

ON AN ARMENIAN-SCANDINAVIAN
MYTHOLOGICAL PARALLEL*

ARTSVI BAKHCHINYAN

Keywords: legend about Noah, Armenian mythology, vine, calf sacrifice, Scandinavian mythology, Thor, goats.

Introduction

In a letter dated 1951, Swedish mythologist Stig Wikander observed that the Armenian legend regarding the growth of a grapevine from the bone of a sacrificed calf has connections with both Greek apocrypha literature and Scandinavian/Nordic mythology. He also mentioned that he had published a preliminary article on this subject in a Swedish ethnographic journal¹. Wikander cited two original sources of these narratives, both associated with the name of the patriarch Noah.

The origin of these cultural narratives in Armenia, often regarded as the birthplace of viticulture and winemaking², has traditionally been linked with the patriarch Noah. According to tradition, Noah, who is said to have descended from Mount Ararat after the global flood, settled in present-day Armenia and planted grapevines. This belief finds its roots in the Old Testament, where it is written: “Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk” (Genesis, 9:20). This biblical passage has resonated widely throughout later centuries, influencing literature and fine arts.

In a later myth, likely developed at a subsequent time, the grapevine was not planted by Noah’s hand, but sprang forth from the bone of a slaughtered calf. In essence, the calf was reborn in another form.

* Submitted as of 19. IV. 2024, reviewed on 26. IV. 2024, approved for publication on 10. VII. 2024.

¹ National Archive of Armenia, f. 426, l. 1, act 1150, doc. 2, see our publication of this document Bakhchinyan. 2000, 171–173.

² On the history of viticulture and winemaking in Armenia, see Арутюнян. 2005.

Armenian legends

The first version of this myth, referred to by Wikander as “Noah’s Vineyard”, was probably initially published in Artashes Abeghyan’s “Worldly Grammar”, presented below in its entirety in my translation:

“The flood subsided, and the patriarch Noah disembarked from his ark atop Mount Masis. Descending with his sons and grandsons, they settled at the foot of the sacred mountain, cultivating the land and embracing a contented existence.

One day, God visited Noah, who, in reverence, sacrificed a calf and prepared a splendid feast. After discarding the animal’s bones and retaining its skin for shoes, Noah’s herd returned from pasture, their young calves eagerly seeking nourishment from their mothers. However, to everyone’s dismay, one calf was missing, causing distress as it wandered in search of its mother.

Moved by the plight of the cow, God intervened, gathering the calf’s bones, wrapping them in fur, and blessing them with life once more. Reunited with its mother, joy was restored, yet the calf was found to be limping, its thigh bone injured. Noah, upon discovering this, presented the bone to the Almighty.

“Patriarch”, said the Lord, “take this bone and plant it in your garden”. So Noah did. When the year passed, he was surprised to see that where he had planted the calf bone, a grapevine had grown, a fresh and beautiful grapevine. Another two years passed. The vine produced grapes, sweet and wonderful grapes.

From that day on, the patriarch Noah delved into winemaking. He made wine, drinking it himself and let others drink it, fine and unique wines.

To this day, Armenians point to the site near Mount Ararat where Noah purportedly planted the first vineyard, savored the divine nectar, and peacefully slumbered”³.

The second source cited by Wikander presents an alternate version of this myth, prevalent among the Hamshen Armenians. In this rendition, the roles of God and Noah are replaced by the angel and the revered Jewish patriarch, Abraham. This variant was documented in 1950, appearing in Istanbul’s “Jaragait” (Ray) Armenian newspaper, under the heading “An Old Armenian Tradition”. The narrative unfolds as follows:

“The Armenians of Hamshen used to recount the legend of Noah in the following manner:

One day, an angel visited Abraham, the patriarch of the Jews. Finding himself without food, Abraham slaughtered his calf. In the evening, when the mother of the calf returned, she expressed sorrow through mournful grunting. Touched by this scene, the angel instructed Abraham to retrieve

³ Abeghian. 1936, 176–177.

the skin of the slaughtered calf and its bones, noting the absence of the thigh bone. Upon the angel's blessing, the animal miraculously recovered.

Following the burial of the missing bone in the garden at the angel's behest, a year later, a plant, a grapevine sprouting from a calf's bone – emerged⁴.

Although the initial sentence suggests the story pertains to Noah, the protagonist is Abraham. It is plausible that the myth originally referred to Noah, but Hamshen Armenians attributed it to Abraham.

This traditional narrative, featuring the angel and Abraham, was later included in Aram Ghanalanyan's "Avandapatum"⁵ and Sargis Harutyunyan's "Armenian Old World of Fiction"⁶ collections.

More recently, folklorist Verzhine Svazlyan documented and published this legend, once again featuring the angel and Abraham⁷.

This legend also allows us to make a linguistic etymology as well. Just as the myth suggests the grapevine originated from the calf, Armenian words *vort* (grapevine) and *hort* (calf) may be linked to the aforementioned legend concerning Noah/Abraham. Linguistically, the Armenian *vort* is etymologically derived from *hort* and is one of its synonyms. According to Hrachia Acharian, it is a native Armenian word, derived from *porthu*, from which the Armenian word *vorti* (son) also originates⁸. Similar semantic and phonetic parallels exist in Romance languages – such as Latin (*vitis* – grapevine, *vitulus* – calf), Italian (*vitello* – calf; *vite* – grapevine)⁹ and Portuguese (*vitelo* – calf; *videira* – grapevine). Thus, it is not unreasonable to assume that the resemblance between these words in Armenian and Romance languages¹⁰ may be attributed to the myth of the grapevine's origin.

The Scandinavian parallel

Although in aforementioned letter Stig Wikander did not specify which episode of Norse mythology the Armenian myth relates to, it corresponds to a narrative found in the 13th century Icelandic skald Snorri Sturluson's "Gylfaginning" section of the "Prose Edda", one of the primary sources of Scandinavian mythology. The story revolves around the supreme deity of Norse mythology, Thor, who was widely revered by Northern Europeans,

⁴ «Հառազայթ» (Իսթանպուլ), 22. IX. 1950:

⁵ Ղ ա ն ա լ ա ն յ ա ն. 1969, 116–117:

⁶ Հ ա Ր Ն Լ թ յ Ն Լ յ ա ն. 1987, 26:

⁷ Ս Վ Պ Ղ Ե ա ն. 2000, 96: By the way, in a later tradition, a grape vine grew from the grave of David the Armenian (Davino Armeno), a Christian saint who worked in Italy, the fruit of which cured diseases (see B a c i. 2004, 550).

⁸ Ա ճ ա Ն յ ա ն. 1977, 578–579:

⁹ See Ս ա Ր Պ Ս յ ա ն. 2004, 26:

¹⁰ It is a pure coincidence that the Russian words коза (goat) and лоза (vine) are similar.

particularly towards the end of the Viking Age. Due to his immense stature, Thor traveled not on horseback but in a chariot pulled by two goats, Tandgnjost (also spelled Tanngnjost/Tanngnjótstr, meaning “teeth-barer”) and Tanggrísir (also spelled Tanngrisner/Tanngrösnir, meaning “teeth-grinder”). As Thor drove his chariot across the sky, the goats’ hooves caused thunder, lightning, and rain. Remarkably, these goats could be slaughtered and consumed repeatedly, only for Thor to resurrect them from their bones and hides using his mighty hammer, Mjølner (Mjöllnir)¹¹. Thus, Thor embodies not only a martial deity but also a creative one, and his goats serve as a constant source of nourishment.

According to legend, it was imperative not to break the bones of the goats during the sacrificial process, as this might harm the resurrected animal. One such incident is recounted in the “Prose Edda”, where Thor and Loki journey to the castle of Utgarda-Loki in Jotunhei. They lodge for the night at the home of a peasant named Egil, his wife, and their two children. Thor offers to share his goats with the impoverished family on the condition that they do not break the bones. However, Egil’s son disregards this instruction and breaks a goat’s shinbone to get to the marrow. Consequently, when Thor resurrects the goats the next morning, one of them is left lame. Thor, identifying the farmer’s son as the culprit, compels Egil’s children to become his servants, otherwise Thos could kill them and destruct their household¹².

Notably, the Norse myth does not mention grapes, and there is no linguistic root connection between the words “goat” and “vine” in Norse languages (*geit* and *vínvið* in Icelandic). Nevertheless, the symbolism of Thor’s goats – sacrifice and regeneration – finds historical resonance in northern European legends with ritual significance. Groups such as the Samis and other hunter societies in Scandinavia ritually collected and preserved the bones of animals they hunted and consumed, viewing it as a reciprocal relationship between humans and animals. In this worldview, animals willingly allowed themselves to be sacrificed to gain access to the human world, with hunters believing in their eventual resurrection to perpetuate the cycle. Danish researcher Jens Peters Schjødt suggests that this pre-agricultural worldview was likely totemistic and shamanistic, wherein animals formed part of a religious sphere that could be communicated with through various rituals¹³.

It’s worth noting that Thor shares some similarities with Vahagn, the Armenian deity associated with thunder, lightning, and fire. Both are considered sons of the Earth. Vahagn, described as fair-haired and with flame-like beard, bears resemblance to Thor, who is depicted in old Icelandic sagas as blond with a red beard. Additionally, both Vahagn and Thor engage in battles against

¹¹ See Sturlason. 1950, 64; Sturluson. 1987, 37–38; also Warmin d. 1996, 202; Աղադ Էդդա. 2018, 228–229: Among the most recent studies of this myth, see the work of the Swedish ethnographer Ebbe Schön (Schön. 2004, 102).

¹² See Larsen. 1943, 46. See also Bæksted. 1978, 84–85.

¹³ See Schjødt. 1999, 38–39.

serpentine monsters – the Armenian *vishaps* (dragons) and the Norse “Jormungandr” or “Midgardsormr”.

Possible ways of transmission

The transmission of Armenian myth motifs may stem from shared Indo-European mythological concepts, yet direct borrowing is also a plausible explanation.

Evidence suggests the presence of Armenians in the Scandinavian Peninsula since ancient times. In the 1920s, European anthropologists noted the existence of an anthropological type in the British Isles, certain regions of the Scandinavian Peninsula, and Denmark that seemed alien to the indigenous populations in appearance, temperament, and even blood composition. Swedish researcher Bertil Lundman, in a study published in 1957 on this phenomenon, showed that the above-mentioned anthropological type and blood composition were characteristic of the population of a number of coastal regions from Asia Minor to the North Sea, including the Armenians, which is an evidence of ethnic movements from the Middle East to Western Europe in ancient times. These “Armenoid” people first settled in Cyprus before dispersing to various parts of Europe, including the Jutland Peninsula in southern Denmark. These movements likely occurred around the end of the second millennium BCE, and this was considered by scholars not to be a mass emigration of the population, but an appropriation of regions rich in metal resources by a people with deposits of metallurgy and advanced crafts and trade. This theory remains as a hypothesis, which, however, would not be correct to ignore¹⁴. This fact is also supported by the archaeological evidence that a strong Thracian and Anatolian influence is noticeable on the Danish Iron Age.

Thus, these potential migrations may account for some of the distant similarities observed between Armenian and Scandinavian cultures, including their mythologies.

Conclusion

The similarities between Armenian and Scandinavian myths regarding the rebirth of goats from buried bones could have originated from either universal mythological themes or direct interactions.

These similarities in mythology, as well as in language and anthropology, between geographically distant peoples likely result from common Indo-European origins and historical contacts, even if occasional and superficial.

According to current hypotheses, it is plausible that Scandinavians may have borrowed the myth of creating new life from animal bones from Armenians. Similarly, the resemblance between the words “calf” and “vine”

¹⁴ Lundman. 1957, 105–117. See also Քոչարյան. 1993, 13:

in Armenian language might be attributed to the myth of the grapevine's origin.

Artsvi Bakhchinyan – Ph.D, Senior Researcher at the Department of Armenian Communities and Diaspora of the Institute of History of NAS RA. Scientific interests: Armenian communities and Diaspora, historical and cultural connections of the Armenians with the world, history of Armenian culture, world eminent figures of Armenian origin. Author of 15 monographs and around 100 articles. ORCID:0000-0001-8637-6946. artsvi@yahoo.com

REFERENCES

Abeghian A. 1936, Neuarmenische Grammatik: ost- und westarmenisch, mit Lesestücken und einem Wörterverzeichnis. Im Anhang, Deklinations- und Konjugationstabellen des Altarmenischen nebst Erläuterungen. Berlin-Leipzig, de Gruyter, 292 S.

Bacci M. 2004, An Armenian Pilgrim in Medieval Italy: Cult and Iconography of St. Davinus of Luce.– Սուրադյան Պ. (խմբ.), Հայագիտության արդի վիճակը և զարգացման հեռանկարները, գեկուցումների ժողովածու, Երևան, ԵՊՀ հրատ., էջ 548–558:

Bakhchinyan A. 2000, Stig Wikander's letter to Charles Vertanes.– “Journal of Society of Armenian Studies”, vol. 11, pp. 171–173.

Bæksted A. 1978, Guder og Helte i Norden, Politikens Forlag, 356 s.

Larsen M. 1943–1946, ed./trans., Den ældre Edda og Eddica minora, b. I, 263 s., b. II, 1946, 350 s., Copenhagen: E. Munksgaard.

Lundman B. 1957, The problem of ancient Oriental shipping on the North Sea.– “Journal of Near astern Studies”, vol. 16, pp. 105–117.

National Archive of Armenia, f. 426, l. 1, act 1150, doc. 2.

Schjødt J. P. 1999, ed., Det Førkristne Norden. Religion og Mytologi. Copenhagen: Samlerens Bogklub, 224 s.

Schön E. 2004, Asa-Tors hammare, gudar och jättar i tro och tradition. Stockholm, 264 s.

Sturlason S. 1950, Edda, norsk oversettning av Anne Holtsmark. Oslo, Cammermeyer, 154 s.

Sturluson S. 1987, Edda, translated by Anthony Faulkes. London, Everyman, 252 p.

Warmind M. 1996, ed., Politikens bog om myter, Politikens Forlag, 240 p.

Арутюнян А. Ф. 2005, Очерки истории виноградарства и виноделия древней и средневековой Армении. Ереван, «Принтинфо», 120 с.

Աճառյան Հ. 1977, Հայերեն արմատական բառարան, հ. 3, Երևան, ԵՊՀ հրատ., 622 էջ:

Ավագ Էդդա, գերմանա-սկանդինավական էպոս. 2018, թարգմ.՝ Հ. Սարգսյան, Երևան, «Անտարես», 320 էջ:

Հարությունյան Ս. 1987, Հայ հին վիպաշխարհը, Երևան, «Արևիկ», 180 էջ:

Դանալանյան Ա. 1969, Ավանդապատում, Երևան, ՀՍՍՀ ԳԱ հրատ., 530 էջ:

Չորս հովերեն. – «Ճառագայթ» (Իսթանպուլ), 22. IX. 1950:

Սարգսյան Վ. 2004, Լատիներեն-հայերեն մի զուգահեռի շուրջ (լատ. vitis, vitulus – հայ. որթ, հորթ)։– «Ռոմանական բանասիրության հանդես» (Երևան), № 2, էջ 21–27:

Սվազլեան Վ. 2000, Պոլսահայոց բանահիսուսությունը, Երևան, «Գիտություն», 592 էջ:

Քոսյան Ա. 1993, Արմենոփոնները Արևմտյան Եվրոպայում։– «Իրան-նամէ» (Երևան), № 3, էջ 13:

ՀԱՅ-ՍԿԱՆԴԻՆԱՎՅԱՆ ԴԻՑԱԲԱՆԱԿԱՆ ՄԻ ԶՈՒԳԱՀԵՌԻ ՇՈՒՐՋ

ԱՐԾՎԻ ԲԱՆԶԻՆՅԱՆ

Ա մ փ ո փ ու մ

Բանալի բառեր՝ ավանդազրույց Նոյի մասին, Հայկական առասպելաբանություն, որթատունկ, հորթի զոհաբերում, սկանդինավյան առասպելաբանություն, Թոր, այծեր:

Ըստ չվեղ առասպելաբան Սթիգ Վիքանդերի՝ զոհաբերված հորթի ոսկորից խաղողի վազի առաջանալու մասին Հայկական ավանդազրույցը զուգահեռ ունի սկանդինավյան բանահյուսության հետ: Ավանդազրույցը կապվում է Նոյ նահապետի (տարբերակ՝ Աբրահամի) հետ: Եվ քանի որ հայերեն «որթ» և «հորթ» բառերը համարվում են առաջինը երկրորդից ծագած և հոմանիշ, առաջին անգամ փորձ է կատարվում դրանց նմանությունը կապել տվյալ ավանդազրույցի հետ: Որպես լրացուցիչ ապացույց բերվում է այն փաստը, որ ոչ պատահականորեն հնչյունային և իմաստային նույն զուգահեռներն առկա են նաև ռոմանական որոշ լեզուներում:

Վիքանդերը չի մատնանշել, թե որն է Հայկական ավանդազրույցի հետ սկանդինավյան առասպելաբանության զուգահեռը: Նա նկատի է ունեցել այծերի ոսկորներից կենդանիների վերածննդի առասպելը, որն առկա է XIII դ. իսլանդացի գրող Մորրի Սթուրլուսոնի «Փոքր Էդդա» վիպաաքում, մասամբ նաև՝ «Ավագ Էդդա» էպոսում:

Հաշվի առնելով հայերի և սկանդինավյանների միջև հնագույն առնչությունները՝ բացառված չէ, որ կենդանու ոսկորներից նոր կյանքի առաջացման դրվագը սկանդինավյանները փոխառած լինեն հայերից:

Արծվի Բախչինյան – Բ. Գ. Թ., ՀՀ ԳԱԱ պատմության ինստիտուտի հայ գաղթավայրերի և Սփյուռքի բաժնի ավագ գիտաշխատող: Գիտական հետաքրքրությունները՝ Հայկական համայնքներ և Սփյուռք, հայության պատմամշակութային կապերն աշխարհի հետ, հայ մշակույթի պատմություն, հայագիտական համալսարանային նշանավոր գործիչներ: Հեղինակ է 15 մենագրության և ավելի քան 100 հոդվածի: ORCID:0000-0001-8637-6946. artsvi@ yahoo.com

ОБ ОДНОЙ АРМЯНО-СКАНДИНАВСКОЙ МИФОЛОГИЧЕСКОЙ ПАРАЛЛЕЛИ

АРЦВИ БАХЧИНЯН

Р е з ю м е

Ключевые слова: легенда о Ное, армянская мифология, виноградная лоза, жертвоприношение теленка, скандинавская мифология, Тор, козы.

Согласно шведскому мифологу Стигу Викандеру армянская легенда о рождении виноградной лозы из телячьей кости имеет параллель в скандинавском фольклоре. Легенда связана с патриархом Ноем (Абраамом). И поскольку армянское слово *որ՝* (лоза) считается происходящим от слова *hort՝* (теленка), и они являются синонимами, впервые предпринята попытка связать это сходство с данной легендой. Дополнительным доказательством является тот факт, что не случайно такое же сходство в звучании и значении обнаруживается и в некоторых романских языках.

Викандер не упоминает, какая из скандинавских легенд имеет сходство с армянской. Он имел в виду легенду о возрождении коз из костей. Источник этой легенды – «Младшая Эдда» исландского скальда Снорри Стурлусона, написанная в XIII веке, частично – «Большая Эдда».

Принимая во внимание древние отношения между армянами и скандинавами, не исключено, что скандинавы заимствовали у армян эпизод рождения новой жизни из костей животного.

Арцви Бахчинян – к. филол. н., старший научный сотрудник отдела армянских общин и Диаспоры Института истории НАН РА. Научные интересы: армянские общины и Диаспора, историко-культурные связи армянского народа с миром, история армянской культуры, выдающиеся мировые деятели армянского происхождения. Автор 15 монографий и более 100 статей. ORCID:0000-0001-8637-6946. artsvi@yahoo.com