra in Armenia it should be specified that there are reasons to assume that in Garni since ancient times existed a temple dedicated to the Sun-god (first – Ardi, then Aregakn, and finally Mihr), and that by his return from Rome Trdat I re-built the temple destroyed during the invasion of Corbulo.<sup>58</sup> We can hardly make a mistake suggesting the first temple and that of Trdat by its general forms were connected with local building traditions.

Turning to the question of Mithra's image we can only express kind or another assumptions since none of the sculptures of Mithra reached us, but we are hopeful that archaeological finds could prove the information of Movses Khorenatsi, Agatangelos, and Plinius and other authors.

Judging by statues and figures on the reliefs along with bull found in western Mithraeums we are aware that the main "escorts" or assistants of Mithra were demigod

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<sup>55</sup> Excavations at Dura-Europos, Report of 1933-1935, p. 85.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., Report of 1932-1933, p. 77-78, № 630.

<sup>57</sup> Ch. Lanckoronski . . . , Loc.cit., vol. I, p. 58, Pic. 39 and p. 65, Pic. 48.

<sup>58</sup> A.A.Sahinyan, The basilica of Kasakh, Yerevan, 1951, p. 20-21.

of the Classical titan Atlas, and beside that a polymorphic creature defined as Zrvan<sup>59</sup> (i.e. Time – titan Chronos).

“Atlas” on the reliefs of Mithra with bull usually is depicted on the bottom left side in the form of a figure down on one knee and with both raised hands supporting some weight above his head. Similar Atlases are depicted also on the reliefs decorating the pylons of Garni temple as it is mentioned in detail in corresponding chapter. What role had played this Atlas in the local Armenian mythology and what was his name here, unfortunately we could not find out since there is no available data. The same could be said also about Zrvan whose statues are found in numerous western Mithraeums – it is an old lion-headed man having four wings whose body is wrapped by a snake.<sup>60</sup> His statues are found only in western Mithraeums but pictorial image depicting an old man with stick existed in the temple at Dura-Europos.<sup>61</sup> Was there in Armenian mythology any connection with Mihr and Zrvan who is mentioned by Movses Khorenatsi and Eznik, we don't know (in Classical mythology Atlas and Chronos are brothers).

In this essay I will not dwell on very interesting historical-cultural problems regarding the connections of Mithraism with Manichaeism and also Christianity, I will point out only one detail – the cited by Ełishe words of Christian episcopos who, it turns out, still in the V century were forced to dispute the omnipotence of Mihr and who expressed doubts about the fact that this god born of earthly woman, however, was king and son of the god.<sup>62</sup> Similar features of Mihr and Christ maybe made it easier the transition from the cult of Mithra into the cult of Christ when inculcators of new religion at the beginning were looking for beneficial elements in ancient local cults for their propaganda.

But even after the adoption of Christianity in Armenia Mihr was not forgotten by Armenian people, but continue to live in folk epic bifurcated into the images of Elder Mher and Lesser Mher, as it was already mentioned.<sup>63</sup> The name Mher reveals the essence of this mythical epic hero ascending to the image of the god Mihr who to that date was expelled from his temples by the Christians. The connection between Mher and Mihr-Mithra in the epic is proved by two details. On all reliefs of Mithra and in Mithraic hymns is depicted the struggle of Mithra-Sun with the darkness appearing in the image of a bull, and in the epic, as it is known, Elder Mher kills the black bull who is connected with evil *devs*. Some rites connected with the cult of Mithra originally should have been performed in the cave, grotto, or in the crypt, dark apartment under the floor

<sup>59</sup> Fr. Cumont, Loc.cit., vol. II, p. 259, Pic. 96. – K.V.Trever, The reflexion in the art of the Zoroastrian dualistic concept, Studies of the Eastern Department of State Hermitage, vol. I, 1939, p. 244ff., Tab. III-IV.

<sup>60</sup> Fr. Cumont, Loc.cit., vol. II, p. 259, Pic. 96ff.

<sup>61</sup> Mesnil du Buisson, Gaz. des Beaux-Arts, Janvier 1935, p. 12, Pic. 12.

<sup>62</sup> Ełishe, Ch. II.

<sup>63</sup> I.A.Orbeli, Davit of Sassoun, Moscow-Leningrad, Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 1939. Preface, p. XXIII-XXIV, – K.Melik-Ohanjanyan, Mithra – Mihr in the Sassoun epic, Literary-philological study, Academy of Sciences of Armenian SSR, vol.I, 1946, p. 269ff.

of the temple, and in the epic, as we know, Lesser Mher walked away into the rock and stayed in the cave.

In Armenian the word “temple” ascends to the name of Mher where it sounds as “mehean”;<sup>64</sup> in ancient Armenian calendar one of the months was named after Mher – “mehekan” (in Old Georgian calendar to this month corresponds “mihraikan-i”) and one of the days of the month “mihra”; with the name of Mihr were sealed oath contracts. The reflexion of his cult is also quadriga on which the Sun-god goes around the sky which is depicted on the coins of Artavazd II,<sup>65</sup> and also the depiction of horse (by Xenophon – dedicated to the Sun-god)<sup>66</sup> on the coins of Tigran IV at the end of the I century BC.<sup>67</sup> Especially clear is the connection with the cult of Mithra is depicted on the coins of Tigran II, whose tiara is decorated with the Symbols of the Sun-god – rosette and two eagles on both sides,<sup>68</sup> and also on the relief from Hatra (Northern Mesopotamia, I-II centuries AD), on which are depicted radiant head of the Sun-god and eagles on both sides.<sup>69</sup>

It seems to me that such explanation is possible, absolutely regardless of various groundless semantic comparisons which are extant in some of my previous studies where I had tried, based on N.Ya.Marr’s “stadial semantics”, to reveal the semantic meaning of one or the other fabulous or mythical image. I.V.Stalin’s work “Marxism and problems of linguistics” which had revealed deep fallacy of the “new theory of language” led me to the perception that the semantic clusters of N.Ya.Marr torn off in each given cases from specific reality can only lead away from the possibility of perception and explanation of one or the other image in cultural monuments, one or the other term or name which are kept in the people’s memory through oral tradition. Accepting the “stadial semantics” I had overlooked the fact that the existence of semantic connection does not mean overlapping of concepts which on the basis of “paleontology of speech” I have compared diachronic phenomena outside of their historical setting.

Let me return to the cult of Mithra in Armenia.

Armenian kings, as it is seen through cited passages, emphasize their connection with Mihr and did worship exactly him as their tutelary god, as long as we can assume by the mentioned above story of Cassius Dio about the meeting of Trdat with Nero when Armenian king says the next words: “I came to you, to my god, like Mithra”.<sup>70</sup> Through the mouth of Armenian king here is named his god. Therefore, it seems quite natural to assume that Trdat, as it was said above, by his return built in his residency at Garni a temple of his tutelary god Mihr, not for any other one.

<sup>64</sup> G.A. Kapancyan, Hittite gods by Armenians, p. 60.

<sup>65</sup> V. Langlois, Numismatique de l’Arménie dans l’antiquité, Paris, 1859, Tab. III, 1.

<sup>66</sup> Xenophon, Anabasis, Book IV, Ch. 5.

<sup>67</sup> E.Babelon, Rois de la Syrie, d’Arménie et de Commagène, Paris, 1890, Tab. XXIX, 20.

<sup>68</sup> Loc.cit., Tab. XXIX, 8-9, 15.

<sup>69</sup> W. Andrae, Hatra, Leipzig, 1908, Bd. I, Tab. XI; Pic. 20, Pic. 32.

<sup>70</sup> Cassius Dio, Book 63, Ch. 5, 2.

As to survival trails of Mihr's cult in the Armenian epic "David of Sassoun", to this problem is devoted the article of K.Melik-Ohanjanyan;<sup>71</sup> he discovered in the epic traces of morning and evening dawn, Sun-god's companions, and traces of Mihr in the images of Elder Mher and Younger Mher to whom in the tales was divided the former unified Sun-god.

The statue of Aregakn-Apollo-Mihr about whom is written by Movses Khorenatsi and Agatangelos, perhaps were completely destroyed during the adoption of Christianity, thus none of them have come down to us, neither completely nor in fragmentary state.

But we don't know also whether the statues of Mihr in Armenia stood only inside the temples or also in open air, on high ground like in Pontus (on the cliff near Trebizont)<sup>72</sup> or in Commagene (Nemrut dağ) where in both western and eastern terraces there were statues of sitting Mithra;<sup>73</sup> the god's figure is aggregately executed but the head of the young god in pointed capis distinguished by the subtlety of modeling.

In this regard two interesting references of Mithra are contained in the dialogues of Lucian, the I century AD Greek satiric author, "Voltaire of Classical antiquity who applied to all religious superstitions equally skeptically", as he was characterized by F.Engels.<sup>74</sup> In the dialogue "Tragic Zeus" it is told that when Zeus ordered Hermes to place the summoned gods by "their wealth, not by nobility of their origin", it appears that on top positions can count only "barbarian gods" made of gold, whereas Hellenic gods made of marble, bronze, ivory, and wood could occupy back rows. Hermes resented: "Here are these Bendida, Anubis and Attis, and next to them Mithra and Men are completely made of gold, they are heavy and really are valuable".<sup>75</sup>

Stories of Pliny, Agatangelos and others about "golden statues" of Armenian gods usually is assumed as legend, but Lucian's text, apparently proves and explains in part why these statues couldn't reach us.

Even more interesting is the passage from other dialogue of Lucian "The Parliament of the Gods" (par.9) where it is told about the filling of Olympus by barbarian gods among which is named also "Mithra in Persian cloths and with tiara, who doesn't even speak Greek and couldn't understand when they drink to his health". These words are a kind of illustration to the relief from Nemrut dag where next to the king is depicted young Mithra, exactly "in Persian cloths and tiara", that is completely from that on the reliefs with bulls.

***Translated from the Russian by Aram Kosyan***

<sup>71</sup> K.Melik-Ohanjanyan, Loc.cit., p. 269-327.

<sup>72</sup> Fr. Cumont, Loc.cit., vol. II, p. 55.

<sup>73</sup> K. Humann und O. Puchstein, Loc.cit., vol Loc.cit.,. II, Tab. XXXVIff.

<sup>74</sup> F.Engels, On the history of early Christianity, K. Marx and F. Engels, Studies, vol. XVI, Part. II, p. 411.

<sup>75</sup> Lucian, Loc.cit., Loc.cit., Tragic Zeus, 8.