

# ՀՆԱԳԻՏՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ ԵՎ ԱԶԳԱԳՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHY

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**ESTER KHEMCHYAN\***

*PhD in Philology*

*Senior Researcher of the Institute of Archaeology*

*and Ethnography NAS RA*

*ekhemchyan@yandex.ru*

ORCID: 0000-0002-3638-7855

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## **MOKS AND ITS LEGENDS IN THE WORKS OF HOVSEP ORBELI**

**Keywords:** Moks dialect, travel notes, Yegherov's pass, Putku St. Gevorg, legend, Red bridge, Mukats-jur.

### **Introduction**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the study of the regions of Western Armenia continued to be in the center of attention of historians, archaeologists, ethnographers, and intellectuals. The historical-architectural monuments, rich lithographic heritage, the national customs, beliefs, holidays, rites, lifestyle, costumes, dishes, various expressions of the language needed a comprehensive study, for which it was necessary to count, photograph, measure, record, and collect the materials scattered on the territories of Western Armenian regions. Among the other Western Armenian regions, inaccessible Moks region was distinguished by its unique dialect, lifestyle, multi-genre folklore culture and traditions representing the local face of the region's history, special beliefs and customs. Among the various traditions, there are some that Joseph Orbeli paid attention to. The purpose of this research is to reflect on those traditions and their Orbelian interpretation.

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Young Joseph Orbeli, being specialized in the fields of the Armenian and Oriental studies, archaeology, classical philology, solidifying his theoretical knowledge with practical one (participation in the excavations of Ani, tours in different provinces of Armenia), showed great interest in research works in the field of cultural heritage of the mentioned subjects. In 1911, Joseph Orbeli graduated from the Department of History and Oriental Languages of St. Petersburg University. Back in September 1910, at the session of the Historiographic Department of the Petersburg Academy of Sciences, Nikolai Marr suggested sending a specialist to Van who would deal with local antiquities and collect dialectological material and study one of the Armenian dialects<sup>1</sup>. Joseph Orbeli was chosen, and he enthusiastically embarked on the preparation for that most important mission. Since the task of studying one of the western Armenian dialects was set, in particular the dialects of Moks and Mush, Orbeli got acquainted with those dialects through the public folklore collections (Eminyan ethnographic collection, collections of G. Sherents, G. Srvandztiants, Reverend Aristakes Sedrakyan). Orbeli chose the Moks dialect for two valid reasons. First, the folklore materials published before that gave an opportunity to get an idea about the Moks dialect, then it was assumed that the isolated position of mountainous Moks region and the closed lifestyle contributed to the preservation of ancient linguistic realities in the dialect.

In August 1911, Orbeli departed for Moks from Van on horseback and stayed there for five weeks. Orbeli made the second trip in April-May 1912. It should be noted that Orbeli entered Moks through the difficult-to-pass Yegherov's mountain pass, which was closed by a high snow layer from October till April, and the storm was raging there. At the highest accessible point of the Yegherov's pass (alt 3180 m) was the famous Putku Saint Gevorg shrine (2045 m) of Pan-Armenian significance, a travelers' lodge, where travelers were provided with free food and living conditions. During the winter months, Moks was cut off from the outside world, and no one dared to leave or enter Moks and, as Orbeli tells in his travel notes: "There is hardly a brave person who would dare to travel through the Moks passes even in the month of March"<sup>2</sup>. This difficult-to-access mountain pass was overcome by the troops of Gagik I Artsruni in a winter in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Narrator Tovma Artsruni described with surprise and admiration the

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<sup>1</sup> Յուզբաշյան 1987, 20:

<sup>2</sup> Орбели 1982, 15.

unprecedented winter raid by Gagik Artsruni to the land of Moks to sanction the owners of Moks who did not pay taxes<sup>3</sup>.

***Moks as Described by Orbeli***

In his travel notes, Orbeli carefully presented the topography of Moks region, which, according to the description, surrounded by mountain ranges that communicates with the outside world through the mountain passes of Yegherov in the north, Shatakh (near Arnos mountain) in the east, and the Moks river gorge (Barvar direction) in the south.

From the height of the Yegherov mountain pass, the land of Moks opened before Orbeli with all its charm, mountain slopes, ravines, walnut groves. Acquaintance with Moks began with Putku Saint Gevorg shrine, about which Orbeli was already informed by his companions. Orbeli expected to see a "valuable architectural monument"<sup>4</sup>, but he witnessed a modest sanctuary with a small church structure, a marble tomb attributed to St. Gevorg and a lodge for travelers.

Saint Gevorg shrine was also a place of pilgrimage of pan-Armenian significance, where pilgrims from Moks and surrounding regions (sometimes with whole villages and families) would go barefoot to Saint Gevorg, offer sacrifices and ask for his help and support on a Saturday that was fixed every year<sup>5</sup>.

According to the information provided by Orbeli, Putku was mainly a place to stay for travelers, that was meant to ensure the passage of the difficult-to-reach Yegherov's pass in spring and autumn, because it was impossible to travel through the pass in winter.

St. Gevorg of Putku did not have a congregation, the affairs and household were managed there by the "putkapan", and the priest attached to the shrine was called "vanitster" or "vanitsher".

During his travels, Joseph Orbeli wrote down materials of various genres of folklore to study the Moks dialect. He also heard etymological, behavioral and explanatory traditions from Armenian and Kurdish storytellers, which he did not attach importance to and did not record at that time. After returning, he tried to recall what he had heard. Speaking about the oral tradition of Saint Gevorg of

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<sup>3</sup> Արծրունի և Անանուն 1985, 284:

<sup>4</sup> Орбели 1982, 17.

<sup>5</sup> Մոկս 2015, 25:

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Putku, he mentions the existence of two “very close” Armenian and Kurdish versions<sup>6</sup>, but considering the fact that he was hosted in the house of a Kurdish bey and communicated equally with the Kurds, he accepted their stories without considering some circumstances.

First of all, the resident Kurds tried to “expropriate” the grave attributed to Saint Gevorg located in the Putku shrine and made the Armenian researcher believe that it was Kurdish. As Orbeli writes: “... later I learned that the Kurds worship that grave as the tomb of Mir-Hassan”<sup>7</sup> and call the shrine “khanye Mir-Hasane”. According to the story restored by Orbeli by memory, Mir-Hasan gets lost in the thicket of the forest while hunting and is saved with the help of Saint Gevorg. Orbeli admits: “Unfortunately, I didn’t write down the tradition on the spot and I don’t remember what role the clay vessel played in the whole story, from whose Armenian name the name of monastery “Putku” allegedly arose”<sup>7</sup>.

#### ***Armenian Traditions of Saint Gevorg of Putku***

Now let's look into the two Armenian versions of the tradition, which were recorded in the same period, that is, in 1910–11. The first version was recorded by Yervand Lalayan in Vaspurakan. According to that tradition, Saint Gevorg church was previously located in Bitar village of Barvar region of Bitlis vilayet. A Kurdish shepherd settled in that village, received a piece of land as a gift from his owner and gradually gathered his relatives around him. They drove the Armenians out of the village and wanted to turn the church into a mosque. Having received an order from Saint Gevorg in a dream, the priest of monastery found a pot with his relics, slapped it and ran away to Moks. The ruler Mir-Hasan seeing a light radiating from the priest's back, sent his men to capture him. The priest fled to mount Yegherov. When the pursuers caught up with the fugitive, he put the pot on his back on a stone, and a miracle happened, the stone broke and took the pot into it.

Saint Gevorg Monastery was built on the place where the miracle happened, and it was called “Putku” after the pot<sup>8</sup>. This is the role of the pot, which Orbeli did not remember and could not explain. According to tradition, St. Gevorg was considered the saint of the storm, and during a storm he was sought for help.

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<sup>6</sup> **Орбели** 1982, 17.

<sup>7</sup> **Орбели** 1982, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Մոկս 2015.- «Փոփօկու Սուրբ Գևորգ», № 17(134), 287–288:

This circumstance gives an opportunity to conclude about the ancient roots and function of the shrine and the abode. As for Mir-Hasan's relationship with this story, it is obvious that by his order the person who stole the pot with the relics of Saint Gevorg was chased. The Kurdish tradition presenting Mir-Hasan in a positive light and describing the shrine as "Khanye Mir Hasane", denies the Armenianness of the sanctuary.

The recorder of the second version of the tradition is unknown. It was preserved in the Yervand Lalayan fund of the Archive of the RA Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography and was first published in the collection "Moks: Armenian folklore culture". According to this version, a fervent Armenian saint from Barvar places the relic of Gevorg in a bag and sneaks away. When he wants to go from Yegherov to Gavash, the pot rolls down from the top of the mountain and stops in a place. The man tries to carry the pot three times, but each time it rolls and stops in the same place. He understands that the relic wants to stay in that place. He builds a chapel and calls it Putku Surb Gevorg<sup>9</sup>.

"Regarding the tradition of the miraculous construction of St. Gevorg, we see that the place of the construction of the shrine was not chosen by chance, the stone in which the relic of Saint Gevorg was enshrined already had a religious significance and probably there was a pagan shrine in that place, the memory of which was passed down from generation to generation"<sup>10</sup>.

According to Yervand Lalayan's assumption, monastery of Saint Gevorg in Putku replaced the pagan temple, which was necessarily built on the snowy and stormy mountain slope to be served as a temple-guesthouse to keep the travelers safe<sup>11</sup>. Yervand Lalayan justifies his assumption and the existence of similar temple-guesthouses in Armenia with the snowy and stormy seasons in Armenia that are impassable and unfavorable for travelers. To strengthen his point of view, he refers to the following information reported by Movses Khorenatsi. "... the Armenian king Tigran the Last honored the grave of his brother, priest Majhan, by building an altar on the grave in Bagavan, Bagrevand province, so that all the passers-by could enjoy the sacrifices there and the guests could be received for the night"<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Մոկս 2015.- «Փոփօկու Սուրբ Գևորգ», № 18(135), 288:

<sup>10</sup> Խենյան 2018, 226:

<sup>11</sup> Լալայեան 1912, 97:

<sup>12</sup> Խորենացի 1968, 202:

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Orbeli was also convinced that this traveler's lodge was a thing of ancient times with its important function. The fact that St. Gevorg was considered the storm saint, people turned to him for help during blizzards and storms. It is obvious that the functions of the ancient pagan wind and storm god and the god of hospitality and shelter were combined in the personality of St. Gevorg.

The famous black rooster of the sanctuary is a symbol of the ancient roots of St. Gevorg of Putku "St. Georgai dik"<sup>13</sup>, which signaled the opening of the road closed by the blizzard of the mountain pass with its call. The black rooster was the symbol of the sanctuary of St. Gevorg of Putku and had the function of forecasting. Its choice was not made by chance, the dead rooster was replaced by a new black rooster whose owner was visited in a dream by St. Gevorg and granted that his rooster be dedicated to monastery. The young rooster led a celibate life in monastery, roamed freely in the sanctuary, enjoyed all the good things, and after he died, he was buried "with honor and dignity"<sup>14</sup> in the chapel of the church of St. Gevorg. As reported by Orbeli, the travelers unconditionally believed in the fortune-telling of the rooster, but they did not swear in the name of the rooster, while the oath in the name of the shrine was considered to be the strongest one<sup>15</sup>. Rooster's forecast was not limited to heralding good weather, travelers often placed the rooster on their head, made a vow or inquired about whom to marry or the health of their ill relative, and if the rooster crowed three times, the person's wishes were granted.

In the traditions of many nations since ancient times, the rooster has been identified with the sun and the dawn, as it heralded the dawn of a new day. Due to the fact that the rooster is watchful and all-seeing like the sun, it was also used in ancient Rome to predict the weather<sup>16</sup>.

The rooster's connection with the sun added another solar characteristic to its function: its connection with the underworld. The black color of St. Gevorg's Rooster emphasized its connection with the underworld, and in Armenian tradition, the Rooster was also called the "Night Resurrection Rooster", which represented another of its functions, that is, the feature of resurrecting the dead

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<sup>13</sup> **Լալայեան** 1914, 45:

<sup>14</sup> **Լալայեան** 1914, 45:

<sup>15</sup> **Орбели** 1982, 19

<sup>16</sup> **Топоров** 988, 310

people<sup>17</sup>. This belief served as the basis for a series of riddles describing the rooster, in which the mythical features and functions attributed to the rooster are allegorically presented.

I have an Armenian king,  
The head saw golden  
He says: "Resurrection from the dead,  
Christ has risen.

Akhaltskha, № 705, 13

Թագավորը ունիմ հայոց,  
Գլովիսը ոսկի սղոց  
Կըսե՛ «Հարություն մեռելոց,  
Քրիստոս հարյալ ի մեռելոց.

Ախալցխա, № 705 ժգ

or:

There was a King of old,  
The crown on his had a golden saw,  
He called the dead  
- Christ has risen<sup>18</sup>.

Kyurin, No. 705, 9

Թագավոր մը կա հինոց,  
Թագը կըլիսն ոսկի սղոց,  
Էլալ կենչեց ննջեցելոց  
- Քրիստոս հարյալ ի մեռելոց:

Կյուրին, № 705 թ

In the riddles, the transition of the old pagan revival belief to the Christian one is clearly visible in the face of the fact of Christ's resurrection.

According to S. Harutyunyan's interpretation, the black color symbolizes the idea of darkness, death, mourning and comes from the understanding of being buried in the underground world and black soil<sup>19</sup>.

The rooster wakes up the sleeping people with its daily call. According to beliefs, sleep is also considered as a temporary death and sometimes, especially in curses, it is characterized by "black", therefore, the call of Putku's black rooster performs functions not only to wake up the sleeping, but also to resurrect the dead people. In this case, the situation of the travelers blocked in Saint Gevorg of Putku is compared to the situation of sleeping people, whose awakening is comparable to the resurrection, and the closed mountain pass of Yegherov is a unique path to the underworld (or Moks world), the rooster heralds the moment of the possibility of crossing it. The call of the rooster ensured the successful course and completion of the journey of the blocked travelers<sup>20</sup>.

As Orbeli attests, the call of the rooster was given such importance that no traveler dared to pass through Yegherov pass if the rooster was silent.

<sup>17</sup> Հարությունյան 2000, 388

<sup>18</sup> Հարությունյան 1965, 68–69:

<sup>19</sup> Հարությունյան 2000, 390:

<sup>20</sup> Հարությունյան 2015, 11:

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To cover the expenses of Putku, every year the donation collectors, called *putkapan*, traveled around the Armenian world and collected donations from believers. Special certificates were prepared for donors in advance. Orbeli was lucky in 1916 to get such a certificate-package in Van, on the upper part of which a black rooster was perched on the dome of the church<sup>21</sup>.

The worship of the rooster, as a fortune-teller and waker, and later also as a sacrificial animal, was very popular in Armenian household and religious culture, and the black rooster of St. Gevorg also served as a symbol of life, light, death and resurrection.

#### ***Mukats-jur and Red bridge***

Orbeli was greatly impressed by the beautiful basin of the Mukats-jur river (Chuch river) and especially its source, which was a large cave mouth from which clean cold water flew<sup>22</sup>. It is surprising that in Orbeli's travel notes, there is no mention of the legend of "Chuch River Ak". It must be assumed that this tradition has also been forgotten or the reason for not telling it was the unwilling attitude and ignorance of the accompanying Kurds.

The only version of the legend "Chuch River Ak"<sup>23</sup> whose recorder is unknown (the original is kept in the archives of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, in the fund of E. Lalayan and was probably recorded in the 1910s) was published in the "Moks: Armenian folklore culture". According to tradition, in early times the cave was a famous monastery, whose abbot refused the request of a hermit in agony to go at night to give the last communion. Before his death, the hermit asks God to punish the hard-hearted monk and flood monastery with water. The unknown recorder wrote: "And really, when a person looks closely, a monastery will leave an impression on the viewer... Mokats river... will have its source in the above-mentioned cave, which is called Chuch River Ak"<sup>24</sup>.

The folk version of the origin of the main river Moks and the story of a monk who did not live up to his rank were combined in the tradition. This tradition belongs to the etymological-religious group. In the face of the behavior of a

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<sup>21</sup> Орбели 1982, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Орбели 1982, 20.

<sup>23</sup> Մոկս 2015, 291, № 27(144):

<sup>24</sup> Մոկս 2015, 291, № 27(144):



spiritual person who does not fulfill his duties, the violation of legal and moral norms by the church and the spiritual class is criticized<sup>25</sup>.

Orbeli describes in detail Moks region, in the center of which the Mukats-jur flows, taking into it the waters of the rivers flowing through rocky gorges and valleys on both sides. The only stone bridge of Moks on the Mokats River was called Red. Orbeli presents the legend of the construction together with the two Armenian inscriptions on the bridge.

According to the first record, the bridge was built by "... khoja Murad and khoja Kharapet (probably Hayrapet – E.K.) in the year 1042 (1593)". Orbeli describes in detail the roads of Moks mountain province, which are mostly mountain passes and caravan trails, and wooden bridges over the rivers. The Red Bridge, built over the Mukats-jur, was actually built by merchants to facilitate the export of Moks agricultural products and the import of necessary goods from outside. This is the practical side of the bridge construction, while the cause-and-effect folk interpretation of the tradition is different. Two merchant brothers, having completed their trade in foreign countries and become rich, send a message that they are returning. Their mother complains: "What is the use of wealth if she has to cross a river on foot to meet her sons". Learning about this, the sons build the Red Bridge, and the mother crosses the bridge and greets her sons.

As Orbeli reported, the beloved bridge of Moks residents found its reflection in many stories and jokes, some of which he wrote and published<sup>26</sup>.

Observing the historical-architectural monuments of Moks (castle, church) and comparing them with similar monuments of other provinces of historical Armenia, Orbeli came to the conclusion that the monuments of Moks were primitive and poor<sup>27</sup>. And the Church of Savior of Moks was famous due to the tradition that it was built at the place where the hair of Christ, brought by Magi Caspar, was kept in a wall. In connection with the legends about the Magi, Orbeli refers to the toponym Moks, which is consistent with the word "*magi*" and, according to popular etymology, is associated with the name of the three Magi (Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar) who worshiped the baby Christ. However, according to Orbeli, the "Moks" toponym has not been scientifically studied and

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<sup>25</sup> Ղանալանյան 1969, 49:

<sup>26</sup> Орбели 2002, 65, 67–68.

<sup>27</sup> Орбели 1982, 23.

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interpreted, although folk etymology tries to connect the name “Moks” with the word “mage” through traditions<sup>28</sup>.

#### ***Conclusions***

Joseph Orbeli was the first researcher to enter inaccessible Moks province. In addition to his main goals, he paid attention to various demographic materials, recorded, photographed, described, retold them and left an invaluable legacy for future researchers.

During his scientific expedition to Moks, Joseph Orbeli briefly referred to several traditions of Moks. While he was there, he did not consider it necessary to write down those traditions, but later tried to restore them from memory. Especially in the case of the legend about Saint Gevorg shrine in Putku, he got a wrong impression, the reason for which was the existence of two (Armenian and Kurdish) versions of the legend. The Kurds attributed the construction of the sanctuary-lodge of pan-Armenian significance to Mir-Hasan, who allegedly fulfilled the order of Saint Gevorg. Meanwhile, the examination shows the ancient origin of the sanctuary.

Observations show Orbeli’s conviction that the sanctuary-lodge of St. Gevorg of Putku existed from ancient times and performed an important function. From the combination of beliefs, traditions and customs, it becomes obvious that Putku Saint Gevorg sanctuary replaced the highland pagan temple-guesthouse, continued to fulfill its functions, even providing the presence of the black rooster, which predicts the weather. And in the personality of Saint Gevorg, who is considered the saint of storms, the attributes and functions of the ancient god of wind and storm and the god who provides hospitality and shelter have been united.

From the height of Yegherov, Orbeli can see the basin of Moks's main river, the Mukats-jur (Chuch river), and then examine both monastic complexes located around the river, in particular the Church of the Savior, the wooden bridges over the river and creeks, and the only stone bridge built over the Mukats-jur (Red bridge), record the various oral stories created around them. Among the versions

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<sup>28</sup> The issue of the connection between the toponym “Moks” and the word “mages” was addressed by S. Harutyunyan in the introduction of his book “Moks. Armenian Folk Culture” (see Հարությունյան 2015, 5–12).

of Moks traditions, the tradition of the Red Bridge recorded by Orbeli is the only preserved version.

Summarizing the research activities of Orbeli, the traditions of Moks province, we can say that the folklore-ethnographic heritage he left behind is exceptional and provides an opportunity to address a number of dark points of Moks demography.

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## ՄՈԿՍԸ ԵՎ ՄՈԿԱՅ ԱՎԱՆԴՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԸ ՀՈՎՍԵՓ ՕՐԲԵԼՈՒ ՀԵՏԱԶՈՏՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐՈՒՄ

ԽԵՄՉՅԱՆ Է.

### Ամփոփում

**Բանալի բառեր՝** Մոկսի բարբառ, ուղեգրություն, Եղերովի լեռնանցք, Փոթկու սուրբ Գևորգ, ավանդություն, Կարմիր կամուրջ, Մոկաց ջուր:

1911–1912 թթ. Մոկսում շրջագայությունների ընթացքում Հ. Օրբելին, ի թիվս բանահյուսական բազմաժանր նյութերի, լսել է նաև բազմաթիվ ստուգաբանական, վարքաբանական, բացատրական ավանդություններ: Մոկսից վերադառնալուց հետո իր ուղեգրությունները շարադրելիս Օրբելին անդրադարձել է այդ ավանդություններին: Նա փորձել է հիշողությամբ վերականգնել տարածաշրջանի ամենահանրահայտ վայրերի՝ Փոթկու սուրբ Գևորգ սրբավայրի, Կարմիր կամրջի, Մոկաց ջուր (ճուշ գետ) ակունքի, Սուրբ Ամենափրկչի կառուցման ավանդությունները:

Համադրվել են համահայկական նշանակություն ունեցող Փոթկու սուրբ Գևորգ սրբավայրի կառուցման և անվանադրման մասին հայկական և քրդական ավանդությունները, որոնք տարբերվում են միմյանցից: Քրդական պատումում սրբավայրի կառուցումը քրդերը վերագրում են իրենց, իսկ սուրբ Գևորգի շիրիմը պաշտում են որպես քուրդ Միր-Հասանի գերեզման:

Օրբելու ուղեգրությունների քննությունը ցույց է տալիս, որ նրա հաղորդած ավանդություններն ու տեղեկատվությունն ունեն գիտաճանաչողական բացառիկ արժեք:

## МОКС И ПРЕДАНИЯ МОКСА В ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯХ ИОСИФА ОРБЕЛИ

ХЕМЧЯН Э.

### Резюме

**Ключевые слова:** диалект Мокса, путевые заметки, Егеровский перевал, Путки св. Геворка, предание, Красный мост, Мукац-джур.

Во время научной экспедиции в Мокс в 1911–1912 гг. Иосифом Орбели в числе разножанровых фольклорных материалов были собраны также многочисленные этимологические, житийные и объяснительные предания.

По возвращении из Мокса, И. Орбели в своих путевых заметках коснулся также темы преданий, в частности, преданий о святынях Путки св. Геворка, Красного моста, истока Мукац джур (река Мокс), о строительстве монастыря Св. Всеспасителя.

Сопоставление армянских и курдских преданий о строительстве и названии святыни Путки св. Геворка выявляет множество отличий. В курдском варианте строительство святыни приписано курдам, и эта гробница почитается как могила Мир-Хасана.

Исследование путевых заметок Орбели показывает, что передающиеся из поколения в поколение предания являют собой огромную научно-познавательную ценность.