

WRITING THE ARMENIAN HISTORY

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Abstract

In academic studies and textbooks, the history of Armenia is entitled the "History of Armenians" or the "History of Armenian people". Like other modern nations such attitude could better fit those ethnic groups who never had statehood during their history. In the case of Armenia everything is turned upside down.

Keywords: History of Armenia, N.Adontz, Movses Khorenatsi

The "History of Armenia" or the "History of Armenian People"

In academic studies, University and school textbooks published during the XX century and until recently, almost without exception, the Armenian history is entitled the "History of Armenians" or the "History of Armenian people". At first glance, it looks perfect. All these publications deal with the ancient, medieval or/and modern history of our country. Such terminology which originates still from Movses Khorenatsi and his successors in the late XVIII century was adopted by M.Chamchyan. But on the contrary, it contains an element of inferiority and the distortion of the status of our history. In this regard only the studies of G.Khalatyan, N.Adontz, R.Grousset and A. et J.-P.Mahé differ from the widespread attitude.¹

There is no nation without the territory where it used to live, lives currently and will live in the future. Statehood is an important criterion and driving force of the nation, its consolidation which secures further development, an important factor that distinguishes the nation from other nations. Historical analogies show that from the moment when the nation, due to the rise of statehood and spiritual-cultural values (political and social institutions, writing system, and religion), is becoming an independent and separable unit, regardless of the existence of statehood in the future is destined to exist.

On the other hand, the nation without statehood would remain an ethnic group with no chance to develop into a nation that creates its own state. This means that ethnos is a social-political, cultural, and civilizational phenomenon. In the remote past and in Middle Ages as well numerous ethnic groups had left the historical arena and were assimilated by others since they could not create their own states. Today we encounter this process in regard to those ethnic groups who live in different countries. Under the influence of several factors (globalization, the policy of assimilation, etc.) they are losing

¹ Khalatyan 1910; Adontz 1946; Grousset 1947; Mahé et Mahé 2012.

their national identity step by step and over time would disappear. Let us refer to some of these ethnic groups.

In the Russian Federation, these are indigenous ethnic groups of Siberia and northern regions (Tungusic peoples, Yakuts, Chukchi etc.). In the USA could be referred the descendants of many European and other nations who immigrated during the XIX and even XX centuries.

The creation of statehood of this or that ethnic group necessarily is accompanied by territorial expansion on behalf of its neighbors who could have been either closely related by language (i.e. belong to the same linguistic group) or had different linguistic affiliation.² Before the rise of Christianity, Islam and other monotheistic religions, the alienation of ethnic groups definitely was not a common phenomenon and rarely is fixed in written sources.

Now let us turn to the main topic of the article and see how our history is represented in modern studies.

During the Soviet period prevailed the title "History of the Armenian people", which now had turned into "History of Armenians". Actually, both are identical. The latter by no means could be understood as the "History of Hayk" (as it is regarded by some historians). Besides the scientific one, such terminology has a political context.

In fundamental studies dealing with the history of Armenia hardly we could find more or less detailed information regarding alien ethnic groups and political formations which once lived in the Armenian Highland (Shaddadids, Shah-Armens, etc.); some even lack any mention. Quite limited space has been given to the general political, social, economic, and cultural picture of the territory of former Greater Armenia during the foreign rule. Henceforth, in the study of our past historians mainly focus on the information which regards ethnic Armenians. And by doing this they very often artificially regard as indigenous Armenian evidently non-Armenian components of our ancient and medieval history. This method of studying the past needs special treatment.

It is worth to stress that today hardly any nation that has statehood writes its history as the history of the nation. For example, the "History of Germans", "History of Hungarians", etc. The histories of these countries are entitled "History of Germany", "History of Hungary" and so on. Even the peoples of Central Asia write the "History of Kazakhstan", the "History of Turkmenistan", etc. In the multiethnic Nigeria (Central Africa) where live several populous tribes (Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, etc.) the comprehensive studies are entitled as "History of Nigeria".³ But in our case, things are turned upside down.

It would be wrong to treat the Armenian case as an intention to preserve and stress national values. When M.Chamchyan still in the late XVIII century wrote his "History of Armenians" we were deprived of our statehood for many centuries. His goal was to show that Armenians used to be ancient people with a glorious past and thus in

² See below the chapter "Multiethnicity".

³ For example, Burns 1929.

the future should restore their statehood. Chamchyan's attitude was fully justified, but now, more than two centuries later we had granted it. The Republic of Armenia is a state recognized by the UN and heir to the ancient kingdoms of the Armenian Highland (Urartu, Artaxiad and Arsacid kingdoms, etc.).

Multietnicity. Indigenous ethnic groups of the Armenian Highland

Currently, actually, all peoples of the world have multiethnic structure as a result of ethnogenetic processes, the mixture of different ethnic groups.

One of the most remarkable examples is Great Britain. Hardly any more or less learned Englishman should try to distinguish inside the English nation its ethnic components, especially ancient ones. Countless ethnic groups, some quite numerous used to inhabit the British isles in the remote past - Celtic tribes, Picts in the north (during the Roman rule), German-speaking tribes in the early medieval period (Anglo-Saxons, Frisians), slightly later Scandinavian Vikings. To this impressive list should be added after the battle near Hastings in 1066 also Normans from Normandy (a branch of Vikings) who to that date were already intermingled with Franks and Gallo-Romans. All these ethnic groups in the course of history were integrated into the English nation due to the rise of the unified kingdom, the territorial, political, economic, and cultural development of English statehood.

In ancient period, similar scenarios of nation-building could be observed in Greece and Rome. In the Greek nation-making had participated numerous Greek-speaking tribes (Achaean, Dorians, Ionians, etc.) as well as of non-Greek origins - Pelasgians, Tyrrhenians, during the Middle Ages - Slavic peoples, Turks, etc.

In the case of ancient Rome before and after the foundation of the city used to live even more ethnic groups - Tyrrhenians, Etruscans, Sicani of Sicily, Corse of Corsica, Ligurians, Sards of Sardinia, Illyrians, Italic tribes, and in the Middle Ages - German tribes and others. During centuries of co-existence numerous Latin-speaking and other tribes of Italy were intermingled and formed a single Roman nation, and later German and other components had been flowed into this new nation.

In all cases mentioned above the differentiation of ethnic components should be the topic of only academic studies but in no way took the shape of propaganda.

But in the case of Armenia, the borders between scholarship and policy had been erased. Due to unknown motives, are regarded as Armenian only those historical persons and connected events in the Armenian Highland in which only ethnic Armenians participated. And this regardless of the obvious fact that the modern Armenian people is a result of a symbiosis of different ethnic elements who by the time were Armenianized. Below we shall bring a list of ethnic groups which once lived in the Armenian Highland and later became part of the Armenian nation.

The vast Armenian Highland, which stretches from the Southern Caucasus to Mesopotamia and from Eastern Asia Minor to western regions of modern Azerbaijan, in the remote past was home to ethnic groups of different linguistic affiliations. This

becomes evident due to the information provided by ancient Near-Eastern, Classical Greek and Roman, medieval Arabic, and other written sources and linguistic data (foreign loanwords in the Classical Armenian). Ancient Armenians had borrowed numerous foreign words from neighboring languages and also from those who live in different parts of the Armenian Highland that later were assimilated by Armenians. Foreign loanwords in Armenian had been studied by many Armenian and other linguists.⁴

A great number of written sources and vast linguistic data show that besides Armenians who spoke their Indo-European language, in the III-I millenniums BC the Armenian Highland was home to many other ethnic groups, which is testified by numerous written sources (cuneiform Assyrian, Hurrian, Hittite, Urartian). These were Hurrians, Hittites, Luwians, Urartians, Thracians, Phrygians, Indo-Iranians, in the Middle Ages - Arabs, Turkish-speaking ethnic groups and others.

First during Urartu (the Kingdom of Van), then Ervandid and succeeding Artaxiad and Arsakid kingdoms, that is about 1200 years had come into existence all necessary factors for the creation of the Armenian nation. That process had culminated in the creation of the Armenian alphabet and the adoption of Christianity. But soon the ethnic unification of Armenia was slowed down first due to Arab invasions and the outpour of a significant portion of the population from their homeland and the immigration of foreign population. From the XI century onwards with the mass migrations into the Armenian Highland of Turkish-speaking tribes from Central Asia and the lost of statehood that process took the shape of a disaster. Thus, during approximately 1500 years after the elimination of the Arsakid kingdom Armenia was literally crowded with alien ethnic groups. But from the XX century, during the immigration of the Armenian population into modern Armenia from abroad had culminated in the concentration of the nation.

In sum, it should be stressed that it is time to leave aside traditional attitude and join those historians who regard us as a nation that was able to restore its state which was lost centuries ago.

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⁴ For example, Acaryan 1971-1979 and Jahukyan 1987 (in general); Kapancyan 1948 and Greppin 1973; 1982; 1991 (Hittite), Mkrtchyan 2005 (Semitic); Hovhannisyan 1990 (Iranian), etc.

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