

Ayvazyan, Armen, *Hayastani Patmutyan Lusabanume Amerikyan Patmagrutyan Mej* (Knnakan Tesutyun), Erevan: "Artagers" hratarakhchutyun, 1998.

"A mind is a terrible thing to waste." This slogan, long ago created in the United States for laudable purposes by the United Negro College fund, is the perfect description of this reviewer's feelings after reading this "critical examination" twice. The author is obviously intelligent, but just as disaffected and seemingly disenfranchised citizens perpetrate acts of political violence, just so does Ayvazyan spew forth intellectual terrorism.

The editors of this journal thought with some justice that a dialogue concerning the present state of Armenian Studies was needed and that the work under review would serve to lead to a fresh discourse on this vital topic. I concurred (too hastily as it turned out) before I had had the chance to read the book.

Let there be no mistake, however: this is not a work of scholarship. It is a polemic and, as such, deserves no scholarly response. Yet a commitment is worth nothing unless it is honored, so herewith random and general comments. Ayvazyan restricts himself to an assessment of the present state of Armenian historiography in particular, not of Armenian studies in general. He is quick to maintain in his "Erku khosk" that he has spent time in the United States, and is, therefore, qualified to pontificate on the scholarly work done in it, and that "I have many American friends, whom I honor and love" (page 6). In other words, "Some of my best friends are American." One comes away with the feeling, though, that his main source of disgruntlement is that we, unschooled and deprived American Armenians, did not have the good sense to fall at the feet of the master and dutifully worship the bearer of the truth. It is also obvious that while in America either he chose not to take the opportunity to study critical historiographical methods or he rejected them out of hand. Either richly demonstrates how he squandered his time.

In the crosshairs of his armament are names such as Nina Garsoian, Robert Thomson, Ronald Suny, Cyril Toumanoff, and yours truly, who is honored to be included in their midst. For daring to defend freedom of expression and thought in scholarly pursuits, Richard G. Hovannisian is drawn into our midst in the book and in subsequent attacks. [See, for instance, "Amerikyan Hayagitutyun Nvachunner", *Iravunk* 27 (256) (April 13-19 1999), p. 7.]

Ayvazyan, however, rather surprisingly indicates that he cannot recognize an historian, for some whom he praises are not and nor do they even claim to be (and have admitted in private to being embarrassed by his praise).

In 1991, the African American conservative jurist, Clarence Thomas, was nominated by the then Republican President, George Bush, to sit on the Supreme Court - the highest court of the land. Thomas' beliefs ran counter to the liberal views prevalent in African American circles, and his confirmation hearings in the United States Congress indicated his nomination was in trouble until he converted those with views antithetical to his own by likening the proceedings to a "high-tech lynching." The word "lynching" was evocative of the days when among the arsenal of despicable terrorist acts perpetrated by whites against blacks lynching was the predominant symbol. Deeply imbued feelings overcame rational thought.



Ayvazyan is not above employing the same technique with, it seems, similar results, for the chief accusation hurled against the degenerate American historians of the Armenian past is that we are, at best, "anti-Armenian," and, at worst, "pro-Turkish." This invective, totally untrue and outside the boundaries of scholarly discourse, has, it seems, found a following both in narrowly defined circles in the Republic of Armenia and, for multiple political and chauvinistic reasons, in certain diasporan circles outside. It also absolves the reader from any responsibility to take seriously and investigate seemingly cogent points made in his book. He has negated these potentially valid points by his manner and methodology.

More than one diasporan scholar who had been invited to participate in a conference held in Erevan in September of 1998 on the origins of Armenian Christianity returned aghast at being told that they were welcomed to believe whatever date they thought feasible for the Christianization of the homeland, but, as it had been decided among scholars in Armenia that the official date was 301 AD, they were thus expected to publish only that date in their individual works.

Ayvazyan follows this insane and totally ignorant precept that history is determined democratically and must be applied in a totalitarian fashion. Those who follow the canon of beliefs authorized by the fatherland are praised. Those who do not are enemies of the state and of the people.

Such a hypothesis is a slap in the face of the great Armenian scholars of the past Levon Khachikyan, Babken Chukaszian, Hakob Papazian, Gagik Sargsyan, Hakob Manandyan, Aram Ter Ghevondyan, and others, many of whom, though of great international stature, were never invited to join the ranks of the moribund Armenian Academy of Sciences, which, though home to some fine scholars, nevertheless seems to admit others on the basis not of what they know or what they have produced, but rather who they know, how acceptable their theories and political stance are, and what help they have been. This is true yet today. For fear of unintentionally omitting one name, I will not begin to list the many accomplished scholars of international stature who are toiling under conditions which would drive many of us in the West to abandon scholarly pursuits. That their fine works languish unpublished, while books such as Ayvazyan's are published, is proof that the market is being flooded in Armenia by vanity publications, i.e., those published without review only because the author or his close associates have at their disposal a source of private funding.

Let me state categorically: Ayvazyan has not and will not tarnish among Diaspora scholars the worth and renown of the many excellent Armenists of the Republic.

I must go on to ask what exactly is "Mer hayots patmutian," (OUR Armenian history) which is everywhere extolled in the pages of this diatribe? Does ancient Greek history belong to the Greeks? Do biblical studies belong to the Israelis? To be effective, history belongs to no one. It is also not a finished narration. It is a constant "inquiry." Yet Ayvazyan and others schooled to write history in the principles of old seem to be unable to inquire outside the confines of a theoretic matrix. In the past, it was political indoctrination. Today, it is chauvinistic.

In 1965, the Azerbaijani academician [sic!] Z. Buniatov corrupted texts, history, maps and whatever in his *Azerbaidzhan v VII-LX vv. (Azerbaijan in the 7th-11th Centuries)*, in an attempt to prove, inter alia, that the Azeris today were not Turks but rather the Turkified native population of the **land** and that the Armenians were nefarious interlopers. On the basis of his historical chicanery, an ahistorical school of Azerbaijani studies flourished and continues to do so to this day. I am sad to admit that,

predominantly in the Republic of Armenia, a similar "Buniatovakan Dprots," i.e. Buniatovistic school of Armenology is flourishing as well.

One can amply demonstrate that such insanity in the field of Armenian history exists in the Diaspora. Witness, for example, Vrej Nercessian's similar methodology and bag of tricks in his attack against many of these same scholars which was unfortunately allowed to be published in volume 9 (1996/1997) of the *Journal of the Society of Armenian Studies* ("The Art of the Interpreter," pp. 125-134). These and similar works are all "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Unfortunately, the lay person reading such unfounded accusations often let their presuppositions and personal sentiments guide their intellect.

This reviewer is certainly not above criticizing the scholarly work of his peers and can withstand the "slings and arrows" of similar intelligent critiques. There is no utility in studying a field if there is no resulting exchange of ideas and corrections of perceptions. It is tone; it is vocabulary; it is integrity; it is intellect. These are the tried and true characteristics, which are virtually, absent in Ayvazyan's work.

I could continue in this vein but frankly, too many bytes have been expended already in discussing a work which should have been left to oblivion. I join the editors in hoping that at some time an intelligent dialogue will commence on the present condition and future of Armenian history. Ayvazyan has given us nothing which would I exchange. Allow me to let the brilliant American political cartoon character Pogo, of late and lamented fame, have the last word about Ayvazyan's self-serving publication: "We have met the enemy, and he is us."

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