HASMIK MATIKYAN

CHILDBEARING AND CHILDREARING TRADITIONS OF THE SHIRAK REGION OF ARMENIA

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HASMIK MATIKYAN: CHILDBEARING AND CHILDREARING TRADITIONS OF THE SHIRAK REGION OF ARMENIA: Yerevan, 2025, 192p.

The monograph is devoted to the study of children's folklore in Shirak as it is performed and transmitted in settings with adults and children. For comparative analysis, folklore gathered from archives and field work outside of Armenia has been added.

The book is addressed to folklorists, ethnologists, philologists, translators and other readers with a general interest in cultural studies.

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"I dedicate my book to the bright memory of my grandmothers and grandfathers, who filled my childhood with games and lullabies".

Author's Biography

Hasmik Matikyan was born in Leninakan in 1987. She is a graduate of Yerevan State University, Faculty of Philology and the American University of Armenia. In 2019 she earned her PhD in Philology, becoming an associate professor in 2024.

Since 2012 she has been working at Shirak Center for Armenological Studies NAS RA as a scientific researcher. She teaches academic courses at Shirak State University and ASUE GB. She has delivered reports at international conferences in Armenia, USA, UK, Spain, Italy, Vienna.

She is the author of the monograph *Let me Sing a Sweet Lullaby* (A Linguistic-Folkloristic Study of the English and Armenian Lullaby Texts) (2020), *Lullaby Songs in Contemporary Manifestations of Traditional Music in Shirak* (co-author, 2024), *Methodological Manual: Modern Manifestations of Children's Folklore in the Shirak Region* (2024), and about 65 articles, and co-authored the *Shirak: Armenian Folklore Culture* collection (2024).

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FOREWORD

The richness of children's lore has long been recognised by folklorists. As Hasmik Matikyan notes here, it marks an integral part of the traditional everyday life of adults and children alike, encompassing both the lore generated and shared by children themselves and the traditional expressive forms addressed to them by adults. Both of these aspects raise the question of the transmission of folklore and the wider historical influences that shape it. Research in childrens' lore has developed exponentially over the development of folklore as a discipline, but the field's huge scope means it still poses challenges and new areas of investigation. One of the key issues has been the systematic and comprehensive documentation and analysis of such a vast array of available material.

This can be seen in the area with which I am most familiar, Great Britain, where Dr Matikyan's previous work on lullabies has been well received. Early British folklore collectors documented specific genres of material (Leslie Orchard Halliwell's collection of nursery rhymes, for example, or Alice Gomme's study of singing games), sometimes at the expense of the context in which they were performed. This problem (not uncommon across folklore more generally in its early years) has been steadily overcome, for example in the later twentieth century work of Iona and Peter Opie, whose vast collection of folklore from across Britain was assembled into a still important series of thematically organised studies of games. While the scale of the Opies' survey enabled a broad sweep analysis, other interested researchers were making geographically narrower but correspondingly more intensive collections of lore: the teacher Nigel Kelsey, for example, conducted his folklore research as a hobby alongside his teaching career in the 1960s and 1970s, with the result that his collection is much more regionally specific in its focus. Contemporary researchers like Steve Roud and Julia Bishop have fought hard to demonstrate the constant evolution and vivacity of children's lore, proving that its

research is not the antiquarian salvage exercise Victorian folklorists might have thought. At the same time, scholars like Bishop and her colleague Catherine Bannister have combined their research into emergent children's lore (virtual play under COVID-19 lockdown conditions, for example) with a renewed attention to the historical archives. This work brings out the need for ever deeper comparative work that places documented childlore in all its social and historical contexts (what are the socio-historical conditions under which it is performed, locally and more broadly, and how has the transmitted lore been developed and communicated as a result?) and that also takes account of the changing perceptions of folklorists towards this material.

Dr Matikyan's study of the birth and child rearing traditions of Shirak offers just this kind of ambitious synthesis. Her study aims to present contemporary lore from the Shirak region as it covers both adults and children in their engagement with birth and child rearing. Focusing in like this, regionally and in terms of the material under discussion, enables a comprehensive comparative analysis in several directions. The folklore investigated here is understood throughout as occupying a vital part of the lives of its bearers, and is accordingly not studied in isolation. Rather than starting from individual folklore items or genres, an overview of general conditions during pregnancy, say, as in Chapter One, enables Matikyan to bring together many different registers of lore. This is also the case with chapters ostensibly addressing a genre more closely, like Chapter Four, which extends its survey of nursery rhymes out to riddles and tongue twisters from perspectives of form and content. The crossover between children's own folklore and that transmitted to them by adults can be well seen in the case of tongue twisters, which have been used as an educational tool while simultaneously being adopted as a fun pursuit.

The approach adopted here allows not just for the close probing of items and genres of folklore in their own right. It also enables us to see them historically, in the

broader setting of Armenia more widely as well as in the context of international comparative material. Chapter Two, on the creation of folklore texts in a childcare environment, particularly addresses the emergence of new forms and items. Matikyan cites, for example, the adoption of rituals and practices in use internationally, like the recent US development of gender reveal parties, which gives us some insight into both the responsiveness of folklore to technological advances and the changes in transmission of folklore in the modern world. Matikyan mentions cases where the ultrasound results are forwarded to a bakery to make a cake in the gender-appropriate colour (pink for a girl, blue for a boy) – a colour symbolism which is itself, as Steve Roud has noted, a fairly recent development.

Most excitingly, the regional focus on Shirak also opens the way to an historical appraisal of the relationship between its folklore and that of Kars, with their very different local histories. The histories involved are also those of the discipline of folklore itself. Matikyan's broad study has engaged the rich theoretical arsenal of folklore studies, allowing the presentation of her own fieldwork in the framework of the historical collections of earlier Armenian folklorists. The tracing of different modes of investigation and analysis opened up in this way is not purely a practical question of the different analytical methods applied. It is also an interdisciplinary question, answered by deploying research approaches from folklore, ethnography, literature and linguistics. It is a rich and exciting collection and analysis that expands our appreciation of historical material and historical approaches as well as opening the way to further future examinations of folklore – children's folklore, certainly, but more widely – in Armenia and elsewhere.

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* * *

The monograph *"Childbearing and Childrearing Traditions of the Shirak Region of Armenia"* by Associate Professor, PhD in Philology, Hasmik Matikyan, constitutes a significant scholarly contribution to the study of Armenian children's folklore, with a particular emphasis on the children's folklore traditions of the Shirak region. Drawing upon extensive fieldwork and comparative analysis, the author situates the children's folklore of Shirak within a broader ethnographic and cultural framework, incorporating materials from other historical-ethnographic regions for contextual depth.

The study is grounded in both primary and secondary sources, enriched by the author's original folklore collection conducted across various rural settlements in Shirak. Notably, the work extends beyond the Armenian context to include folklore material from English-speaking cultures, recorded and analyzed during Matikyan's international research engagements. This comparative approach underscores the transnational dimensions of children's folklore and highlights both unique and shared elements across cultures.

This monograph addresses a notable lacuna in Armenian folkloristics—specifically, the documentation and scholarly interpretation of children's oral traditions in the Shirak region. In following the methodological precedent set by renowned Armenian ethnographer Yervand Lalayan, the author retains the traditional ethnographic title *"Childbearing and Childrearing Traditions,"* thereby anchoring the study within a well-established academic lineage while offering novel perspectives.

Through interdisciplinary methodology, Hasmik Matikyan provides a comprehensive and nuanced portrait of Shirak's children's folklore, examining its thematic, performative, and functional aspects. Furthermore, the comparative treatment of Armenian, English, and American folklore traditions serves to situate Shirak's cultural heritage within a global folkloric discourse.

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PREFACE

Childbearing and Childrearing Traditions of the Shirak Region of Armenia is a comparative study of children's folklore in the cultural region of Shirak. The book presents the ethnographic and folkloric context of pregnancy and child-rearing in the distinctive social and environmental conditions of Shirak. Working in this understudied field, we have applied the methodology of renowned Armenian folklorist and ethnographer Y. Lalayan in order to introduce the period of pregnancy, the caring setting of the expectant mother, and the newborn child.

Lalayan laid the foundation for the method of comprehensive and multidisciplinary regional research in the historical and ethnographic regions of historical Armenia. The results of this method are reflected in the scholar's work in areas such as Javakhk, Varanda, Gandzak, Borchalou District, Vayots Dzor, Zangezur, Nor Bayazet District, Nakhijevan, Vaspurakan, Mush-Taron, and elsewhere. He used the ethnographic description *Տպաբերք և կնունք* (Birth and Baptism).

Undertaking this present research, we have aimed to fill the gap that exists in similar studies. By our modest effort, we have sought to contribute to and enrich Lalayan's ethnographic and folkloristic research while remaining true to the framework of birth and child-rearing in ethnographic scholarship.

We conducted our study using a range of methods known from folklore studies (historical-comparative, typological-comparative, quantitative, etc.). We focused on customs, rituals, and beliefs that have influenced pregnancy and child-rearing practices in the Shirak region.

The work also gains importance through the analysis and interpretation of the tellers' narrations. Metafolklore is the core of the

aforementioned work. It is indeed appropriate to quote A. Dundes' insightful perspective on the role of metafolklore, the 'folklore of folklore', for contextual information for folklorists: 'Folklore texts without contexts are essentially analogous to the large numbers of exotic musical instruments which adorn the walls of anthropological or folk museums and grace the homes of private individuals. The instrument is authentic as is the folklore text, but the range of the instrument, the tuning of the instrument, the function of the instruments, and the intricacies of performing with the instrument are rarely known' (in *The Meaning of Folklore*, ed. by Simon Bronner, 2007, p.80)

The purpose of the current work is also to present contemporary lore from the Shirak region. Our fieldwork framework involves different communities of the Shirak region, especially tellers from the Shirak region. In the oral heritage of Shirak there is an abundance of folklore elements related to the world of children. The nursery environment is rich with ritual ceremonies such as the fortieth-day celebration, christening, and first tooth ceremony.

I also conducted my research in historical and comparative terms, sometimes comparing the material with the folklore material of different ethnographic regions of Armenia. For the source material I used both our folklore collection works and items from the folklore archive funds (Folklore Archive of NAS RA IAE, Archive of Museum of Literature and Art, National Archive of Armenia). Folklore here cannot be separated from ethnography, and the interdisciplinary approach taken in this study incorporated folklore, literature, linguistics, and ethnography.

To accomplish these goals, I have structured the book into four parts. I devote the first section to *Wishing Formulas Addressed to the*

Expectant Mother Reflecting Folkloric Thinking, highlighting the characteristic features and oral narratives addressed to the pregnant woman. Special attention has been given to the role of the midwife as a caregiver for the parturient and the newborn.

In Armenian folklore there are many folk beliefs, customs and experiences about pregnancy, and the Shirak region is rich in folklore for children and adults alike. Sometimes the borders between children's folklore and adult folklore are not hard and fast: pregnancy evokes narratives that deal with both the joy and anxiety of the imminent birth. The stage of pregnancy inspires folklore. Idiomatic expressions related to pregnancy and the expectant woman are vividly used in both folklore and literary sources.

A number of beliefs and customs centre on childless families. If a woman wants to have a child she would often turn to magic and folk medicine to become fertile. This is found in folkloric genres, lullabies, nursery rhymes. Armenian stones reportedly hold magical power, for example: by touching the appropriate stone, the woman can become pregnant or have her breasts fill with milk. Similarly, tellers in the Shirak region describe the process of the child's 'navel falling' as a special ceremony. Midwives (in earlier periods), parents and great-grandparents bless the child by wishing it a healthy life, success and all the fruits of the world. The tellers find some association between 'hiding' the child's navel in a fertile place and the child's future actions. If the parents have long-held desires for their child's future occupation, they might 'hide' the child's navel either in a successful person's pocket or in the corners of an educational institution. This tradition has a long history and is still flourishing in contemporary culture.

The second section, *Craving as a Descriptive Sign of an Expectant Mother*, identifies and explores the importance of food cravings both in real Armenian culture and in folklore-based materials (including the Armenian epic poem *Davit of Sassoun*, traditional fairy tales and nursery rhymes). A number of Armenian traditional fairy tales have been 'inhabited' by the description of maternal cravings and their effect on the foetus or the fate of the child.

Folk beliefs accompany a woman throughout the birthing process, and we have included some of them in the book. Through history the midwife has played an important role in caring for the woman and the newborn baby, cutting the baby's umbilical cord, in feeding, education, etc. As an active figure in the Armenian nursery, the midwife is given a unique description in both ethnographic and folkloric environments (epic, fairy tale, lullaby, etc.). Almost every ethnographic region of Armenia has had its midwives, which is vividly reflected in archival materials, our fieldwork, and printed collections of Armenian ethnography and folklore.

This study would not be complete if we did not also take account of the foreign (American, English) folk beliefs, customs and practices surrounding pregnancy and childcare, especially in customary folklore, that are having an effect in Armenian lore. I move in this second chapter to examine the environment that 'gives birth' to new examples of folklore, particularly external rites. Sometimes, the environment of raising the child is formed with didactic, affectionate formulas and child-protective short units of verbal expression.

This chapter brings out that the nursery is a wonderful environment which is an interesting field of study for folklorists and ethnographers. Children's folklore, focusing mainly on the nursery, is a

combination of oral, material, and customary folklore. Each type of folklore in the nursery has its unique function. Oral folklore aims at naming children (how parents use diminutive words to name, to express their love and devotion to their children), and involves stories about the evil eye, which supposedly is cast on newborn children (speech practices of warding off the evil eye). Customary folklore in the nursery is usually about gestures and games that combine oral with body lore. Customary folklore involves gathering for a special event or acting on a traditional belief (such as parties for the appearance of the first tooth). The Shirak region, comprising tradition-centred communities, adapts such older traditions into seemingly new ones like the nursery 'Gender Reveal Party' now staged during pregnancy.

The subheadings of this chapter cover the main aspects of folklore that foster the production of traditional folkloric materials: folk sayings and folk elements to celebrate the appearance of the child's first tooth, speech practices and supernatural objects to keep the child away from the evil eye and demons. The chapter summarises the lifelong lessons and instructions given by the parents (or grandparents and great-grandparents) to children.

Dwellers in the Shirak region hold 'Gender Reveal Parties' on a household scale, but until now there has been no comparative and contrastive study of this ritual in the field of Armenian folkloristics. This phenomenon is a comparatively new mediated event in Shirakian culture, but the parents mark the event with joy and amusement. It is evident from this that foreign rituals have the capacity to spread from one household to another, from one geographical location to another. The modern period is characterised by intense penetration of external ceremonies, rituals. It is important to note that the development and

spread of these rituals are greatly facilitated by increased travel and the spread of advertising clips and other footage online, particularly on social platforms.

Children's folklore is a space that has unique context (conditioned by the age and sex of the child, as well as the age of the caregiver). Folk belief in the evil eye is ancient and occurs in many folk cultures. Armenians have believed in the negative power of the evil eye not only in Shirak, but also in other ethnographic regions. The ceremony for the appearance of the first tooth is a longstanding tradition in Armenian culture that is also contextual: besides speech practices directed to children (blessings, diminutive words and expressions), food is an important folk element here. In part 3, *Childrearing Songs in the Context of Shirak's Children's Folklore*, I touch upon traditional lullabies, ethnographic and folklore materials related to the fortieth-day ceremony and baptism, as well as texts related to bathing. From the children's play songs, we have selected those samples that had ritual significance, clear local coordinates, etc. The fourth section, *The Nursery Rhyme as a Fundamental Part of Children's Folklore*, analyses counting-out rhymes, riddles and tongue-twisters.

Alongside the translations of lullabies and children's nursery rhymes, we present the original Armenian texts to ensure the continuity of our folklore heritage and its transmission to future generations. The Armenian versions are rendered faithfully, staying true to the dialect of the storytellers. The Appendix includes lullaby texts with notations.

Considering the difficulty of translating folkloric texts, we have simply transliterated some of them.

Note: The research was conducted and financed by the Higher Education and Science Committee of RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports within the framework of the research project '22 YR-6B030'. The monograph in the Armenian language was published in 2024.

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I have transliterated the folkloric materials using the HMB transliteration system.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Ա ա	A a	Eng. Us	Ծ ծ	C c	Rus. мать (ts)	Ջ ջ	J̌ ǰ	Eng. joy
Բ բ	B b	Eng. Bed	Կ կ	K k	It. casa	Ռ ռ	R̆ r̆	Eng. ready
Գ գ	G g	Eng. Dog	Հ հ	H h	Eng. hat	U u	S s	Eng. save
Դ դ	D d	Eng. Dog	Ձ ձ	J j	It. mezzo	Վ վ	V v	Eng. view
Ե ե	E e	Eng. Yellow	Ղ ղ	Ł ł	Fr. jours	S ւ	T t	It. tutti
Զ զ	Z z	Eng. zebra	Ճ ճ	Č č	affricate č‘	Ր ր	R r	Eng. soft r
Է է	Ē ē	Eng. Bed	Մ մ	M m	Eng. meal	Ց ց	C‘ c‘	It. circa (ts)
Ը ը	Ə ə	Eng. Search	Յ յ	Y y	Eng. boy	Ուու	U u	Eng. book
Թ թ	T‘ t‘	Eng. town	Ն ն	N n	Eng. nice	Փ փ	P‘ p‘	Eng. piano
Ժ ժ	Ž ž	Fr. Jours	Շ շ	Š š	Eng. she	Ք ք	K‘ k‘	Eng. castle
Ի ի	I i	Eng. meal	Ո ո	O o	Eng. voice	և	ew	Eng. never
Լ լ	L l	Eng. lunch	Չ չ	Č‘ č‘	Eng. chair	Օ օ	Ō ō	Eng. hot
Խ խ	X x	Sp. joven	Պ պ	P p	It. padre	Ֆ ֆ	F f	Eng. flower

In comparison with HMB transliteration system, the following changes are to be considered:

- ✓ «Ե» in the beginning of the word is sometimes transliterated as «ye».
- ✓ «Ո» in the beginning of the word is sometimes transliterated as «vo».

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I want to acknowledge my academic supervisors, foreign advisors (Simon Bronner, Paul Cowdell), colleagues, and tellers for their contribution to my research.

Folklorist and translator Alvard Jivanyan oriented my path to analysing folklore texts from different sources when she was supervising my PhD thesis on *Linguo-Folkloristic Study of the English Lullaby Text (as Compared to the Armenian Folk Material)*. Her methodology on looking at the folklore text from various spectra guides me in this research as well.

I also appreciate Sergo Hayrapetyan's role in shaping critical thinking while dealing with academic papers. As an editor of 'Scientific Works' of NAS RA Shirak Center for Armenological Studies he is kindly expanding my research areas through his offer to draw Armenian parallels with foreign materials by helping with terminological commentaries.

I owe thanks to Simon Bronner for broadening my interdisciplinary outlook. I had the good fortune to have fruitful discussions with him at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 2024. I appreciate his hospitality during my visit to the USA. His contribution is noteworthy with structuring the titles of the chapters. In the same spirit I want to extend my thanks to Paul Cowdell for editing the book.

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I am indebted to my family, my husband, for giving me the opportunities to present some of the research sections at international conferences in USA, Great Britain, Austria and Italy, and for the time I have spent on research outside family time. The participation in conferences has enlarged my horizons and given birth to new ideas.

PART I

WISHING FORMULAS ADDRESSED TO THE EXPECTANT MOTHER IN THE CONTEXT OF FOLKLORE THINKING

Narratives and Folk Beliefs on the Expectant Mother

Pregnancy, being a condition associated with risk for women, generates the entry of folk beliefs and symbolic expressions of desire into the realm of childbirth. Folk tradition at times resorts to the assistance of such beliefs as a means of overcoming seemingly insurmountable or difficult situations. Each region, possessing its own rich repertoire of folklore, over time also 'imports' and 'exports' certain elements. The Shirak region retains components of traditional thought and presents itself through striking folkloric material specifically addressed to childbirth and the newborn.

Folk beliefs related to pregnancy in Shirak have been classified here into three categories, based on the thematic categorisation proposed by Simon Bronner:

1. Prognostic (sign-based) beliefs,
2. Sympathetic (magical) beliefs,
3. Transformational beliefs.

According to Bronner, in the case of prognostic beliefs, the human agent lacks control over the outcome; such events are perceived as inevitable. In the case of sympathetic beliefs, human actions are believed to produce purposeful results. Transformational beliefs, on the other hand, function as symbolic mechanisms that facilitate transition from the negative to the positive, particularly in contexts of desire (Bell, Bronner, 2006, p. 85).

In *Encyclopedia of American Folklife* S.Bronner describes the structure and forms beliefs in the following way:

In 'sign beliefs,' the condition is an omen over which human beings exert no control: 'If a dog howls [sign condition], it a sign of

death [result].' In 'magic beliefs,' purposeful human action brings about the result: 'Turn a snake belly up [cause condition], and it will rain soon [result].' A third type, 'conversion beliefs,' expresses how, after the appearance of a sign that portends an undesirable result, one can intervene to avoid the negative outcome or, in some cases, even create a positive one. For example, 'if you break a mirror [sign], you will have seven years' bad luck [result], unless you gather up the pieces and throw them into the running water (conversion) (Bronner, 2006, p.84).

Based on the ethnographic materials we have collected, it can be asserted that all of the aforementioned belief types are still present in the folklore of Shirak. For instance, if a pregnant woman dreams of an apple (a prognostic belief), it is interpreted as a sign that she will give birth to a girl. Moreover, if a woman is not pregnant or if childbirth is delayed, folk medical practices are believed to be capable of altering the situation (a transformational belief).

The world of childbirth is full of experience, across the whole range of prenatal, birth, and postnatal stages. From the perspective of folk belief narratives, pregnancy has a distinct character not only in Shirak but also across other cultures. This uniqueness is largely influenced by collective memory and the shared cultural perception of certain worship and belief-related elements.

Shirak's rich folklore reflects a poetic and metaphorical vein, often revolving around themes of infertility and pregnancy. A woman unable to conceive in Shirak was traditionally called *'ch'ber'* (barren), using expressions like 'she doesn't produce dew', intended to describe a woman unable to bear children. In contrast, pregnant women were referred to by various euphemisms, which, over time, became markers

of pregnancy itself. These included: 'remained' (meaning 'became pregnant'), 'with child', 'carrying a baby', and 'heavy-footed'.

Several idiomatic expressions are similarly used in the English language to say that a woman is pregnant. Common examples include 'having a bun in the oven', 'up the duff', 'expecting', 'being in the family way', and the informal 'preggers'. English women have been known to say of an unwanted pregnancy 'I fell for a baby'.

According to the narrator Khanum Mikayelyan, there is a temporal distinction between the terms 'with child' (*tsotsvor*) and 'caused' (*patcharavor*). She explains:

'If you were pregnant, then you were *tsotsvor*. Back then, we didn't say "pregnant", we'd say "our bride is *tsotsvor*". That's how it's been from ancient times. The word *պաոճառավոր* is much older—it was used once the belly became visibly round'.

The term *ծոցվոր* is also commonly used in literary contexts. For example, in Hakob Mntsuri's short story *The Mute*, we find this passage: '"You can't carry the milk pail by yourself, it's filled with snow. You're *tsotsvor*, your due date is near. What if something happens to you? God forbid. Should I go with my sister-in-law instead?" the girl interrupted' (H. Mncuri, *Munj*)

These folk terms, rooted in oral tradition, have evidently found a natural place in Armenian literature. Prominent literary scholar A. Ghanalanyan explores this in his book *Armenian Literature and Folklore*, where he notes that: 'Folk traditions have had a strong influence on artistic and historical literature. Writers from various peoples and historical periods have drawn from the people's oral traditions—using their themes, motifs, idioms, language, and creative methods' (Ghanalanyan, 1985).

In one of Grigor Zohrap's story, the term *ծոցվորությունն* (pregnancy) is used: 'One day, Tigranouhi fell ill. Her head spun, and she felt nauseous. She kept her discomfort to herself, telling no one. Over time, the signs of pregnancy (*ծոցվորությունն*) became increasingly evident' (Zohrap, 1982, p. 13).

The word *ծոցվոր* is frequently used in metaphorical literary contexts, such as in Paruyr Sevak's poem:

The fault lay with the Armenian,
Who wouldn't willingly leave his ancestral land—
His centuries-old villages and towns,
The mighty Karin, the impregnable Sasun,
His *tsotsvor* Mush, and his fruitful Van...

As mentioned, in Shirak, the term *պատճառավոր* was sometimes used to refer to a pregnant woman, emphasising her condition—'Does she have causes?' (Is she pregnant?).

H. Cholakyan explores similar euphemistic expressions for pregnancy in his study of the Kesab region:

'Kesab residents reveal pregnancy through astonishing euphemisms: "*pataghvyur i*" (fruitful), "*yrkgkghek i*" (two persons), or "*meoyu mtvots i kerovose*" (the seed has entered the jar). Similarly, a woman unable to conceive might be described as "*erovore pouty keghvots i*" (the plough has been hung up)' (Cholakyan, 1988).

Eastern Armenian literature also features the frequent use of the word *պատճառավոր*. Stepan Zoryan's *Winter Nights* features the following passage: 'War is a terrible thing... What do you think would happen if the enemy suddenly reached the city? How would Derzak Minas escape? He's limping, his wife is *gravid*, and they have five children—no carriage, no cart… She can't ride a horse if she's *gravid.*

The Armenian word *ծոց tsots* (bosom, breast) holds deep symbolic meaning, indicating the maternal bond. Common expressions from Shirak include: 'kept in the mother's bosom', 'came from the mother's bosom', 'may your bosom be full of children', as well as soothing lines for children like 'Come to mommy's bosom'.

Interestingly, some folktales refer to pregnancy as a 'disease of the boy-child', as in the tale 'The Sparrow Girl': 'Once there was a man and his wife. They were childless for eight years. One day, the woman wraps an egg in cloth and lays it on her belly. She tells her husband: "I have the disease of the boy-child".' (HZH-13, 1985, p. 115).

Several folk practices are believed to 'create' pregnancy. An elderly storyteller from Tavshut, Khanum Mikayelyan, shared this story: 'Around 1957, a woman couldn't get pregnant. My sister-in-law Sanam brought her to our village. She heated water in a copper pot, added various medicinal herbs and flowers, and let the woman sit in the herbal bath. After an hour, she got out, and soon we heard she was pregnant. The herbs must have cleansed her thoroughly'.

Another narrator, Hayastan Khurshudyan, shared this symbolic belief: 'A barren woman (*թափդի* can't carry a pregnancy. So they would roll her seven times across the roof (*yerdik*) of a family that had many children. After that, she would conceive'.

For centuries, many cultures have believed in the healing or generative power of stones. One American folk belief records that 'A stone with a hole in it, hung over the head of a woman in labor, will assist in the birth' (Brown, 1952). A. Ghanalanyan's *Traditions and Legends* mentions two sacred stones in Armenia:

1. The **Milk-Giving Stone** in Sisian, where barren women light candles and anoint their breasts with dripping water from the stone, believing it will increase milk production.
2. The **Fertility Stone** in Kajaran, a smooth, shiny blue stone. Barren women would rub their bellies against it, hoping to receive a child from the divine (Ghanalanyan, 1969, 54).

In literature, these symbolic beliefs are often shaped into key thematic elements. In Sero Khanzadyan's short story *"Պորտաքար/ Navel Stone/,"* the power of the sacred *Portakar* stone is described:

"'Get ready," said Sophi's friend Henazi. "We're going to Portakar tomorrow. That sacred stone... I haven't taken you yet. No barren woman ever leaves without a blessing. Let's place your belly against the stone- maybe a light will shine upon your head." One day, Henazi took her weak hand and placed it on her belly: "Something's moving here." The woman's face lit up. She kissed Henazi's cheeks and whispered with reverence: "I bow to your power, Portakar, for giving this poor orphan a child…"'(Khanzadyan, 1983, p. 326)

The very word *պորտաքար* (literally 'navel-stone') suggests the deep connection between the mother and child through the umbilical cord. In the Shirak region, sayings like 'May I bury your navel' or 'May your navel not fall' are common. Sometimes, the navel becomes a metaphor for lineage more generally, as in the expressions 'seven navels away' or 'the child is drawn through seven navels'.

Shirak-based narrator Donara Zargaryan described the celebratory custom surrounding the falling of the umbilical cord: 'If the cord fell early, the child was said to be healthy. They'd wrap it in clean cloth and place it at the doorstep of a governor or, today, an important institution—so the child would hold a good position or receive a strong

education. The cord was never left at home. If the child misbehaved, they'd say the cord had been improperly cut'.

Another narrator Khanum Mikayelyan shared that: 'We'd wrap the cord in clean cloth and place it near the school gate if we hoped the child would become a teacher. For a doctor, at the clinic gate. I left my son's at the schoolyard. And my wish came true'.

Folk beliefs tend to spread rapidly across cultures, often offering solutions to universal human concerns—illness, fertility, social conflict, and more. According to S. Bronner, tradition is best described as 'handy'—not just in the sense of utility, but as something 'handed down' from generation to generation (Bronner, 2011, pp. 32-33).

Craving as a Descriptive Sign of an Expectant Mother

Pregnancy, being such an important stage in a woman's life, deserves attention both in real life settings and in the realm of fairy tale genre. Folkloric examples often depict a pregnant woman's desire to achieve a need being accomplished through food cravings. The food desired varies in meaning depending on the specific ethnic background, while the phenomenon of changing one's mind also has its own peculiarities among Armenians. According to Malkhaseants' dictionary, craving has a specific description in Armenian culture, with women being given whatever, and however much, they want to eat and drink: *մտափոխ- բարփոխ* (Malkhaseants 1944, 373). *Բարփոխ* means a woman who has extreme cravings, deep appetite. Acharyan gives the example բարք (Ախց)-ախորժակ, մէտէ, կ"ըսուի միայն բարքս կ"ուզէ (այլուր՝ սիրտս կ"ուզէ) մէտէս կ'ուզէ (Acharyan, 1913, p.180), where *բարք* should clearly be understood in the sense of appetite.

According to the narrator M. Petrosyan, the notion of *տղաբերք* 'fertility' in Armenian national culture has, as well as its connection with children 'երեխա, 'the following meaning: *բար-պտուղ-բերք*. It means a good harvest. The birth of a child is also understood as harvest in the formulaic thinking of Karabakh *Բերքս եկալ՝ (հղիացել ես), դե ծնի)* (Petrosyan, 2024, p.120). One Shirak narrator recalled that 'A pregnant woman was told: "Take a craving and eat it, one fine day you will give birth to a giant boy"'.

In one American folk belief, it is claimed that if a pregnant woman does not satisfy her food craving, the child will be born with a mark resembling the desired food (Hendricks, 1966, p. 29). Within this cultural framework, the expression '*what the heart desires'* has acquired a formulaic and symbolic significance.

Narratives pertaining to this craving belief often take the form of vivid, exceptional memory-images. As narrator R. Aristakesyan recalls: 'My mother-in-law once told a story. "I've heard that when a pregnant woman suddenly craves something, it is not merely the woman who desires the food—it is the unborn child. There was a case of a pregnant woman travelling—back then, people used carriages—and during the ride, she saw a pomegranate. Lacking money to purchase it, she stole it. As a result of the theft, she was killed. During the autopsy, it was discovered that the pomegranate was in the mouth of the foetus".

Other expressions rooted in this belief also appear in colloquial speech: 'When someone has a sudden craving, people ask, "Are you pregnant?" or: "Aren't you a pregnant woman, the kind who changes her mind every moment and says, 'I want to eat this, I want to eat that'?"' (H. Matikyan's fieldwork, 2023).

This cultural motif is echoed in Hrachya Harutyunyan's recorded folktale 'The Pomegranate Seed', which bears notably close parallels to the account provided by R. Aristakesyan. The story documented by Harutyunyan is as follows:

'A young man is riding a horse and has seated his sister behind him. As they proceed toward the village, the sister sees a pomegranate seed on the ground and says: "Brother dear, please stop the horse so I may get down". The brother stops; the sister dismounts, picks up the seed, puts it in her mouth, and remounts the horse. As they continue their journey, the brother remarks: "My sister brought the horse to a halt and dismounted for a single pomegranate seed—this must mean she is with child. Unfortunate things may follow. Ride slowly, so I may catch up".

'He said, "The horse will start to trot, pass by the sister's field and the garden, and come from the orchard..." The brother thought it over and

opened his sister's heart and belly. He saw that the pomegranate seed had just sprouted in the child's mouth.

This metaphorical thinking is also reflected in the realm of folklore. Armenian folk tales, as collective expressions of language, thought, and cultural meanings, often encode the pregnant woman's described cravings.

For example, 'A girl is pregnant, she will crave, she will want a pomegranate. Brother, bring a pomegranate, she will eat it, and in nine months' time, she will give birth to a boy. That boy will grow up strong, and he will have a pomegranate seed on his head. Of course, they will name the boy Nranhat Նռանհատ (Pomegranate Seed)' (HZH-10, 1967, p. 84).

This symbolic significance of the pomegranate fruit is similarly emphasised in the introductory section of another variant, the Van-Vaspurakan folk tale 'Naran Hat' Նառ խաթյուն ('Pomegranate Seed'):

'A girl will come, a girl will come to be a wife. One day she will want a wooden plank; in the plank, she will find the pomegranate seed. The pomegranate seed will sprout, will grow. In nine months, nine hours, nine days, this girl will give birth to a sweet boy, and they will name him Naran Hat (Pomegranate Seed)' (HZH-14, 1999, p. 542).

Folklorist Tork Dalalyan, in his presentation 'The Symbolism of the Pomegranate in Folk Riddles, Songs, and Tales', addresses this symbolic significance of the pomegranate in folkloric texts. He makes the point: 'The earliest cultural reference to the pomegranate appears in the mythology of small nations. According to a Phrygian and pre-Armenian myth, the goddess of motherhood, Nana, becomes pregnant after swallowing a pomegranate seed. From Nana is born the dying-and-resurrecting god, who is the counterpart of Ara the Beautiful—the symbol of the annual renewal of vegetation and the sun's yearly cycle (Dalalyan 2020, 14-16).

Pregnant women and mothers were largely fed nutritious foods, which is reflected in idiomatic expressions. Some common sayings from the Shirak region include:

- ‘One who eats butter and honey will be healthy’ (Յուղ ու մեղր ուտողը առողջ կէղնի).
- ‘One who eats butter and honey will bear a boy’ (Յուղ ու մեղր ուտողը տղա կբերե).
- ‘Give money to the butter, not to the medicine’ (Փող տուր յեղին, օր չտաս դեղին).

The idiomatic formulation ‘*butter and honey’* has distinct connotations. Phrases such as:

- ‘One who spills butter and gathers honey’, or ‘One who spills honey and gathers butter’ (Յուղ թափող՝ մեղր հավաքող, մեղր թափող՝ յուղ հավաքող), refer to a gracious, industrious, and wise woman (Suqiasyan, Galstyan, 1975, p. 450).

In the Shirak region, butter and honey themselves become formulas of blessing:

- ‘May you be filled with butter and honey’ (Յուղով ու մեղրով լցվիք)
- ‘May you live in butter and honey’ (Յուղ ու մեղրի մեջ էղնիք, յուղ ու մեղրի մեջ կորիք).

During Armenian weddings, the bride and groom are also fed honey as a symbol of sweetness and abundance. From this comes the idiomatic expression ‘to live in honey’, meaning to live in plenty and lead a fulfilling life. This further feeds into ideas about pregnancy. In Inner Basen, every evening and morning, boiled milk with honey or butter was given to the expectant women to drink (Hakobyan, 1974, p. 193).

P.Bediryan’s *Comprehensive Explanatory Dictionary of Armenian Idioms* records several idioms involving the word ‘honey’:

- ‘To drop honey from one’s mouth / to have honey and milk flow from the lips’, ie., to speak sweetly (բերանից մեղր թափել/ բերնեն մեղր ու կաթ վազել)
- ‘To have the taste of milk and honey’, ie., to be very sweet (բերանից մեղր թափել/ բերնեն մեղր ու կաթ վազել/ շրթունքեն մեղր հոսիլ- քաղցր խոսել, կաթի ու մեղրի համ ունենալ- շատ քաղցր լինել) (Bediryan, 2011, p. 932).

Lullabies and children’s songs from Shirak (Karin), especially those beginning with the phrases ‘*Dan, dan*’ or ‘*hop! hop!*’, are rich in references to children’s foods, particularly honey. For example:

Dandan, dandan, let’s tap the tray,
Full of honey is the spoon we lay,
Let’s dance, let’s play,
Let’s sacrifice the black lamb today…
(Grigoryan, 1970, p. 96)

(Դանդա՛ն- դանդա՛ն դընկոցիք,
Մեղրով լիքը քթոցիկ,
Դան էնենք, դանդան էնենք,
Սև գառը մատաղ էնենք…

Dandān- dandān dənkocʿikʿ,
Mełrov likʿə kʿtocʿikʿ,
Dan ēnēnkʿ, dandān ēnēnkʿ,
Sew gaṙə matał ēnēnkʿ…)

American culture shows a comparable use of the word ‘sugar’, as in rhymes like:

Roses are red
Violets are blue
Sugar is sweet
And so are you.
(Bronner, 1988, p. 86)

Bronner explains that, as early as the eighteenth century, adults used this verse as a Valentine rhyme and later introduced it to the nursery as a child's play rhyme. Today, children delight in the many variations possible on the verse's simple meter and rhyme, and find humour in inverting the verse's sentiment (Bronner, 1988, p. 86).

Honey is sometimes used as a form of affectionate address toward children, especially using a diminutive or tender expression. In Vahe Hayk's short story 'Grandma and Grandchild', for instance, the grandmother affectionately addresses her grandchild with the words: 'Sweetie… sweetie… little honey, mm… little honey…' (Hayk, p. 172).

Honey gathered by bee larvae (*dzag-meghr*) is considered the tastiest and most precious kind. In the Gegharkunik region, grandmothers would use this term as a term of endearment for their grandchildren: *dzagu meghr* (little larval honey).

In folktales we often find the restriction that the expectant woman is allowed to eat the food her heart desires but only under one condition—she must share part of it with the character (often magical) who witnessed her desiring it or helped her obtain it. This idea of 'sharing in halves' is a recurring motif in Armenian folktales. For example, in the Shirak folktale 'Majrum Khoji's Tale', we find the following:

'Long ago, there lived a powerful king. But he had no heir. Day and night, he thought about having a son... The king said: "If I don't think about it, who will? If I die without an heir, who will govern my people?" At that moment, a dervish said: "Long live the king! If I give you two sons, will you give me one?" The king promised he would. Then the dervish pulled out an apple, gave it to the king and said: "Take it—eat half yourself, and give the other half to the queen. By God's will, you will have two sons. But until I return, do not name them"' (HZH-4, 1963, p. 105).

In this tale from Shirak, the dervish is an active character. Folklorist Marine Khemchyan, in her monograph *Adviser and Donor in Armenian Folk Fairy Tales* discusses common themes of childless kings or childless poor couples in Armenian tales, and emphasises the presence of the dervish:

'The appearance of the dervish in our tales is conditioned by plotlines borrowed from Eastern folklore traditions, as well as by the cultural proximity of Christianity and Islam in the region. As a result, tales incorporated not only the roles played by dervishes but also their various names as used in the Near East (*darvish*, *darvesh*, *davrish*, *davresh*, *dvresh*…)' (Khemchyan, 2021, p. 46).

Shirak's folklore is closely connected with the folklore of Kars, due to both geographical characteristics and the historical reality that a large portion of the Shirak population migrated from Kars, so we unsurprisingly find similar motifs in the folklore. In the Kars folktale 'The Tale of Yashoghlan', a dervish also offers a magical apple to a poor couple, an apple that brings children:

'Once upon a time, there lived a man and a woman. They were poor... Every day the man and woman prayed to God, went to the church, made offerings from their humble means, hoping God would take pity and grant them a child—but nothing happened. They split the apple: the man ate one half, the woman the other. Nine months and nine days later, the woman gave birth to a son'(Kars, 2013, pp. 105–106).

The opening formulas of certain Armenian folktales also mention that the heroes are childless or longing for children. In these tales, a dervish appears to help them conceive by offering an apple. Representative stories include:

- 'The Tale of King Tur i Tam'

- ‘Ahmat and Mahmat’
- ‘Shahzadeh’ (HZH-13, 1985, pp. 58–101).

Similar beliefs around cravings can be found elsewhere, often in connection with physical effects on the unborn child. The belief that a thwarted craving will result in a birthmark resembling the desired food is recorded across the USA, for example from Illinois (Harry Middleton Hyatt, *Folk-Lore from Adams County Illinois*, 2nd edn (Hannibal, MO: Memoirs of the Alma Egan Hyatt Foundation, 1965) and Texas (George D. Hendricks, *Mirrors, Mice, & Mustaches: A Sampling of Superstitions and Popular Beliefs in Texas* (Austin: Texas Folklore Society, 1966). The sympathetic character of birthmarks is recorded in both of these collections, with Hendricks noting that if a pregnant woman sees a person with a defect and says something about them, the baby will be born with the same defect. Hendricks also records the practice of putting a knife under the mother’s bed during birth, in order to cut the pains of labour.

Birthmarks are usually blamed on evil influences the mother was exposed to during pregnancy. Divination by the shape and placement of birthmarks is known as maculomancy. Hippocrates, the Greek physician, believed birthmarks should be looked at closely when examining a patient. For divination purposes, birthmarks are read in the same way as moles. One American superstition says birthmarks can be removed by touching them with the hand of the dead child (Webster, 2008, p. 32).

In these narratives, the motif of craving serves as a culturally coded indicator of pregnancy, symbolising an intuitive or embodied knowledge of transformation. These stories not only preserve communal

memory but also offer insight into the symbolic logic underlying folk perceptions of the maternal body and its desires.

Shirak's rich body of sayings and beliefs surrounding the cravings of pregnant women shows similar conceptions, for example:

- ❖ 'If a pregnant woman eats stolen food, the baby's cheek will have a mark' (ie: a birthmark) (Եթե հղի կինը գողտունց է կերել, էրեխու թուշը պուճ կընկնի/ կէղնի)
- ❖ 'A pregnant woman eats for two' (Հղի կինը երկու հոգու համար կուտե).

According to a folk belief, when the foetus begins to move (kicks), the mother's intense food cravings are likely to subside or disappear altogether.

We should briefly note the distinction between concepts of 'child' and 'foetus'. Until a baby is born, it is referred to as a foetus (*պտուղ*). The word *պտուղ /ptugh/*(meaning literally 'fruit' or 'offspring') has a distinctive presence in Shirak's blessing and curse formulas.

Examples include:

Blessings:

'May it be a good fruit' (Բարի պտուղ էղնի)

'May it grow up with goodness and grace' (Բարով խերով մեծընա)

'May they become a good person' (Լավ մարդ դառնա).

Curses:

'May your fruit dry up' (Պտուղդ չորնա)

'May you bear no fruit' (Պտուղ չտաս).

Common idiomatic expressions also include:

'The fruit doesn't fall far from the tree' (Պտուղը ծառից հեռու չի ընկնի)

'A good tree bears good fruit' (Բարի ծառը բարի պտուղ կուտա)

The following comparable expressions are found in English linguistic culture:

- Like father, like son / Like mother, like daughter–Very common and direct.
- Cut from the same cloth–Suggests people are very similar in nature or background.
- A chip off the old block–Refers to someone (often a son) who closely resembles their parent.
- Runs in the family–Used when a trait or tendency appears across generations.
- Blood will tell–Suggests inherited qualities (good or bad) inevitably show through.
- Born under the same star–Implies a shared fate or character, though a bit poetic.
- It's in their blood–Suggests an inherited talent, habit, or disposition.

The *Armenian Dialectological Dictionary* defines the verbs պտղել/պտղիլ *ptghel*/*ptghil* as meaning 'to give birth' or 'to have a child':

- *ptghel* – to bear fruit, to give birth (general),
- 'Blessed be the day your mother bore you'
- *ptghil* – to give birth (specifically referring to a woman), to bear offspring,
- Used in curses as well: *"May you never bear fruit"* (Acharyan, 1913, p. 931).

In conclusion, it should be noted that folk beliefs surrounding pregnant women continue to exist in contemporary culture. These beliefs manifest vividly throughout all stages of pregnancy and often extend into the postpartum period as well.

Paremiological Examples Addressed to the Expectant Mother

Among the most widespread and vital genres of Shirak's folk tradition are proverbial and formulaic expressions. In terms of our theme, we will highlight verbal formulas directed toward pregnant women and mothers, including blessings, good wishes, and protective sayings (known as a*chk'alusankner*—literally, 'eye-light' wishes).

In the Shirak region, the following are the expressive speech units most often addressed to the woman:

- 'May you have an easy delivery' (Թեթև ազատվիս)
- 'May the doctor's hands be light upon you' (Բժշկի ձեռը վրեդ թեթև էղնի)
- 'May your labour go well' (Բարի ազատում էղնի)
- 'May you quickly be freed from that tight place' (էդ նեղ տեղից շուտըմ ազատվիս)
- 'May God open the bundle He tied, may He untie what He has bound. Let God loose the bound which he has created' (Աստծու կապած բոխչեն թող Աստված էլ բացե, իրա կապածը թող ինքը քանդե)
- 'May you deliver with just one push' (Մե ձենով ազատվիս)
- 'The pain is God-given; may God also relieve you and help' (Աստծու տված ցավ է, Աստված էլ կազատե, կօգնե)
- 'May God protect you and your child' (Աստված քեզի ու էրեխուդ պահե-պահպանե)

In English, 'Wishing you a smooth and safe delivery' is often used as a supportive message for someone expecting a baby.

Protective and congratulatory sayings (a*chk'alusankner*) are most commonly used at the time of birth or baptism. In Shirak, typical congratulatory phrases include:

- ‘May your eyes be lightened!’ (i.e., may your child bring joy) (Աչ-քերդ լույս էղնի)
- ‘May your house and home always be full’ (Տուն ու դուռդ միշտ լիքն էղնի)
- ‘May the corners of your home echo with the voices of children’ (-Թող տան սաղ անկյուններից էրեխեքը վազվզեն կամ էրեխու ձեն լսվի)

To a mother, it is customary to say: ‘May your bed be blessed’.

Sargis Harutyunyan’s monograph “The Genre of Blessing and Cursing in Armenian Folklore” is rich with well-wishing formulas addressed to women in childbirth. The renowned folklorist connects the origin of blessing formulas primarily with the event of childbirth, writing:

‘In ancient traditional views of the people, childbirth was perceived as a sacred and mystical event—a phenomenon carried out by supernatural forces. Thus, a series of ritual acts and verbal formulas emerged, meant to ensure a successful birth, and to protect both the mother and the newborn from external evil forces and to neutralise them’ (Harutyunyan, 1975, p. 221).

According to S. Harutyunyan, the well-wishing formulas for new mothers generally express three main concerns:

1. Ensuring the health of the mother
   e.g., ‘May you be safely freed from that narrow place’, ‘May God's help be with you’, etc. (Բարով էդ նեղ տեղից ազատվես, Աստծու աջողությունը վրեդ ըլնի)
2. Protecting from harmful influences and evil forces
   e.g., ‘May your bed be blessed’, ‘May you joyfully complete your 40-day rest’, etc. (Բարձդ բարի ըլնի, Ուրախուտենով քառասունք բռնի)

3. Securing the health, life, and future happiness of the newborn and its family

   e.g., 'May God protect it with father and mother', 'May the child grow up with both parents', etc. (Աստված հորով մորով պահի, Հորով-մորով վենձանա) (Harutyunyan, 1975, p. 222).

The Shirakian expressions 'sweet eye', or 'take a sweet eye' are commonly used in the nursery. The mother can have sweet eyes and her eyes do not cause any damage to children. This is significant in terms of wider beliefs around the eye and vision. For Shirak tellers, if the right eye is 'moving' it is a sign of good luck. If the left eye moves, something bad should be expected.

Measures have been constantly taken to ward off the evil eye. It is an Armenian belief that the evil eye even breaks stone into several pieces. For Shirak residents, newborn children and their mothers are vulnerable and the evil eye will 'catch' them easily. One of the reasons is that they are not defended. Armenian chant prayers are mostly said to protect the newborn from evil spirits. The evil is described in a variety of terms, including babysnatchers, child-scaring spirits. In Shirakian culture parents put holy books (especially the prayer book Narek) under the child's pillow, uttering 'May the evil go away from you'. Frequently, household elements serve as a means of protecting the newborn child: a knife is put under the child's pillow, beads are hung from the cradles, etc.

Many cultures believe in the existence of nursery fairies. For example, in Scottish folk culture the newborn child, in the first few days of its life, is exposed to the great danger of being stolen by the fairies, who are forever on the lookout for innocent babies, who they take in exchange for some of their evil ones. Something of this belief in the changeling is known all over Scotland. There are means of circumventing this. A knife placed in

the cradle will do the trick, while care must be taken not to carry fire or light out of the house until the child is at least a week old.

One measure to ward off the evil eye is the prayer text which can be uttered at any time of a day, usually at bedtime. The prayer can be uttered instead of a lullaby, or any other bedtime text (e.g., fairy tale). Sometimes short sentences or even three words (*tu-tu-tu*) are uttered, having the value of a chant song. One of the famous Shirakian evil-eye chants is:

The evil eye to the evil thorn,
The evil eye to the hell…
Չար աչքը, չար փշին,
Գեշ աչքը գրողին:
Čʿaračʿkʿə, čʿar pʿšin,
Gešačʿkʿə groġin.

The Armenian nursery has many protective folkloric elements and sayings which have been handed down from the older generation to the next, especially from women to expectant mothers.

The Midwife-Nurse as an Active Figure in the Nursery

Midwifery as the care of women in pregnancy, childbirth (parturition), and the postpartum period often includes care of the newborn. Midwifery is as old as childbearing. Indeed, midwives historically were women who were mothers themselves and who became midwives when they attended the births of neighbours or family members. Though without formal training, some midwives had extensive knowledge of herbal remedies and performed medical services beyond simply attending childbirths. Midwifery was an important occupation for married, older, or widowed women that provided them with payment (monetary or in kind) or social capital in exchange for their work.

The universality of childbirth makes the practice of midwifery a cultural touchstone, as seen in historic textual and pictorial references to midwives attending births.
(https://www.britannica.com/science/midwifery/Midwifery-in-the-modern-era/).

The anglophone world has produced specialised manuals and books about midwifery, such as J. Watson's foundational British work *A Complete Handbook of Midwifery for Midwives and Nurses* (1910).

As an active figure in Armenian culture, the midwife holds a distinct place both in ethnographic and folkloric contexts (epic, fairy tales, lullabies, etc.). Each region traditionally had its own nurse-midwife. This is evidenced by our fieldwork recordings as well as the materials found in ethnographic collections. The semantic depth of the word dayak (nursemaid), discussed further below, implies its significant role. The *dayak* (or *dahek*) originally referred to a wet nurse, a woman who breastfed another's child, as in the example: 'The wet nurse arrived on time, and relieved the birth mother' (Malkhaseants, 1944, p. 493).

The *dayak* plays an important role in pregnancy and nursery settings: assisting the nursing mother, supporting childbirth, caring, educating, instructing, and nurturing the child.

V. Hatsuni, in his *History of Armenian Women*, highlights the work of the nursemaid: 'Our women did not personally nurse their own children but entrusted them to wet nurses. Thus, if a newborn Armenian girl was born under a certain sign, she was first swaddled not by her own mother, but by a foreign woman—a wet nurse. The maternal authority entrusted to the wet nurse created a close and inseparable bond between the nurse and the child, which remained throughout their lives. Numerous examples confirm this: the beloved nursemaids in the families, who surrounded the children during their upbringing, and the bonds formed between them. However, a girl without a wet nurse lacked such connections; in her case, the mother was everything' (Hatsuni, 2007, p. 8).

Khrimyan Hayrik also commented on the importance of the *dayak*: 'The wet nurse is certainly the child's second mother. Woe to the careless mother who, driven by economic hardship, entrusts her child to another woman of lower status, while she herself wanders the bazaars, selling her milk at a higher price, which is the rightful property of her own child' (Khrimyan, 2011, p. 147).

The word *դայակ (nurse)* has a comprehensive semantic range in historical sources. Dictionaries generally define it as: 1) A woman who breastfeeds another's child, i.e., a wet nurse; 2) More broadly, a nurturer or caregiver; 3) A home educator or instructor; 4) (historically) A domestic caregiver entrusted with the upbringing and education of noble or wealthy families' children (Aghayan, 1976, p. 272). In Western

Armenian dialects, the verb *դայակել* (to nurse, keep, care for, educate) carries similar meanings (Sargsyan, 1991, p. 73).

Based on comparative evidence, the *տատմայր* and the *դայակ* share a close semantic and functional relationship. The tellers from the Shirak region remembered their village nurses. For example, in Molamusay, trusted wet nurses still recalled included Mukhso Maran, Savgyul, and Broyi Sandon (Hovhannisyan, 2005, p. 225).

During our fieldwork, we met several narrators whose mothers had been village midwives. Svetlana Smbatyan (Sargsyan), for example, told us: "My mother was a midwife for the entire village. She went around, worked, and cared for children on their birthdays'.

The word "midwife" is also used to refer to the newborn child's wet nurse in one of the folkloric samples from Alexandropol included in the collection *Thorns from Shirak's Barns*: 'When our relatives and well-wishers come to visit the newborn and his mother, the midwife immediately places the child in their arms, saying: "My grandchild is in your care"' (Mkhitareants, 1901, pp. 254–255).

The midwife addressing the newborn as 'grandchild' reflects the semantic significance of the word midwife itself, which fundamentally means grandmother or great-grandmother. According to H. Acharyan's *Etymological Dictionary*, the root word *ատտ (grandmother')* also carries the meaning of midwife. The word midwife is found in both Indo-European and non-Indo-European language families (Acharyan, 1926, p. 379).

In K. Bazeyan and G. Aghanyan's book *Alexandropol: Ethnographic Sketches (Historical-Ethnographic Research)*, special attention is given to midwives. The authors write:

'In the absence of hospitals, childbirth took place at home with the help of midwives (*dayeks*). It was not customary to call a male

obstetrician, as doing so was considered a great shame for a woman, who preferred to die rather than turn to a doctor. Later, more educated families began turning to professionals—midwives and doctors—but the general public continued to trust experienced midwives. These midwives were elderly, seasoned, "worldly-wise" women who were not shy or embarrassed in the presence of men. They would arrive immediately when a woman began experiencing labour pains' (Bazeyan, Aghanyan, 2014, p. 67).

Folkloric archival materials also confirm that there were many midwives in Shirak. Let us cite the memoir of H. Gyoletsyan in this respect:

'In old Gyumri, childbirth was carried out with the help of midwives—*dayeks*. Every household had its own *dayek*. These *dayeks* were generally older women, open-eyed and experienced, women who had shared bread in thousands of homes. Unlike other women of Gyumri who avoided strange men and were shy or silent, these women were bold and outspoken. When a woman began experiencing labour pains, the *dayek* was immediately called, who would help the mother give birth. Sometimes the woman could not be saved and would die. That was attributed to God, not the *dayek*'s incompetence. Later, in more educated and progressive families, midwives trained in medicine were invited' (Gyoletsyan-2, 1976).

Even today in Shirak, when someone refers to a woman who knows everything, they say: 'She is a midwife or *tatmerik*, meaning 'she knows everything'.

Collector Gohar Gogolyan (from the village of Meghradzor) once mentioned in conversation with me that: 'Midwives... were everywhere, a welcome guest in every household. Wherever they went, it meant something good was happening—a child was about to be born. They

stayed by the labouring mother's side from the start of the pain until the cutting of the umbilical cord. Their work was the most awaited and the most responsible. Sometimes a piece of homemade flatbread with butter, or ten eggs and a hen. Sometimes even a lump of sugar would be gifted. There were two well-known *tatmayrs* (midwives) in our village—Sukoyents Haykanush and Manasents Nano, also known as Nanagyul. People remember both of them with special love and respect. They were not just members of their own families—they belonged to the whole village. No matter what time of day it was, people would knock on their doors and call out to "Mother Haykanush" or "Mother Nano"—"Get up, the daughter-in-law is in labour, she's about to give birth". The respectful form of address for a midwife was *mother*.

Even today, many of the children born with their help are living in the village, and they remember those kind-hearted women with blessings. The midwife would bathe the newborn, constantly pray, and offer blessings and well-wishes, saying:

'Let it be like the water of Jesus's eye,
let it be like paradise water,
may you live like the sound of flowing water,
may you be successful, may you live in good health'.

There are rare memoirs that vividly describe the mother's labour pains and emotional state, as well as the important role of the midwife. One such memoir, written by Atrpet (Sargis Mubayajyan, 1860–1937), was found in the archival materials of the Museum of Literature and Art. In his memoirs, he preserved the memory of his mother's pregnancy and her suffering during childbirth. He recorded it under the

title 'Memories from the Past': 'It was early winter when my mother was pregnant. She lay down, gave birth, and I had a brother named Hakob. That night, my mother's pain, her voice, her groans—none of it ever left my memory. Earlier I had seen a cow and a mare give birth with difficulty. That's when I understood that my mother was about to give birth. But it took her two days to deliver. I was asleep when I suddenly woke and saw my mother resting peacefully, the baby placed beside her. Then I heard a familiar voice: "You see? I went to Harlik and brought you a little brother".

The midwife was also responsible for caring for the newborn baby. For example, in Arjakh (Artsakh), until the baptism of the newborn, the midwife was considered *haram* (unclean). She was not allowed to knead dough, churn butter, or handle cheese or yogurt stored in containers prepared for bread making. The newborn was baptised between four and ten days after birth. On the day of baptism, the family prepared a godparents' meal (*knk'achash*). During this period, several family members and the godfather—holding the baby—along with the midwife, went to church, taking hot water with them (HAB-8 1978, 73).

A detailed description of the midwife's important duties is given in the 'Boyhood Customs' section of *Armenian Ethnography and Folklore*. When labour pains began at night or during the day, the head of the household's wife was responsible for sending away unnecessary people and men from the house, and summoning from among the women of the family or neighbours two or three women who would help the labouring woman. Then the midwife took over.

'After washing the newborn, the midwife sprinkled salt over the baby's entire skin and carefully rubbed the back of the ears, soles of the

feet, palms of the hands, joints, and armpits, then wrapped the baby and laid it beside the labouring woman' (HAB-8 1978, 73).

The midwife would say blessings and offer wishes to the newborn. S. Harutyunyan includes in a collection of well-wishes addressed to newborns some of the phrases spoken beside the midwife during ritual washings of the newborn. For example, immediately after birth, the midwife would take a piece of bread, place it on her head so that the child's 'luck would be abundant', and cut the newborn's cord with scissors, whispering the following blessings:

May the wounds heal,
May the pains lessen,
May the healing of doctors come,
May the suffering be eased.
(Harutyunyan 1975, 222)

Վշտերու դարման,
Ցավերու առողջություն,
Հիվանդաց բժշկություն,
Տրտմելոց մխիթարություն։

Vštēru darman,
Cʿawēru aṙoǰutʿyun,
Hivandacʿ bžškutʿyun,
Trtmelocʿ mxitarutʿyun

At the moment of cutting the newborn's cord, the following blessings are described from Kesab: 'the midwife would take the newborn, cut the cord, and hand over the *auetis* (newborn's protector) to the father.

She was called *Minch Mar* (Great Mother). The Great Mother or midwife was customarily entrusted with handing over the *auetis* to the newborn's protector or father who was watching over the child'.

The midwife's next statement was a comment on the gender of the newborn.

- ❖ 'May your eye shine bright, may the feast be prepared'. This meant the newborn was a boy (Լոյս աչքդ, շնորհաւոր ըլլայ, ընկոյզ պատրաստ է)
- ❖ 'May your eye shine bright, may the *lochum* be prepared'. This meant the newborn was a girl (Լոյս աչքդ, շնորհաւոր ըլլայ, լոխումը ը պատրաստ է). (Cholakean, 1988, 61)

The word *dayak* (midwife/nursemaid) also carries the meaning of a wet nurse in the folklore materials. In the epic *Davit of Sasoun*, the wet nurse is mentioned as a caretaker:

Mher stayed in Egypt for seven years,
There a wet nurse was found,
And for Mher's sake, David was sent by the king.
David sent Mher.
He stayed there for a while, otherwise here
It's impossible—the baby wouldn't stop crying.

(Davit of Sasoun, 1981)

-Միեր յոթ տարի որ Մըսըր մնաց,
Մըկա էնտեղ *ծծմեր* մի կա,
Ու Միերի խաթեր համար՝ ըզ Դավիթ տի շահի:
ՋԴավիթ Մըսըր ուղարկի.
Էնի էնտեղ տ'ապրի, թե չէ էստեղ
Անկարելի բան է.- ծիծ չի վերցու:

(*Davit of Sasoun*,1981):

Mher yoṙ tari or Msəṙ mənacʿ,
Məka ēnteł cʿcʿmer mi ka,
U Mheri xatēr hamarʾəz Dawit ti šahi:
Z-Dawit Msəṙ ułarki.
Ēni ēnteł tʿapri, tʿe čʿē ēsteł
Ankarelī ban ē – cicʿ čʿi vercʿu.

The nourishing role of the midwife is also emphasised in the popular oral texts:

What mother would bring you,
What nurse would feed you,
Would give you mountain deer,
And sometimes feed you meat.
The moon would make you laugh,
The sun would soothe you.
The wind would give you clothes,
And the holy font would tell you a prayer.
(Grigoryan, 1970, 71)

Ի՞նչ մայր է ըզքեզ բերեր,
Ի՞նչ դայեկ ըզքեզ սնուցեր,
Ձքեզ եղն ի սարին բերեր,
Ու շահէն բազան սնուցեր.
Լուսինն է քեզ ծիծ տուեր
Արեգակն է դաղրեցուցեր.
Քամին տարուբեր արեր,
Սուրբ կուսանքն օրոր ասացեր:

Inčʿ mayr ē əz-kʿez berer,
Inčʿ dayek əz-kʿez snucʿer,
Z-kʿez ełn i sarin berer,
U šahēn bazan snucʿer.
Lusinn ē kʿez cicʿ tułer
Aregakn ē dadrecʿucʿer.
Kʿamin taruber arer,
Surb kusankʿn oror asacʿer.

Giving birth, bathing, and caring are activities related to the childrearing practices of carrying, feeding, making laugh, calming, giving clothes, and telling stories. This text is also summarised by M. Abeghyan as 'the dear midwife' (Abeghyan, 1967, 242):

In Armenian folk tales, the midwife has an important role. Her primary task is to deliver the baby for the woman in labour. In the fairy tales 'Aslan-zade' and 'Zanpolad', midwives appear as witches. Let us cite an example:

'—Man,—says the woman,—you are ashamed to be freed before me, my pains are growing, leave me alone, let me alone, only let me be freed first. People will perish, days will perish—you will become a witch woman and become a midwife, the woman will be freed, she will bear children, they will grow well, they will give the mother a good meal' (HZH-10 1967, 62).

In fairy tales, the role of the midwife is sometimes taken over by the wet nurse: 'They became sick, they said:—Let's go see what the matter is. We saw that the wife was in pain, she was crying loudly—husband, mother-in-law. The mice were crawling on the roads, they

said:—Go, bring the wife and come back. Let the wet nurse be healthy' (HZH-13 1985, 154).

In the fairy tale 'Varditer', the wet nurse also comes to assist the woman in labour: '—Ah,— she said,—God, how will I do this, I don't have wet nurses, I have no one to help me.

'Then the town's wet nurses arrived. The boy was born, she bathed him, dressed him, laid him aside. Five, six days passed and he got sick. The wife's child got a rash. She said:—Ah, God, what shall I do? The Godfather isn't here, my tobacco pipe isn't here, how will I calm my baby and give him water?

'Then she learned that their Godfather and tobacco pipe and the wet nurses had arrived…

'They brought the mother's child. The wet nurse said:—We purified the water, purified him, now let us bless him, let us offer a flower. The *Godfather* said:—Let's bless, the right is yours, since you said it, we will also come from your side. The wet nurse said:—I pray to God that whenever this baby bathes, the water becomes milk, turns to silver. The *Godfather* said:—I also pray to God that whenever this baby cries, tears become sparkling gems' (HZH-1, 1959, 356-357).

In the course of a fairy tale, the wet nurse sometimes has a significant role as a hero. For example, in the fairy tale 'The King of Kajants', the wet nurse advises the young prince in order to save him from destruction. The role and significance of the midwife is also described in historical texts, particularly in the context of noble families:

'After Yervand became king, fearing the descendants of Sanatruk who could plot against him, he killed them all. Only a small boy named Artashes remained, whom he secretly took and fled to the outskirts of

the Her region, near the mountains of Makhkhazani. From there, he sent news to Artashes' *nurse*—Smbat Bagratuni, the brother of Byurat Bagratuni, who lived in the village of Smbatavank in the Sper region' (Harutyunyan, 1987, p. 63).

The wet nurse holds a significant and symbolic place in Armenian literary tradition as well. A remarkable example is Raffi's poem 'The Wet Nurse' (Դայեակ), in which the wet nurse is portrayed not just as a caretaker, but also as a nurturing maternal figure, embodying deep love and tenderness:

There sat the old wet nurse,
Rocking the sleeping child,
Swaying and dozing,
Singing a lullaby with the melody of the time—
Sleep, sleep, pretty bird,
Sleep sweetly in your slumber,
I'll gently rock your cradle,
With motherly warm love

(Raffi, 1874, pp. 285–286)

This poem emphasises the emotional bond and maternal care provided by the wet nurse, symbolising not only her physical nurturing role but also her spiritual and emotional presence in the child's life. It reflects both cultural values and gendered expectations tied to caregiving in traditional Armenian society.

During my professional visit to the United States, I observed that in the state of Wisconsin, women in the final stages of pregnancy often seek the support of *doulas*. This phenomenon is also becoming

increasingly common in Armenia. The term *doula* originates from the Greek word *doule*, meaning female servant or helper, and it refers to a person (typically a woman) who assists a pregnant woman during childbirth—both emotionally and physically.

In summary, we can note that the role of the traditional birth assistant (grandmother/midwife) has historically been active in both ethnographic and folkloric contexts.

Part II

CREATION OF FOLKLORIC TEXTS IN THE CONTEXT OF CHILDREARING

Armenian researchers have often studied children's folklore. R. Grigoryan in her dissertation 'Armenian Children's Folklore' describes in detail the history and origins of the documentation of Armenian children's folklore and highlights significant studies and collection efforts in the field. Grigoryan's dissertation covers the period 1890-1990s when, through the efforts of folklore collectors such as E.Lalayan, G. Hovsepyan, and H. Chanikyan, a great deal of material was recorded. The work of recording and publishing children's folklore, including songs and games, by Eastern Armenian and Western Armenian periodicals is also documented.

Items of children's lore have been published in various places. R. Grigoryan's collection *Armenian Folk Lullabies and Children's Songs* (1970) is an exceptionally valuable resource in Armenian childlore. This publication is noteworthy because, as far as we know, no other comprehensive collection of lullabies devoted to children's folklore has been published. Children's folklore recorded in the field has also been included in several volumes of Armenian ethnography and folklore. The folklore collection *A Crumb from Shirak's Barns* presents items from the rich heritage of the oral literature of Alexandropol. (Mkhitareants 1901). Given the close similarity of their folklore texts, the children's folklore of Shirak is also usefully reflected in the collection *Kars: Armenian Folklore Culture* (Kars: Armenian Folklore Culture, Compilers: S.B. Harutyunyan, S.A. Vardanyan, E.H. Khemchyan, L.Kh. Ghredjian, M.H. Khemchyan, Yerevan, RA NAS 'Science' Publishing House, 2013).

Articles dedicated to children's folklore have also been authored by A. Sargsyan. In his studies, the author examines various samples of children's folklore: rhymes, puns, play songs and tongue-twisters, as well as children's jokes and amusing stories. The author has been engaged in folklore collection for years, recording folklore samples and

children's folklore. Special note should also be made of A. Petrosyan's series of articles on children's folklore, as these emphasise relatively recent periods, particularly children's folklore texts that contain foreign language elements.

L. Ghredjian has written several works that study children's folklore materials of the Gavar region. H. Galstyan has collected important samples of children's folklore from Vahramaberd village in the Shirak region.

Ethnographic Journal, the main serial publication of Armenian ethnography, is dedicated to the problems of studying Armenian ethnography, folklore, and history. A number of volumes of the journal also cover topics around family education and children's education, as collective work led by E. Lalayan.

The *Hasker* yearbook of children's literature and folklore (editor-in-chief: A. Jivanyan) is also dedicated to the collection, preservation, and interpretation of children's folklore in Armenian culture. The periodical has scientific, artistic, and bibliographic sections.

The field of study of children's folklore is extensive. It operates in two directions, covering:

- lore addressed to children,
- lore created by children themselves.

Folklore, as a manifestation of tradition, is integral to the everyday life of both adults and children. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish the boundary between them, as the orally transmitted text circulates like air and water from one to the other.

Moreover, these folklore texts can be recounted by both adults and children. In the study, we also addressed folklore samples directed at pregnant women, including expressions of desire such as prayers, blessings, and wishes, as well as congratulatory words to the pregnant woman, and the role and functions of the caregiver.

'Childrearing' is an ethnographic term that refers to the care of a child from birth up to 2-3 years old. To comprehensively study childrearing, it is necessary to define the scope of children's folklore. According to scholar R. Grigoryan, the scope of children's folklore can be generally applied to all folklore creations that have a childish nature and whose carriers are children or adolescents. Accordingly,children's folklore should include all the creations made by adolescents for children, as well as the various songs and sayings created by the children themselves. The writing and study of children's folklore materials are important in almost all cultures. Among English-language studies, significant research includes the work of S. Bronner (*American Children's Folklore*, 1988), I. and P. Opie (*Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*, 1951; *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*, 1959; *Children's Games in Street and Playground*, 1969; *The People in the Playground*, 1994), which are key folklore collections and studies.

Children's folklore texts performed by parents often bring out the educational function of folklore in teaching life lessons to children. In the view of the elder generation of Shirak, the acquisition of life lessons should commence at a very early age—even from the cradle, on the parent's lap. This may be achieved through the medium of a lullaby, in the first case, or a children's play song, in the other. The texts told to children for lesson-giving purposes can be defined as having a brief, formulaic structure that has evolved over time. As is the case with the proverbial folklore of other Armenian ethnographic regions, as well as that of the Shirak region, instructional texts, which exhibit characteristics typical of proverbs and fables, occupy a primary position. The practice of imparting guidance through oral transmission remains a prominent feature of cultural practice in Shirak. As a formulaic structure, the oral text has a narrative component, whereby parents impart lessons to their children through the folkloric text.

Outside Rituals and Local Superstitions to Determine the Gender of the Child

In traditional ethnography, the terms 'incoming traditions' and 'incoming ritual' are commonly used. In our study, we have also considered it necessary to use the term 'external (outside) ritual' to reflect the external traditions which are the source of these incoming traditions.

Renowned ethnographer A. Ghanalanyan, in a passage on 'Incoming Traditions', makes the point: 'No nation's culture develops and flourishes in complete isolation and independence, without interaction and connections with other nations. Within the framework of certain historical relationships and interactions, numerous elements of a nation's culture and language enter from the outside into that nation and, through corresponding adaptation and creative reinterpretation, take deep root in its worldview' (Ghanalanyan, 1960).

External ritual practices easily flow from one culture to another, from one geographic location to another. The modern era is characterised by intense transmissions. It is worth noting that travel and the advertising channels of social platforms significantly contribute to the spread and development of external rituals.

Lore about the sex of an unborn child offers a useful example. Traditionally, the sex of a child can be determined during pregnancy by noting whether the child is carried low or high. If low, it will be a girl, high, a boy. If the mother longs for sweet foods, it will be a girl, if sour foods, a boy. There have been some noteworthy relevant studies from American culture. In our research I interviewed associate professor Mary Sellers from Pennsylvania State University. In a paper to the

American Folklore Society on the Gender-Reveal Party, she made the following observation:

'The emergence of a new tradition or celebration presents a conundrum for researchers. The gender-reveal party (sometimes known as a baby gender reveal party) is a relatively new practice. Typically, the expecting parent or parents have an ultrasound of the unborn baby about halfway through the pregnancy (typically at 20 weeks) which is the first time the sex of the child can be clearly determined with ultrasound technology. The identity of the sex of the child is given to the parent(s) who have to decide if they want to know the sex before the party or be surprised along with other guests. If they choose the latter, often the ultrasound results are delivered directly to a bakery which is instructed to make a cake with a filling (custard, candies, etc.) to correspond to the child's sex—pink for a girl and blue for a boy. At the party, the cake is sliced to reveal the filling and thus the sex of the child. I examined the potential reasoning for the emergence of this tradition from three angles. First, I examined the ideas of privacy and the lack of privacy due to social media and how that may relate to the prevalence of this party. Finally, I make the claim that this tradition has emerged based on the current fluidity of gender in American society and long-standing parental anxiety which wishes to alleviate potential problems in the lives of their children' (Personal talk with Mary Sellers, 2024).

A similar event with the same activities is now becoming a regular part of Armenian culture. Armenian researcher Verjiné Svazlian has recorded and studied the Gender Reveal Party among Armenian-Americans in her book *The Oral Tradition of the American-Armenians in the Course of Time* (2021). She describes the process of the ceremony and the accompanying blessing texts:

'The advent of a newborn child is anticipated within the newly constituted family unit. Consequently, the day prior to the birth, a gathering is held, which is referred to as a "baby party".A representation of the stork is affixed to the roof of the mansion, with swaddling belonging to an infant positioned within its beak. A young parent makes an appointment with a store in advance and provides a list of items required for the child's accommodation: a bed, a pillow, and so forth. The address of the aforementioned establishment is provided on the invitation card, which is distributed to the female attendees of the event. This allows them to select, purchase and send their gift in accordance with the specified schedule. The female guests are the only ones permitted to enter the room, where they offer their best wishes for a safe delivery. Only female invitees, having offered their blessings, enter the reception room' (Svazlyan, 2021, pp. 644-645).

In recent years, baby gender reveal parties have been organised in Armenia as well, as an event that has clearly been transferred from another culture. What follows is taken from the transcript of one of the interviews we conducted on this topic in Gyumri.

Hasmik Matikyan (H.M.): At whose initiative did you organise the baby gender reveal ceremony, and what is its significance?

Louiza Khumaryan (L.Kh.): When we found out I was expecting a child, it was my mother-in-law's idea to organise a gender reveal ceremony, since such events have become very trendy recently. She had seen a similar video online and was inspired by it.

H.M.: How did you send out the invitations?

L.Kh.: We invited guests and told them we were organising a small party to reveal the baby's gender.

H.M.: Please describe your emotional state, your feelings during that moment.

L.Kh.: When the ceremony started, I was a bit nervous, because I was impatient to find out my baby's gender. Initially, the plan was to cut a cake, and the colour of the filling would reveal whether it was a boy or a girl. But when we cut the cake, we were even more surprised, as both blue and pink were inside. Then, suddenly and unexpectedly for everyone, teddy bears came into the room carrying a box. Inside the box was a chocolate heart labeled either 'boy' or 'girl'. There was also a small wooden mallet with which we had to break the heart to find out the gender. It was quite hard to break it. Inside were blue baby socks.

H.M.: Why do you think the words used to indicate the baby's gender were in English and not Armenian?

L.Kh.: I think it's not a national tradition; it's most likely American or British. We had seen many photos related to such events on social media.

H.M.: What kind of wishes were expressed to mark the occasion?

L.Kh.: 'May a healthy baby be born', 'May you sit at a table with seven sons','May he grow up to be a good man','May he become a strong child and defend our country', 'May he be a child of peaceful days', etc.

In Shirak, traditional folk methods of predicting a baby's gender are known, based on the pregnant woman's gait or bodily changes as mentioned above. Teller Khanum Mikayelyan records: 'If the womb was positioned upward and she looked up, people said it would be a boy; if the womb was low, it would be a girl. A woman expecting a boy would walk lightly, while one expecting a girl walked heavily. If the belly became sharp and pointed, it was a boy; if the walk was heavy, it indicated a girl'.

In Tavush, people believed in omens: if a pregnant woman happened to find a button or a bead while walking, it meant she would have a girl; if she found a horseshoe, it meant a boy (based on a private conversation with folklorist Ester Khemchyan).

The gender of a child can influence the language and word choice used in folklore texts. For example, in Eastern Armenian traditions, a newborn boy is more valued than a girl. On the day of the child's birth, women gather around the mother and sing, adjusting the lyrics depending on the baby's gender. If it is a boy, they sing:

'Bring spring bread for the boy's mother, the soft, fresh bread
Let her eat, it's for the boy's sake, the boy…'

But if the newborn is a girl, the lyrics are changed to:

'Bring dry, crusty bread for the girl's mother
Let her eat it by breaking her teeth… because she gave birth to a girl'.

This is a form of gender-based judgment: soft spring bread is offered as a sign of appreciation to the mother of a boy, while hard dry bread is given to the mother of a girl as a kind of punishment or mockery (Patmagrean, 1973, p. 36.)

At the proverbial level, similar gender-based distinctions are observed. For example:

- The mother of a girl keeps one hand in her bosom.
- While the mother of a boy has a golden bowl.
- A girl is the lamp of another household (i.e., she will marry and leave her family) (Ghanalanyan 1960).

Sometimes, the gender of an unborn child is guessed based on popular sayings. For instance, in the Shirak region, people often say: 'If a pregnant woman becomes unattractive, she is probably having a girl. A boy, however, gives his mother beauty and a radiant appearance'. In American culture, a similar idea can be found, although without the same gender inflection, in the expression 'pregnancy glow'.

First Tooth Event

The tradition of the Tooth Ceremony (*Atamhatik*) is still widespread in Shirak today and symbolises one of the transitions in a child's life. In this section, we present stories told by folk narrators around this event.

Many beliefs arise when a child's first tooth falls or is pulled out. What parents do with their children's baby teeth varies from family to family. In Shirakian culture the child throws his/her first fallen tooth into the oven (*tonir*) while saying a prayer or singing a song to an animal. The action of 'throwing' (part of practice theory) is common in Asian culture. The provision of food or a reward is more common in Europe. The symbolism of the mouse (with its sharp teeth) is also European.

In children's folklore of Shirak we find the following expressions:

Take this dog teeth and give me lamb teeth [told by a child]

Mouse, mouse come

Bring silver teeth for my son [told by a parent].

Texts in children's folklore have variants: the main content remains the same, the body part changes. Each teller produces his/her speech based on the memory, special interest towards traditions and customs, folk beliefs and superstitions, background knowledge, etc, as for example:

Mousie, mousie, my mousie,

Take your iron-y tooth,

Give me lambie tooth.

The tradition of celebrating the emergence and later the loss of the child's first tooth has traditional roots and intercultural motives. It is a cultural sign of growth—the transition from babyhood to infancy.

Many studies have been conducted in this field, but it is worth quoting the tooth fairy material from *American Folklore:* 'The tooth fairy's genealogy is obscure. England, Ireland and Scotland have referenced fairies

for centuries. However, these fairies were capable of evil as well as good, and any fairy could act on a child's behalf. Current British children's stories of the late 20th century still place a tooth fairy in a large group of similar scavengers' (American Folklore, 1996).

Based on our fieldwork carried out in the Shirak region, we have collected a lot of folkloric material on 'First Tooth Appearing'.

Teller Donara Zargaryan mentioned: 'Our grandfathers and grandmothers, in the dialect of Mush, would call it akvasorik. On the day the first tooth appeared, they would seat the child at the table, place a piece of white cloth on their head, and pour cooked grains over them—this was to ensure the child never lacked bread and always had abundance.

'Then, they would place several objects in front of the child: a comb, a mirror, and a knife—symbolising wishes for even and strong teeth, a wealthy and healthy life, and bravery and strength, respectively. Nowadays, people put all kinds of items in front of the child, hoping they'll grow up to be the person they want them to be.

Teller Ashkhen Davtyan from Jajur recalled: 'Before the child's tooth fell out, people would say: The child's teeth are itching. They would cook wheat on the day of the Tooth Ceremony so the child would grow teeth quickly. The child would be seated on a white cloth so that the scattered grains would look nice. We've done all this based on the stories of our elders. Whatever the child picks, that's what they'll become—and it's a very true belief. All the family members would sing to keep the child engaged. Everyone had to partake of the grains. We divided the dish among seven households, like a *matagh* (ritual meal), which symbolises the seven days of the week and the seven blessings invoked during prayers—"may you sit at the table with seven sons"

In the village of Horom, people would say: 'Come, let's give a blessing, let's eat Atamhatik! The cooked grains were poured (on the child), and blessings were given—the one pouring would also offer a wish. It was more than just a wish; it was a blessing tied directly to the child's teeth—that they grow healthy teeth and eat good food with them.

It was mandatory for the elder of the household to pour the grains. That elder had raised many children and their blessing would reach the child quickly.

When a tooth fell out, the following was said: 'Take the tooth of a dog, give me the tooth of a lamb'.

The main purpose of the Tooth Ceremony is for the child to be wished strong teeth and to receive a hint about their future profession. They cook wheat grains, pour them over the child's head, and with kind words, they offer wishes like: 'Grow strong teeth, Become a strong person…' If the child picks up a pen, it means they might become a poet. If they pick up a paintbrush, they may become a painter.

The *Atamhatik* is a deeply Armenian tradition and custom. During the ceremony, the child's relatives gather—mostly other children. With songs and music, they pour the grains over the child's head, clap, and rejoice. Wheat is a symbol of happiness, family fertility, and abundance. It is believed to help the child grow, flourish, and live a long life.

They chant:

'Tooth, tooth, milk tooth,

May your arrival be blessed, golden tooth,

Shiny tooth, pearl-like tooth…'

In the city of Mush, people used to hang wheat from a baby's cradle. This tradition is said to be ten thousand years old.

They would pour a handful of wheat into a small pouch and hang it from the infant's cradle. As the mother rocked the baby, she would say:

'May your home always be filled with wheat.
May your life and fields never suffer drought.
May your soul remain pure into old age,
And may people love you like honest, golden wheat'

(Khachatryan, 1984, p. 113).

Before the Tooth Ceremony, people would say it was a wheat ceremony. The tooth is like a grain, and the grain is counted with the tooth grain.The child would sit on the ground, and they would sprinkle wheat using a spoon.On the tray, they would place scissors, a knife, shoes, a pen. While pouring the wheat, they would make wishes and give blessings: 'May the child be healthy, may they grow with good fortune, may they grow up with wisdom and grace, may they be a good child to their mother and father, may God protect them, may their teeth come in quickly or fall out easily, may they be respectful and obedient to their parents'.

The wheat was boiled to make sure the child wouldn't take it into their mouth all at once and choke.

In the Borchalu region, we have an interesting description tied to the appearance and falling out of the first tooth. When a baby's milk teeth start coming in, the mother tears a little piece of the baby's undershirt, saying: 'May the place for the tooth tear like this shirt, and the tooth come out'.

When the first milk tooth becomes visible, they perform a ceremony: wheat is boiled, kneaded, slightly cooled, then covered with a handkerchief and poured over the child's head.

In some villages, neighbours are invited to collect the ceremonial wheat, and in others, other small children are invited. When a tooth falls out, they throw it into the ashes of the oven, saying:

‘Mouse, mouse, take and bring
An iron tooth for my child’

(Lalayan, 2004, p.151).

Մուկ, մուկ. տար ու բի,
Իմ երեխի համար էրծաթի ատամ բի:

Muk, muk. tar u bi,
Im yerexi hamar ercatʿi atam bi.

Or:

‘Mousey, mousey, little mouse,
Take the old milk tooth,
Give me a shiny tooth in return…’
(Grigoryan, 1970, p.254).

Մուկի՛կ, մուկի՛կ, ա՛յ մուկի՛կ,
Առ քու էրկաթե ատամը,
Ինձի՝ իմ օսկոռե ատամը…

Mu-kikʿ, mu-kikʿ, ay mu-kikʿ,
Ar kʿu erkatʿe atamə,
Inzi — im oskore atamə…

When a child loses a tooth, parents blessed their children: ‘May God be your protector, may God’s hand be over you”, “May you grow strong second teeth”.

Teller Shushi Tumanyan told us this interesting story: “I scattered wheat on my child’s head—it’s a natural act. I performed the tooth celebration ritual with sprouts from seven grains: wheat,

chickpeas, lentils, barley, buckwheat, peas, and beans. The number seven holds deep symbolism—for instance, when seven people sit at a table, it brings blessings. Our ancestors were ascetics, and priests also ate sprouts—they release positive energy into the body (The longer the plant grows, the less strength it retains for consumption). Another goal was that the child would not grow accustomed to only tasty foods, but learn to overcome hardships from a young age. As I added each grain, I would say: 'May your tooth be strong, may your teeth be as firm as rock. In the vernacular, it is common to say: 'The tooth has sprouted, the tooth has grown a sprout".

In Goris, the tooth ceremony is called *kchakhash*, a name the locals link to the grains used in it. Here is the recipe for *kchakhash*:

- 1 cup coarse bulgur (*korkot*)
- ½ cup corn
- ½ cup beans
- ½ cup chickpeas
- 2 onions
- 1 espresso cup of oil or 2 tablespoons of butter
- Dried greens, black pepper, and salt

Boil the beans, chickpeas, and corn. Add the bulgur. Chop and fry the onions in oil, and add to the mixture. Add the seasonings and continue to cook until the grains are soft and blended (Lorents, 2013, p. 48).

The tooth celebration is taking on modern forms. In the rituals we have observed, the traditional symbolic objects (pen, scissors, knife, ladle) are often absent. Instead, jars filled with slips of paper naming various professions, decorative elements, and certificates of blessing for the child are used.

In Van, they used to place the fallen tooth between the two doors of the house, opening and closing them three times, reciting:

‘Take this wolf’s tooth,
Give me a horse’s tooth’
(Shaghoyan, 2007, p. 106).

Ա՛ռ քե, գայլու ատամ,
Տու ձիկ գառու ատամ
(Shaghoyan, 2007, p. 106).

Aṙ kʿe, gaylu atam,
Tu dzik garu atam.

In Kesab, it is customary to say: ‘When a baby begins teething, they touch honey to the baby’s gums’.

And they say:

‘Little house,
Upper little house,
The door is guarded by a little dog —
Woof!’
(Where the ‘upper house’ clearly refers to the child’s mouth)
(Cholakean, 1988, p. 325)

Տնակ,
Վերի տնակ,
Դռնակը կը կապեն շնիկ.
-Հա՛ֆ (Վերի տնակը բերնի խոռոչն է)

Tnak,
Veri tnak,
Drnakə kʿə kapen šnik.
– Haf! (Veri tnake berni xoročʿn ē)

In English culture, there are well-known superstitions regarding the appearance of a baby’s first tooth. It was once believed that if a baby’s first tooth came in during a premature birth, the child would die in early childhood. Even today, some mothers burn their baby’s first milk tooth to prevent witches or sorcerers from finding it (Grunfeld, 1991, p. 69).

Folkloric Sayings to Protect the Child from the Evil Eye

Belief in the negative power of the evil eye existed not only in Shirak, but in various other regions of Armenia. Many incantatory sayings were created to ward off the evil eye. For example, in Tavush, people would pray to protect not only children and adults from the evil eye, but also domestic animals, the home, and possessions. An example:

A child's daily blessing,
A stone on the finger and on the forehead,
A psalm in the pocket, a stone and a clove in the mouth,
The mark of the malicious one—God bless the guardian,
The whispering stone—let it sit atop seven ridges,
The black serpent's sack—for the evil-willed,
The light of the eye of the one who cast the eye—for the evil tongue.
May the serpent bite, may the serpent coil, may the serpent devour.
If it's a woman—may her hair rise,
If it's a man—may his beard rise.
Tfu! Tfu! Tfu! [spitting sound to ward off evil]

(Khemchyan, 2020, p. 190).

Ըրեխեն ըրօրոցըմը, Քարը մատին ու վըետին,
Սաղմոսը ծոցըմը, Քարն ու քացախը բերանին,
Թըշթըշան կետը, Աստված օրինի պառավին,
Վըշվըշան քարը, Վըեր նստել ա յոթ շըհարին
Սև օցի քիստը՝ Ի չար նիաթին,
Աչք տվողի աչքի լիսըմը: Ի չար սհաթին
Օցը կըթի, օցը մորթի, օցը ուտացնի,
Թե կնիկ ա՝ պոչը վեր կյa
Թե մարթ ա՝ միրուքը վեր կյա,
Թո՛ւ, թո՛ւ, թո՛ւ

Ərexen əroroc'əmə,
K'arə matin u vəetin,
Sałmosə coc'əmə,
K'arn u k'ac'axə beranin,
T'əšt'əšan ketə,
Astuac orhni baravin,
Vəšvəšan k'arə,
Vəer nstel a iot' šəhari,
Sew oc'i k'istə—
I č'ar niatin,
Ač'k' tvoł i ač'ki lisəmə.
I č'ar šahat'in
Oc'ə k'əti, oc'ə morti, oc'ə utac'ni,
T'e knik a—poč'ə ver k'ya,
T'e mart' a—miruk'ə ver k'ya,
T'ow, t'ow, t'ow!

A large part of Armenian protective prayers is dedicated to guarding pregnant women and newborns against evil spirits, especially the destructive influence of *ali* and *tpghas* (types of evil beings). According to the beliefs of the people of Shirak, Ali is the mortal enemy of a woman in childbirth. It constantly circles her bed and looks for a way to kill her along with the newborn. If the woman is left alone, Ali steals her liver and rushes to the river, where he washes it and then greedily devours it. The consequence is the death of the woman in childbirth (*Nor Dar*, 1885, No. 25).

The ethnography and folklore of Nerkin Basen describe the existence of evil spirits that pose a threat to women in childbirth: 'A cross or *aghish* (protective charm) was placed on the right side of a newborn

boy to keep away evil spirits. It was said that *jinn-kngtiks* (female demons) are enemies of human offspring—they come at night, suffocate the baby, and strike the mother as well' (Hakobyan, 1974, p. 193).

People sometimes relied on the magical power of words to protect young children from the evil eye and malevolent forces. In Shirak, the expression 'Tu, tu, tu' is used as a verbal talisman for protection.

According to the memoirs of H. Gyoletsyan, there was a tradition in Gyumri known as *ļnɧu/kokh* ('the child has been harmed by a gaze'). Sometimes a newborn would be sickly, fail to grow, become weak, be restless, and cry constantly. In such cases, elders would say, 'The child has been *kokh'd*' (affected by an evil force).

A Gyumri child could become *ļnɧu* under several circumstances:

- When food or an item was brought into the home, and the newborn was not momentarily placed on top of it;
- When a barren woman visited, and her gaze unknowingly made the child ill.

In response, families would begin home healing rituals. Various prayers would be murmured over the baby's clothes, which were then kept on the child. A knife, scissors, or needle was placed under the pillow to prevent evil from approaching or devils from harming the child.

In Gorka on the western side of the town, there are ancient graves. Around one of them, broken bottles are scattered. This is the grave of Chakhalloghlu. No one knows who Chakhalloghlu was, only that after washing a *kokh'd* or frightened child's hands and feet near this grave, they would break the bottle used to carry the water on the gravestone, and the child would begin to heal (Gyoletsyan-1, 1976).

This tradition still survives in Shirak and various ethnographic regions, as well as in the cultures of other peoples. In Scottish lore, for

example, a child born at midnight is also regarded as one who will live to be 'different', whether for good or for ill. When a child is first taken from the room in which it was born, it must be taken upwards, and never down. The newborn child, in the first few days of its life, is exposed to the great danger of being stolen by the fairies, who are for ever on the look out for innocent babies, that they may take them in exchange for some of their evil ones. Something of this belief in the changeling is known all over Scotland (Scottish Lore and Folklore, 1982, p. 99).

There are means of circumventing this. A knife placed in the cradle will do the trick, and care must be taken not to carry fire nor light out of the house until the child is at least a week old. All visitors seeing the child for the first time should place a silver coin in its hand. If the child loosens its fist and drops the coin it will grow up to be open-handed and generous, but if it grabs tightly it will be a 'grippy' man or woman (Douglas, 1982, p.100).

Nor should the cradle ever be rocked empty, either before or after the child is born. The mother of a newly born child must never leave the house after sunset. If she does, she runs the risk of being carried off by the fairies to nurse one of their weaklings. When a child 'casts' its first tooth, the tooth must be put in salt, wrapped in paper or a 'bit cloot', and secreted in a mouse-hole (Douglas, 1982, p.101).

In an article on 'Cradle-snatching and Child-harming Spirits folklorist Hasmik Galstyan gives a detailed description of supernatural spirits that cause harm to children (Galstyan, 2018-2019, pp. 20-30).

Among Armenians, similar beliefs about *kajqers* (benevolent or malevolent spirits) were widespread. For example, in Varanda, mothers believed in cradle-stealing *kajqers*, who would come and take away babies. These *kajqers* often kidnap children, who would later be used to

tend their flocks as shepherds. These kidnapped children were gifted with the power to shape-shift or become invisible. But most often, the *kajqers* were believed to swap babies: they would take away healthy and beautiful infants—especially those not protected by any talisman or ritual—and replace them with sickly and ugly children, who usually would not survive (Abeghyan, 1975, p. 88).

In Shirak's nursery traditions, various supernatural entities associated with childhood are also known. For example, to protect a child from the evil eye, people would attach a blue eye bead to the infant's clothes or cradle, and decorate the cradle with various protective items such as knives, scissors, and other tools believed to repel evil.

In the traditional lullaby 'Sleep and Grow', the function of the blue bead is mentioned:

I have tied a blue bead,
Hung it on the cradle,
So that your bright eyes
Stay far away
From the enemy's gaze.
(Svazlian, 2020, p. 239)

Հուլունք եմ կապել,
Կախել օրոցքից,
Քո զար աչքերից
Որ հեռու մնա
Թշնամու աչքից։

Hulunkʿ em kapel,
Kaʿxel orocʿkʿicʿ,
Kʿo zar ačʿkericʿ

Or heru mna
Tʿišnamu ačʿkʿicʿ.

The notion of the evil eye is also mentioned in the following poetic line by Hovhannes Shiraz:

Ah, there are still many evil eyes in this world,
Grow up, my child, among the purest stars...

(Shiraz, 2012)

Ա՛խ, դեռ աշխարհում չար աչքեր շատ կան,
Մեծացիր, բալիկ, ջինջ աստղերի մեջ

Aḫ, dēr ašxarhum čʿar ačʿker šat kan,
Mecacʿir, balik, jinǰ astłeri meǰ.

The older teller J. Khachatryan passed on to us the following protective prayer:

Evil eye, evil thorn,
Ugly eye, go to the devil!

Չար աչքը, չար փշին,
Գեշ աչքը գրողին:

Čʿar ačʿkə, čʿar pʿšin,
Geš ačʿkə groġin.

According to the teller, during bedtime, it was customary to place the prayer book *Narek* under the child's pillow for protection.

The influence of the evil eye was believed to be prevalent throughout the whole day, but the time of falling asleep especially influenced the incorporation of such folklore elements. The folklorist and storyteller V. Galstyan noted: "My uncle used to say that when they rocked the cradle, they would say: Sleep, sleep, may the evil fall off the bridge, may the water carry it away...'

Instructions to Children /Life-Lessons/

A study of the aforementioned genre of proverbial folklore from the Shirak region reveals that these texts convey advice and exhortation through the use of imagery. It is worth quoting the instructions that are addressed to children in the Shirak region (H. Matikyan's personal archive, 2024):

- Do not go to someone else's door. (A lesson to work hard)
- Eat dry bread, but eat in your home. (A lesson to stay in one's native land)
- One day people will give you good advice. Listen, but another day they will say bad things, hide it under the grass. (A lesson to keep your mouth closed)
- Follow the advice and the instructions of elders: good instruction, advice is a year's work.
- Be a listener to the elder (a lesson to follow your elder's advice).

To sum up, the nursery is a child-centred world thanks to the contribution of caregivers who hand down their traditional thinking and practice from 'mouth to mouth' (blessings), from 'hand to hand' (wheat preparation for a First Tooth Ceremony).

Children's folklore texts are filled with admonitions. According to Shirak elders and folklore experts, advice should be given from the earliest days onwards, right from infancy, in the parent's arms; sometimes through lullabies, sometimes through children's play songs.

Admonition texts can be defined as a genre that gradually acquires formal characteristics over time. Just like in other Armenian ethnographic regions, admonitions occupy a leading place in Shirak's oral folklore, often having features of proverbs and fables. Admonishing speech is still actively alive in Shirak today. As a genre, admonitions

have historical significance: parents use admonition texts to teach their children lessons. According to social structure, Shirak's admonitions are mostly found within the nuclear family unit, though a large number also come from extended family and clan relations.

By studying this genre of Shirak's oral folklore, we can see that these texts, through their verbal imagery, convey advice and warnings. The genre of admonitions has been ethnographically described as: 'a form of speech embodying the human desire for a righteous life and teaching, is a type of didactic discourse arising from ancient times. Traveling a long oral path, it entered the literary collections of peoples with writing, evolving, developing, and changing according to later needs. Admonitions are characterised by three main features:

1. The instructive nature of speech,
2. The second-person address,
3. The figurative language used is only stylistic decoration.'

(*Genres of Armenian Medieval Literature*, 1984, pp. 238-240)

Vano Yeghiazaryan, in his study of 'The Basis of Nerses Shnorhali's Didactic Texts', examines the origin of N. Shnorhali's didactic literary type. Yeghiazaryan stresses that: 'In later periods, admonitions became a widespread phenomenon, spreading also among folk tales and proverbs. Through the latter, admonition became a secret code, where other linguistic means were chosen for admonishing.

One of the distinguishing formal features of admonitions is the emotional manifestation of the relationship between the admonisher and the admonished—making the admonishing act more vivid and creating contact with the spiritual world of the admonished. This is the essence revealing the secret of creating admonitory poetry (Yeghiazaryan, 2007).

In the context of our study, we find a close emotional connection between the admonisher (parent) and admonished (child).

In one of my studies, 'Lullabies as Entry to Admonition (Comparison of Shirak Lullabies)', lullabies are analysed through the lens of biblical admonitory texts. The testimonies of the Holy Fathers help compare the parts related to parent-child relationships. As an intermediate form of children's folklore, lullabies carry, alongside their general literary function, a significant meaning of admonishing and teaching. Thus, Shirak's children's folklore has its own language.

In the books of the Holy Fathers, lines of admonition have widespread distribution. For example, Khrimyan Hayrik's works 'Sirak and Samuel', 'Grandfather and Grandson' can be considered good examples of admonitions.

We will cite one of Khrimyan Hayrik's admonitions: 'Therefore, you parents, who have been honoured with the great names of father and mother... do not await your devotion to end at the hour of your death, when lips and tongue become weak, but from infancy and lullabies begin your lessons of blessing—parental teaching and admonition, which bring full and vigorous blessing to the whole household and family' (Khrimyan, 2011, p. 191).

V. Yeghiazaryan, in his study 'Parents', examines the various manifestations of admonitions in parental speech (Admonition-Parent) (Yeghiazaryan 2007).

Shirak's admonitions are characterised by indirect expressions of relational ties. In admonition texts, the terms *to admonish, to give admonition, to take admonition, to follow admonition* are frequently used. Let us mention some admonitions recorded during folklore collections:

1. A good day's admonition to children: listen well, but when bad things are said, throw them underfoot.
2. The admonition should be given then and there; if they stumble later, remember they were well advised; don't take offence.
3. Suppose an elder says two things; you don't hear them, only listen to the child's speech. Take the admonition, listen and obey—it is beneficial and not harmful. Don't say what the admonition will do; the soap will not help a black thing no matter how washed (meaning: if you don't listen, the admonition is like soap that cannot whiten blackness—a major reprimand).
4. Pay attention to the elders.
5. Follow the elders' words and admonitions; good admonitions and advice are a precious gift.
6. Listen to the elders, so your feet will not stumble on stones.
7. Keep the house with sweat.
8. The word belongs to the child; the water belongs to the younger.
9. Be forgiving; do not respond harshly to the elders.
10. Do not open others' doors or windows.

In Alexandropol (Gyumri), parents would tell children to be diligent, saying: 'A man who has a trade and earns his bread with sweat could not be a beggar or lazy among Alexandropol people; every parent strove to give their child a "trade"'. When teaching a trade, Alexandropol parents said, 'A potter's belly is upset until dinner, trade is taught so bread is earned' (Bazeyan, Aghanyan, 2014).

In Mkhitareants' section on 'Moral Admonitions', the recorded admonitions are mostly proverbial sayings, such as: 'When baking bread, place the dough carefully so the bread devil does not throw it into the fire', or 'Don't make noise at home when the calves are there, otherwise

devils will come upon you', as well as the biblical command, 'Honour your father and mother or your elders so God will also keep you safe' (Mkhitareants, 1901).

The following proverb is also found as a prayer text:

'I am bread, the bread devil,
A sure sign of life,
You be well-spoken before God'
(Haykuni, 1906, p. 297).

Ես հաց, հացի հրեշտակ,
Արդար եզան վաստակ,
Դու բարեխօս էղնիս առ Աստուած

Es hacʿ, hacʿi hreštak,
Ardar ezan vastak,
Du barexos ełnis aṙ Astuac.

Part III

CHILDREARING SONGS IN SHIRAKIAN CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE

This section examines issues related to the childcare environment: household culture, traditional lullaby songs, songs used during childbathing, and two ceremonies, including the fortieth-day event. In many academic sources, children's folklore and folklore for children are treated separately: children's folklore is created and shared by children, while folklore for children (nursery lore) is created by adults. In our research we take a universal approach, covering children's folklore which is created for children and is produced by children, as well as the surrounding birthgiving milieu.

We have indicated five qualities for Armenian children's folklore texts:

1. Its content is oral.
2. It is traditional in form and transmission.
3. It exists in different versions.
4. It is usually anonymous
5. It tends to become formularised.

Description of Children's Belongings In Ethnographic and Folklore Materials

The cradle, as an item associated with childhood, is described in a distinctive manner in Shirak. According to Gyumri dwellers, soil is healthy for children, so the parents throw soil to the cradle. If the child's cradle is warm, he will sleep peacefully and will not interfere with the work of the mother. It was considered a great reproach for a Shirakian woman to sit idly or aimlessly. Naturally, they tried their best to keep the child asleep for a long time.

At earlier periods carers swaddled children and blessed them. Swaddling was a traditional practice in the Shirak region. Shirakian folklore is replete with nursery rhymes (lullabies, bathtime songs, rhymes for playing with children) that convey the child's cradle and dress. Two typical examples are:

Hop, hop, my child,
May the bird fly
To Jerusalem
To bring wool, cutton
For I can knit warm socks for you,
Hop, hop, my child.

Ծի՛վ-ծի՛վ,
Ագռավ ու ծիվ,
Ծիտիկ թռա՛վ Երուսաղեմ,
Բուրդ բերեց, բամբակ բերեց,
Գուլպա գործեց,
Թռավ գնա՛ց:

Cʻiv-cʻiv,
Aġrav u cʻiv,
Cʻitik tʻrav Erusaghem,
Burd berēcʻ, bambak berēcʻ,
Gulpa gorcecʻ,
Tʻrav gnacʻ.

Hop, hop, my child,
I will feed you with black chicken,
I'll keep you and raise you
Put on lovely clothes
And take you to your cradle.

Թռի՛, թռի՛, թռցնեմ,
Սև հավու միս կերցնեմ,
Քեզի պահեմ մեծրցնեմ,
Սիրուն շորեր հագծրնեմ,
Վերջում տանեմ քընծնեմ
(*Շիրակ*)։

Tʻri! tʻri! tʻrcʻnem,
Sew havu mis kercʻnem,
Kʻezi pahem mecʻcʻnem,
Sirun šorer hagcʻnem,
Veŕum tanem kʻncʻnem.

The ethnographic milieu gives birth to folklore materials. In the past, childcarers knitted socks and dresses for children, a practice which was then incorporated into nursery lore. Nowadays in some urban and rural communities the tradition of sewing and knitting clothes for children is still active.

Shirak's folkloric tradition encompasses a distinctive feature of oral traditions and narratives, shaped by the unique characteristics of the region's culture and everyday life. These traditions reflect a rich folk imagination and way of thinking.

Gyumri teller Hamaspyur Khachatryan recalls with fondness:

'The cradle in our home was built by my father—decorated with lyres and lovely carvings. It was a beautiful, beautifully wrought iron cradle. Even today, we keep it in the corner of our home as a keepsake—both in memory of my father and of my children's early years. The cradle's canopy was constructed in such a way that toys wouldn't fall off. The swing had two large hanging supports, and above, a central hook from which it hung—like the curve of a golden fish. They'd gently rock it back and forth… and when rocking the cradle, they wouldn't let just any child play with the swing'.

The details of traditional suspended cradle were thoroughly recorded by G. Zulalyan (Archival Source), who explained:

'I want to offer a more complete explanation of this type of immediate-use cradle, so it can be clearly understood. Older generations already know it well—many of us were raised in exactly these kinds of cradles. But I felt it was important to describe and illustrate its construction in a simple way, for those unfamiliar with it—especially for the younger generation'.

This cradle, simple and effective, could be dismantled and reassembled wherever needed. It was traditionally set up in the following way:

1. Choose a suitable spot inside the sleeping area—preferably in the mother's section.

2. In two adjacent walls or corners, hammer in ring-shaped nails—strong and dependable.
3. Thread a thick double rope through the rings and secure it tightly, leaving enough slack.
4. Attach a smaller rope from the middle of the cradle for swinging.
5. Lay a blanket across the two ropes, forming a soft bed for the baby.
6. After placing the blanket, insert two flat wooden slats (about 40 cm each) at either end of the blanket, to keep the cradle open and give the baby space to move freely.
7. Once the baby is laid inside and covered, pull gently on the side rope to rock the cradle.
8. If the child is older and more active (starting to move or roll), the cradle is tied over the top to prevent falling out—a safety measure.

'This kind of cradle', Zulalyan notes, 'was a great relief for mothers—it allowed them to do their work in peace. It was especially calming for fussy or crying infants'.

In Kessab, in the Yughutian region, cradle-making was a shared familial tradition. The father would construct the cradle itself, the maternal grandfather often provided the wooden base, while the paternal grandmother prepared the bedding and linings. It was common to fill the mattress with soft wood shavings or pine wool, offering warmth and breathability (Cholakean, 1988, p. 61).

In Shirak, cradles and baby-walkers—known as *t'ndirs* or *chrnigs*—were often preserved long after the child had grown up. They were not discarded but cherished as symbols of memory, embodying a connection to both childhood and ancestral care. Even when no longer in use, the cradle remained in the home, echoing a time when lullabies filled the air and work was balanced with love.

Ethnographer H. Marutyan offers a compelling perspective on traditional Armenian children's furniture, particularly focusing on the infant cradle as it appears across regional ethnographic zones. In his analysis, he highlights the regional specificities in the design and use of cradles, offering insights not only into material culture but also into gender roles, domestic routines, and intergenerational memory (Marutyan, 1989, pp. 101-105).

In the Shirak region, cradles were often constructed with low headboards, a practical adaptation that made the act of rocking the cradle easier. This allowed the caregiver—typically the mother or grandmother—to multitask, soothing the baby while simultaneously engaging in other household chores.

In oral narrations recorded by folklorists, lullabies were often interwoven with depictions of everyday tasks. These were not simply songs of comfort, but poetic narratives reflecting a woman's labour and care, her hopes and worries. The act of rocking a child merged seamlessly with the rhythms of rural life, creating a rich mosaic of lived experience.

The writer and educator Khachatur Abovyan, in his work 'The Structure of Village Homes', provides a detailed description of the traditional Armenian cradle and its functional components:

'To the right of the mother is the infant's cradle, supported by two bow-shaped wooden beams that serve as legs, facilitating movement. A long rope is stretched between two trees, the ends brought together to form a gentle curve. A strong piece of fabric is tied to both ends of the rope, so that the bottom remains flat. The fabric's edges are neatly wrapped around the rope. Then, two sturdy wooden slats of equal length are placed at the head and foot to create a frame'.

Once the sleeping surface is set, the child is laid down and lightly secured to prevent accidental falls. After a few initial pushes, the cradle begins to rock on its own, gently swinging with inertia.

Often, a rope is tied to the cradle and pulled from a distance—by foot or hand—allowing the caregiver to remain at work while keeping the child in motion. There is no mechanical noise; instead, the cradle is often suspended outdoors, beneath leaves or branches, where clean air and the serenity of nature support the child's sleep.

Abovyan notes a striking tradition: in some communities, even ill children as old as 10-12 were laid in these cradles to help them rest peacefully, a practice rooted in both care and the belief in the healing power of rhythmic motion and natural surroundings (Abovyan, 1984, pp. 569-573).

The American-Armenian writer V. Hayk, in his homeland-themed narrative, vividly evokes the cradle as a powerful symbol of childhood and family life. He recalls:

'Like in my grandfather's time my cradle was tied to a grapevine trellis, just like a small sister guarding a little bush right in the garden's centre, watching over summer and winter alike, tirelessly and without rest. My childhood cries would rise up through its ropes; I would cry, weep, and beg there—lying among a flock of children from neighbouring families' (Hayk 1960, p.329).

Teller Margush Sargsyan shared her memories:

'I used to pull the cradle's ropes with my hands, twisting them tight. I would throw dust at it and flick it away. We called that *sarath*—crossing the ropes like a grid. Sometimes we'd say *ilikin arzhkan* (a morning song). There were stone cradles too; their headboards were

low, and a cloth was stitched onto the cradle as a belly band, so the baby wouldn't roll out'.

Another teller, Kh. Mikayelyan, linked the act of rocking with singing and caring:

'With rocking comes singing; I was a child and would sing:

"La˜-la˜-la˜, la˜-la˜-la˜…
Poor little cribbed ones would sigh,
The cradle would be set and prepared, singing:
"Rock, dear child,
Rock, little one,
Sleep sweetly in dreams,
My dear little one, my dear,
Butter and honey within you,
May you have all the blessings, my dear…"

We were fortunate to find a pure lullaby from the Shirak region, preserved in Hovhannes Kostaneants' *Legends and Folk Tales of Shirak* (1896), where lullabies are born near the cradle:

'Outside, the wind cries and wails,
At night, a voice arises—
In the pasture, near the cradle,
The mother sings a lullaby...'

(Kostaneants 1896, 13).

This tapestry of voices and memories reveals how the cradle was not merely a piece of furniture but a living symbol of care, comfort, and cultural continuity—a focal point around which childhood, motherhood, and tradition intertwined.

A. Isahakyan's poetic expression is a clear vivid testimony:

I made a black swing,
I tied the swing to the trees...
(Isahakyan, 1987, p.36).

In the folklore narrative, the word *Ճղոր* (meaning a tied or bound bundle) dominates, for example, in the folk tale 'Tujri *Tghen*' ('The Tujri Boy'):

'The bride left, went inside, saw, what did she see—a tied bundle there. She got scared, wondered where it was, the bundle was struck with a stick' (HZH-13 1985, 434).

Nora Nersesyan in her book *The Orphanage* highlights the role of cradles and swings in the life of orphans in Alexandropol as a kind of psychological therapeutic device:

'So, they initially planned rocking chairs, and on Saturdays, they would take the orphans out to show flight-height, stone throwing, and jumping... The teachers were instructed to force the boys to play, and most of them were required to spin five times with a belt or swing or do something else' (Nersesyan 2018, p.264).

According to older informants, under the cradle, they also placed trunks filled with clothes. For example:

'When we collected clothes, we put them in trunks under the cradle, under the feet, and sometimes we only put clothes, wrapped in cotton, because the baby's eyes cannot see them, the baby was kept in cotton, meaning delicate. They paid great attention, it was very delicate, the eyesight was protected, so the cradle's leg was tied so that the eye wouldn't touch it; they tied a blue string around the baby's head to keep the eye from catching the cloth, so the baby's eye wouldn't be disturbed from outside. The string was torn so that the bad would not break it. They tied a blue thread on the baby's head' (Hasmik Matikyan's Fieldwork, 2022).

It is notable that the baby's kit and baby bundles are widespread in Shirak.

'For childbirth, the baby bundle was tied until the seventh day, when the mother would bring her prepared aid. It is a traditional saying: "The mother's foot is 'heavy', the mother's eye is sweet; the girl will soon be taken, to please they let her go, after which only the mother's voice is heard". The protective aid is tied; it is considered good praise both for the mother and the baby's father. They used to say: "I would die for the colours of your clothes, for your threads, for the skin, for the thousand brushes, for the good brushes". They said: "Let the old remain, the new will be, your mother and father are your wings and ribs" etc'.

The baby's clothing tradition is common in Shirak. In children's play songs, clothes have an active role. Teller Vrezh Margaryan shared the following with us during our conversation:

'Again, there were spring days,
We took our Vrezhik's clothes,
And went to the fields and deserts,
I will die for Vrezhik's shoes, the weaving,
Needle's thread, sharp sewing...'

Էլի եկան գարնան օրեր,
Մեր Վրեժիկին առանք շորեր,
Առավ, ընկավ, դաշտ ու չոլեր,
Ես կմեռնիմ մեր Վրեժիկի չարխներին, չարխաթելին,
Բերնի լոզին, ծակ կոլոզին…

Eli ekan garnan orer,
Mer Vrežikin arraŋk šorer,
Arav, ənkav, dašt u čʿoler,

Es k'mernim mer Vrežiki čʿarxnerin, čʿarxatelin,
Berni lozin, cak kolozin…

After a birth in Shirak, the bundle was tied and secured, mostly by the older women of the household. Making or tying the bundle was considered a protective ritual. According to older informants, the bundle would hold the baby tightly so the legs would stay straight, the back straightened, and the baby would grow properly, stay warm during winter, and sleep peacefully. Before people had the opportunity to buy clothes for the baby piece by piece, they would sew pieces together to make a bundle and wrap the baby with it.

In our contemporary recordings, both rural and urban environments reflect this phenomenon as a natural consequence of modern times and lifestyle.

In the pre-urban culture of Alexandropol, infant care was carried out in this way: regardless of gender, until it was about 4-5 months old, the baby was tightly swaddled and laid down in a cradle made of wood and cloth. The baby's swaddling (*barur*) consisted of daily and festive bundles made from silk or white cotton fabric, sewn with needlework, including a bundle, a cap, a triangular-shaped blanket (*fogshor*), a 1m x 30cm sleeve fabric, a *takashor* (a kind of small cloth), a *golkark* (headband), a *glkhashor* (headscarf), and so forth. During the day, the baby would be taken out several times, changed, re-swaddled, their eyes covered, and then put back to sleep (Bazeyan, Aghanyan, 2015, p.68).

According to one resident of Gyumri, the *foghn*/*hogh* (blanket/ cloth) is the most vital item; the baby will not be scared, the place will stay warm, the baby will sleep peacefully, and it will not bother household chores. For a Gyumri woman, sitting idle or aimlessly wandering around was considered a serious mistake. Essentially, every effort was

made to keep the baby asleep during the three waking hours (H.Gyoltsyan, oral history).

Teller Emma Khachatryan provided a drawing of the *swaddling* (bundle):

'The *swaddling* is the baby's wrapping cloth, the bundle used to tie and wrap the baby. In Shirak, there is also the saying: "Keep the clothes in the bundle until dressing / keep the clothes, take them out" in daily life. By saying *բոխչա*, we mean something tied.

In pre-urban life, the *բոխչա* was made by the bride (or the groom's) family and was a symbol of the groom's household. On the wedding day, the groom would take the *բոխչա* to his family's home, marking that household's property; right up to today, people in Shirak say: 'The *բոխչա* is tied, so where do you go?'

In Shirak, swaddling was partly conditioned by the family's social status. Babies were born at home under lamplight, and before the umbilical cord fell off, special clothes were not put on them; they were wrapped in swaddling cloths, their arms tied with bands, their eyes covered, and a cap called *chamchuk* was put on their heads.

Khachatur Abovyan in the section 'Life' in his educational works notes the small baby bed items:

'On a flat cradle lies the small baby bed, made of various pieces of fabric... On one side of the cradle, two wide cloth strips are sewn. As soon as the baby is covered with the small bed, these strips are pulled over the baby's body, tightly wrapped also on the side where the mother sits to nurse, the other side under the cradle is turned back, gathered on the baby's chest, and tightly tied to the cradle's bar' (Abovyan, 1984, 570).

Kh. Mikayelyan, during a conversation with us, was playing a game. *Tat'ik* / *tat'nots, tat'pan*—these are what they call the little gloves that babies wear. If the child was sick, they put them on quickly; if not,

they wrapped the hands loosely and called them *dalar dzherk'er* (meaning soft, warm hands).

I'll bring wool,
Make socks,
Dress my little one,
Tenderly, sweetly pamper him/her.

Բուրդ բերեմ,
Գուլպա գործեմ,
Իմ ննոյին հագցնեմ,
Անուշ -անուշ քընցնեմ։

Burd berem,
Gulpa gorcʿem,
Im nnojin hagcʿnem,
Anuš-anuš kʿəncʿnem.

Or:

Tsiv-tsiv,
The raven and the hawk,
The little bird flew to Jerusalem,
Brought wool, brought cotton,
Made socks,
And flew away.

Ծի՛վ-ծի՛վ,
Ագռավ ու ծիվ,
Ծիտիկ թռա՛վ Երուսաղեմ,
Բուրդ բերեց, բամբակ բերեց,
Գուլպա գործեց,
Թռավ գնա՛ց։

Cʿiv-cʿiv,
Aġrav u cʿiv,
Cʿitik tʿrav Erusaghem,
Burd berēcʿ, bambak berēcʿ,
Gulpa gorcecʿ,
Tʿrav gnacʿ.

Փոփոլ—this was something they used to make: a little warm padded piece with a string or a ball underneath so the child's foot wouldn't get cold. These *pop'ol* pieces were stretched to prevent the socks from slipping off and to keep the child warm. When putting the child to sleep, they used to say: '*Ta'y-ta'y-ta'y* / Not cold, my child! / Come close, my child…'—as described by the teller Kh. Mikayelyan.

In both Shirak and other dialect regions of Armenia, clothing vocabulary like this is very common in folk children's rhymes.

Two texts, one already familiar, from informant Gohar Gogolyan, bring this out:

Fly, fly, I'll make it fly,
I'll catch the meat of a black bird,
I'll protect you and help you grow,
I'll dress you in beautiful clothes,
Finally, I'll take you home and pamper you.

(Shirak)

Թռի՛, թռի՛, թռցնեմ,
Սև հավու միս կերցնեմ,
Քեզի պահեմ մեծըցնեմ,
Սիրուն շորեր հագծընեմ,
Վերջում տանեմ քընծնեմ

Tʿri! tʿri! tʿrcʿnem,
Sew havu mis kercʿnem,
Kʿezi pahem mecʿcʿnem,
Sirun šorer hagcʿnem,
Veŗum tanem kʿəncʿnem.

Tsiv, tsiv,
The raven and the hawk…
The raven went to Jerusalem,
Brought wool, brought cotton,
Our dear little one cried for warmth…
(Teller Gohar Gogolyan from village Meghradzor).

Ծի՛վ, ծի՛վ,
Ագռավը ու ծիվ...
Ագռավը գնած Երուսաղեմ,
Բուռտ բերեծ, բամբագ բերեծ,
Մեր ճըժերուն չորաբ գոռնեծ...

Cʿiv, cʿiv,
Aġrave u cʿiv...
Aġrave gnacʿ Erusaghem,
Burt berecʿ, bambag berecʿ,
Mer cʿəžerun čorab gorcʿecʿ.

In Shirak, the tradition of *balul* (swaddling) is still alive today. *Balul* means a baby or a child who is swaddled—wrapped tightly in cloth or a blanket. The swaddling cloth (*barur*) usually has an open part in the middle, as shown in this passage from Hovhannes Shiraz's poem 'Birth Love' (*Tsnoghakan Ser*):

'My mother was crying and lamenting,

Suddenly I saw—she came inside
And took out the swaddling cloth,
Saying, “You’ve been cut off”.
And she cried over me,
“Oh, may no evil harm my child...”
—"Where did you take it out? Bring it back inside,
Put on the clothes, bring my naked child back in”.’

Այնինչ մայրս գոռում-լալիս,
Մեկ էլ տեսա՝ մտավ ներս
Ու դուրս բերեց բարուր-բալիս,
Ասես կտրից ընկա ես.
Ու գոռացի մորս վրա,
Ա՛խ, չորանար թող լեզուս...
- Ու՛ր դուրս բերիր, նե՛րս տար իսկույն,
Մրսե՛ց, ներս տար մերկ որդուս։

Ayninc՛ mayrs gorum-lalis,
Mek el tesă: mtav ners
U durs berec՛ barur-balis,
Ases ktric՛ ənka es.
U gorc՛aci mors vra,
Aի, č՛oranar toł lezus...
– Ur durs berir, ners tar isk՛uyn,
Mrsec՛, ners tar merk՛ ordus.

Or:

‘If I am the swaddling cloth — life is the day;//You are the child in my arms, // If I am the home — you are my fortress; // You are the tent I pitched’.

(H. Shiraz)

Թե բարուր եմ՝ կյանքն է օրօցք//դու ես բալիկն իմ գրկած//,
Թե բանակ եմ՝ դու ինձ ամրոց//, դու ես վրանն իմ զարկած

Tʿe barur em — kyanqʿn ē orocʿkʿ / du es balikn im gṛkacʿ /
Tʿe banak em — du indz amrocʿ / du es vrann im zarkacʿ

There are items that are essential for preparing a child to walk. In the Shirak region's childhood environment, the *tendir* is known, which according to folklorists resembles a *tonir* (traditional Armenian oven). Incidentally, in several Shirak communities, the *tonir* is also called *tendir*. The *tendir* is intended for babies who are already crawling but not yet walking, and it is used to keep the child still so they do not get hurt.

Teller Khanum Mikayelyan found common features between the child's *tendir* and the *tonir* of the *tonra-tan* (a type of oven). According to her analysis, adults would hang on the *tendir* and sit on its edges, while children were tied around it. It is likely that, based on this observation, people invented the *tendir* specifically for children.

Babies at this stage stood supported, suspended with flexibility, and mostly crawled rather than walked. According to ethnographic data from Gyumri, when babies start walking at 8–9 months babies start walking they use a *crnik*, which is a wooden support frame with three wheels that stabilises the child's torso. The child holds the *crnik* from behind and pushes it forward; the wheels move with a clacking sound as the child walks holding the frame. This is how babies learn to walk (From the folklore archive of H. Yeghishe Gyoletsyan, Gyumri / Aleksandrapol, Leninakan, 1976, Yerevan, Notebook No. 2, pages 1–178).

The Shirak folklore has unique ethnographic manifestations that stem from the ethnic particularities and collective mindset of the community.

Lullaby Songs in the Shirak Region From the Perspective of Language and Culture

The lullaby, as a living genre of children's folklore, has become a focal point of interest for researchers. My monograph *Let me Sing a Sweet Lullaby* is a linguistic study, where English and Armenian lullaby texts are examined and analysed from linguistic and philological perspectives.

A large number of recorded samples of children's folklore are lullabies. The lullaby as a stable folklore genre 'lives' in Shirak. Contemporary records show that the lullaby (*ororí*) has a unique place and role in Shirakian life. The name used for the word 'lullaby' across the region is *nanig, nanig, ayig, ayig*, etc.

Lullabies occupy a special place in the work of collectors. Lullabies have been written in different time periods and different communities. The following lullaby text was recorded by V. Arakelyan in 1982 in the village of Nahapetavan in the Artik region. Its content speaks about the preservation of Shirak residents' village lifestyle, which is also reflected in folk songs and dances.

I say *nene, nene, nene,*
I say *nene*,
I have gently comforted my baby with your lullaby,*nene, nene, nene*,
I say *nene*:
I have sweetened the bitter milk,
Nene, nene, nene,
Oh, I can't sleep at nights, tired from the burden, *nene, nene, nene*.

Ընդր եմ ասում, ընդը, բալես, ընդը,
Ընդր եմ ասում,
Անուշ քունըս խանգարել եմ օրորոցիդ տակին,

նընը, բալես, նընը,
Ննըր եմ ասում:
Քաղցըր կաթով պայել, մեծացըրել եմ,
Ննիկ բալես, նընիկ, նընիկ, նընիկ,
Ախ, գիշերը քուն չունիմ, զօրը՝ դադարում,
Ննը, նընը, բալես, նընը:

Nənər em asum, nənə, bales, nənə,
Nənər em asum,
Anuš kʿunəs xangarel em ororoćid takin,
nənə, bales, nənə,
Nənər em asum:
Kagcʿər katov payel, mecacʿerel em,
Nənik bales, nənik, nənik, nənik,
Ax, gišerə kʿun čunin, zorə: dadarum,
Nənə, nənə, bales, nənə.

Shirak lullaby makers used to include the lullaby in the activities of daily chores; the social situation of the household was also depicted in M. Khachatryan's written lullaby:

Nana *nene, nana nene*,
Nana, your nanny is not here:
I am your carer,
I am your player,
Nana dear...

Նանա բալես, նանա
Նանա, տադիգը հոս չէ:
Ես եմ ձեզ պայողը,
Ես եմ ձեզ շայողը,
Նան ջան...

Nana bales, nana
Nana, tadigə hos če:
Es em dzez payoġə,
Es em dzez šayoġə,
Nan jan...

Shirakian lullabies are marked by their blessings. Often, the burden or responsibility of the household becomes a component of poetic expression:

I will say a lullaby, my dear,
My sweet little one...

Օրոր ասեմ, իմ բալին,
Իմ անուշ հոտովին

Orror asum, im balikn,
Im anuš hotovin

In the lullaby text, we frequently meet simple, intimate phrases spoken by a mother to her child.

Sleep, sleep, sweet baby,
Sleep, sleep, oh little one.

Քնի՛, քնի՛, անուշ բալես,
Քնի, քնի, այ օղուլ։

Kʿni!, kʿni!, anuš bales,
Kʿni, kʿni, ay oġul.

The word *oghoul* (person) is often used in Shirak lullabies, particularly with the meaning of a little boy. In lullabies from the Tigranakert region, the same word is used:

Nenny, I will say, I will put you to sleep,
Oghoul, lullaby, lullaby, lullaby...

Նեննի ըսեմ, քընցընիմ,
Օղուլ, օրոր, օրոր, օրոր…

Kʿni!, kʿni!, anuš bales,
Kʿni, kʿni, ay oġul.

E. Aghayan's *Dictionary of Armenian* explains the word *oghoul* as: 1) a boy child, 2) a colloquial word for child or little one (baby).

Teller Ruzanna Aristakesyan remembers: 'My mother-in-law continuously sang sad songs, rocking my children to sleep, murmuring under her breath. She had lost a child in the war'.

The lullaby language reflects these meanings:

1. Singing softly under the nose for self-soothing,
2. Engaging with a calm, gentle word,
3. Remembering past days and sighing quietly under the nose.

Various lullaby texts can serve as a basis for lullaby singing.

Sleep, my dear, sweet baby,
Nanik, nannik you are,
Sleep, mountain breeze,
Until the day comes,
The herds return with burdens,
With rays of light...

Քնի՛ իմ բալա, անուշ ջան բալա,
Նանի՛կ, նանի՛կ դու արա,
Քնի՛ սարի հովին,
Մինչև օրը վեր գա,
Հերդ գա բեռներով,
Շողքի թևերով։

Kʿni im bala, anuš jan bala,
Nanik, nanik du ara,
Kʿni sari hovin,
Minčē orə ver ga,
Herd ga bernerov,
Šoǰki tʿēverov.

With lullaby singing, happy and victorious memories always come to my mind—'My boy, you will become strong with boys'.

Shirakian lullabies are often composed using children's play language:

The frost took away the flowers,
The wind gave coldness,
The flowers' place
Is filled with salt and pepper...
My colt lost its tail,
It will no longer enter the garden...
So sleep, sleep, my baby,
My dear little lamb...

Տեղից հանեց պոզերը,
Քամուն տվեց մազերը,
Հանած պոզերի տեղը
Լցրեց աղ ու պղպեղը..
Քոլիկ դառավ մաստանը
Էլ չի մտնի բոստանը…
Դե քնի, քնի, իմ բալա,
Իմ համով գառնուկ բալա…

Teɫicʿ hanec pozɛri,
Kʿamun tvets mazɛri,

Hanac pozɛri teɬə
Lćrecʿ ał u pʿɬpɛyə...
Kolik darav mastanə
El čʿi mtni bostanə...
De kʿni, kʿni, im bala,
Im hamov garnuk bala.

From wider Armenian culture, we often see the borrowing of playful expressions combined with words like *bayik*:

I call you *bayik*,
So that you sleep on my knees,
Open your eyes,
Mouse, mouse, sleep...

The rest period of lullaby activity is essentially marked by the repetition of words, creating a transitional state.

It's already late, late, late,
Sleep, baby, sleep, sweet sleep,
Go to the second peaceful dream,
There beautiful dreams await you...

The repetition of words in the lullaby is used for stylistic purposes—'late, late, late', 'sweet sleep, sweet sleep'. This calming effect shapes the lullaby.

Another lullaby from Shirak uses the method of 'linking words' to combine phrases:

Nani, nene, nanik dear,
Nanik dear, my baby,

I will bring you a fragrant lullaby,
I will cover your lullaby with a soft cloak.

Collector L. Margaryan recalls the lullaby singing process: 'I used to sing holding my child, then place the lullaby down. I gave energy, carried and bore it; I only made sounds. Later, I started singing lullabies like "It is dark, it is late already". Then I sang patriotic songs like "The two suns of Armenia'. I wanted to instill love for the homeland from a young age…While rocking the child to sleep, I praised his lovely eyes…'

Sleep, my little dear,
Drink cold water, baby,
Sleep calmly, baby...

Folklorist Alvard Jivanyan explained in conversation with me that lullabies, by nature, are not educational texts. They have one specific function—to soothe the child. However, lullabies can contain linguistic elements such as adjectives and names of plants and animals, which were intentionally introduced to stimulate the child's thinking and satisfaction with the text. In individual lullabies, there is a noticeable tendency to simplify the number of children.

Among Armenian folk literary genres, lullabies are unique in that, unlike other linguistic genres, they emerged spontaneously, although meeting the requirements of chronological continuity, and have undergone textual changes. Lullabies were originally intended for infant care but also provided opportunities for young mothers to express themselves, manifest desires, social and historical pictures, human relations, and emotions.

Folklorist Ester Khemchyan notes that with the help of lullabies, mothers expressed their love and tenderness to the newborn. The monotonic repetition of refrains like 'Layla˜, baby, layla˜', 'O-ror, o-ror˜rem', etc., helped the child fall asleep.

Lullabies have been a unique self-learning process for the newborn, through which the mother awakens and nurtures the child's Armenian identity, responsibility, and goodness. Although lullabies have had such an important function, they must not only be preserved but also utilised, taught, and studied whenever possible.

In 2018, during fieldwork in the UK, I had the chance to meet Mark Winstell, a drama instructor at the Manchester theatre. According to him, lullabies have a restorative function in theatre, often used during rehearsals to calm and soften actors. 'Lullabies help actors to relax and feel comforted. On stage, a calm environment must be created, as when a mother lulls her child. When actors are exhausted during rehearsals, they are asked to sing lullabies to help refresh'.

The lullaby, as a separate type of children's folklore, is found in the nursery. It usually has a soothing melody and rhythmic elements. The Shirakian lullaby texts are considered to be:

- praise-texts: when the lullaby singer praises the child and his/her surrounding world:

  My clever boy, my smartie,
  Close your soft eyes and sleep
  Nanig, nanig, my sweet child.

- blessing-texts: when the lullaby singer blesses the child and the child's parents:

Sleep my child, sleep,
May you grow up
And be a strong power (wing) for your father.

- memory-texts: when the lullaby singer remembers her past or her nation's historical past by emphasising toponomies (e.g. Kars):

Sleep my child, child,
Your ancestors escaped from Kars,
You should sleep and awake strong
To defend us and our country.

Our research shows that Shirakian lullabies are abundant with blessings, transference of life experience. Sometimes a diminutive word or phrase becomes a key component of a lullaby text.

Lullabies have different functions: to bring sleep for the child, to provide peace for the singer and the child. Shirakian lullabies, as compared to other region's lullaby texts, have a therapeutic function, which is essentially due to the repetition of words and opening and closing formulas. A large group of Shirakian lullabies should be regarded as a heritage handed down from older generation to younger generation. Therefore, as a unique heritage, they mostly live and survive as memories (collective, local, individual).

In conclusion, in Shirakian lullabies blessings are common.

Customs and Rituals for Forty Days after the Birth of a Child and Baptism

The study of rituals marking forty days since a birth, for both mother and child, has been largely the province of Armenian ethnography. Both the childbirth and postpartum *karasunq* (forty-day period) themes are part of Armenian national ethnographic studies. This national custom, due to its vitality, is still alive in Armenian society, although some of its related activities are less practiced now. This formerly much more widely spread tradition is still alive in the Shirak region, due to the strength of traditional and conservative thinking. Although some of the actions related to the mentioned ritual are not used much now, they still have deep roots in wider popular consciousness, which is somehow conditionally linked to religious ideas and the religious worldview of the community.

The *karasunq* is a guideline for childbirth cleansing: the national custom injects water into this ritual as a purifying, vital element. Before understanding the ritual's social-religious significance, we should consider the religious symbolism of the *karasunq* day itself. The forty days from birth are considered a purification period, during which the newborn cannot be baptised. The fortieth day marks the end of the purification period; the mother presents her child to the church as a sacred offering, a prayer of thanksgiving, and consecrates the child's entry into the church.

The significance of the *karasunq* is connected to the presentation of Jesus Christ on the fortieth day to the church: 'And when the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord' (*Luke* 2:22).

The child was named Jesus on the eighth day, as commanded by the angel before the child's birth.

From a national religious worldview, certain prohibitions have been established for the mother and the newborn during this time. Teller Hayastan Khurshudyan described some of the beliefs: 'For forty days, I wouldn't let the child leave the house. I would be afraid, trembling, but I would wrap them in warm clothes, saying the child must not remain exposed or the child will get sick and fall ill. They would be wrapped tightly, kept indoors, cared for day and night, protected from cold and illness. When the child cried, I would comfort and rock them, feeding them during the day and night. At night, I would say prayers and put holy water on the child's forehead to keep away evil spirits'.

Among Armenians, there was a long-standing belief that 'during the forty days, the mother does not walk barefoot, otherwise the newborn will be weak and late to start walking' (Nazareants, 1878).

Through the church, parents make a covenant with God and pray for divine strength to raise the child spiritually and physically. The baptism, performed immediately after the forty-day period, has its own symbolism, as it is believed that the child carries the original sin inherited by all humans from Adam. Baptism cleanses these sins and grants the child the possibility to live a pure life. This cleansing is done through water.

Besides the church's ritual system, there are also still some traditional customs and ceremonies passed down from ancient times, which parents and relatives follow both before the child's birth and during the forty days after birth.

A significant component of the postpartum ritual is water. As mentioned, water has a purifying function. Before the forty-day ritual bath, the baby is not bathed in plain water but with water mixed with

salt, which has antiseptic properties. During the ritual bath, a piece of raw meat is placed in the water to prevent the child from catching a cold. A cold child is weak and does not gain weight. To cure or avoid colds, the child's relatives take certain steps during the *karasunq* period, and, according to their testimonies, the child was healed in this way. Such stories were heard in the Lusaghbyur community during ethnographic research.

One storyteller narrated: 'The child was born, and we washed it daily with holy water until the fortieth day. For the fortieth day, we added water. We believed in Jesus Christ every day and put water on the child's head, and after washing, the child was taken outside to play. If the child got sick, we cared for it, feeling weak, feeding it, and washing it with water. We also washed the child's head with holy water, believing it kept away evil spirits and illness'.

The same informant also described how newborns were soothed: 'The child's crying was unbearable, there was no light or sound; we put the child to sleep by saying, "Jesus Christ, protect us", and sprinkled water on the child with our hands, praying for protection from evil. We feared evil spirits greatly and said, "You cannot come near this child". Children were protected with needles, scissors, or razors placed under their mattresses to keep away evil spirits, and some families also placed a Bible or prayer book under the mattress to increase protective power' (Teller Khanum Mikayelyan).

The compiled knowledge of evil spirits was widespread in Shirak, where it was believed that evil spirits pursued the mother and child. There were even conversations about how some had managed to catch the evil spirit with a needle or thread and scare it away. Houses where this was successful were called 'Ali houses'. Ali is considered an

evil spirit. We find information about Ali in Manuk Abeghyan's work: 'According to a conversation, God created Ali for Adam, but Adam was earthy, Ali was fiery, and they did not get along. Therefore, Adam disliked Ali. When God saw this, He created Eve. Since then, Eve and her descendants have been in conflict with Ali. Ali brings sickness to young couples and destroys the foetus. Thus, he does not bring happiness'.

To protect the mother and child, needles, scissors, or razors were placed under mattresses to prevent evil spirits from approaching. Sometimes the Bible or prayer book was also placed under the mattress for stronger protection.

Before the forty-day period is completed, the child's clothes were washed, the child was not exposed to daylight, and if someone carried the child outside before sunset, it was a bad omen. The water sometimes had herbs or oats added, believed to strengthen the child during the bath.

One of the traditional rhymes from those days goes:

'*Nanik*, may you sleep well,
Bathing in rose water,
You are small, you will grow big'
(Tumachyan, 1986, 111).

During the forty-day ritual, the child's bathing was an important event: 'We washed, sprinkled water above, said prayers, and while sprinkling, said, "Jesus and Christ, take away the evil, Jesus and Christ, pin the evil on the needles, so evil does not come near, good comes to the child, the child is healthy"'.

'I've bathed the baby, sprinkled water over them, swaddled the child in cloth. While swaddling, I've said: Jesus and Christ, I made the sign of the cross—Jesus and Christ. I pinned a safety pin to the clothes, stuck a needle into the hem, so that evil may depart and good come to the child, that the child may sleep peacefully'.

During the *karasunq* ritual, rose petals and gold are also added to the baby's bathwater. Teller Tsovinar Ghazaryan recounts that when the mother wore gold jewelry during childbirth, the newborn's skin turned yellow afterward. However, when gold was placed in the water during the *karasunq*, the jaundice disappeared. She also mentions a tradition where water was poured over the baby's head forty times using an eggshell. According to her explanation, the egg symbolises the Earth, and the water inside the shell represents humanity's wisdom, which is transferred to the newborn when poured over their head.

The *karasunq* ritual is also accompanied by blessings and well-wishes directed toward the child:

'May you be a lucky child,
A pride to your father and mother'.

When water is poured over the baby's head, they would describe the baby's features, almost as if painting a picture:

'May your forehead be clear,
May your eyebrows be high,
May your eyes be almond-shaped and sharp-sighted,
May your nose be straight,
May your mouth be small'.

According to Ghazaryan, during the bath, the baby's arms are folded behind their back, and the child is gently bent forward. At that moment, they say: 'May our boy become a gentleman', or 'May our daughter become a lady', meaning 'may they have a long life'. If someone enters the room before the *karasunq* is complete, they are not allowed to leave until the bathing is finished. They would say: 'Come, give your sleep to my baby'. If that person left early, it was believed the baby's sleep would go with them.

In Shirak, water-related sayings are remembered, such as: 'The word to the elder, the water to the young,' or 'May you have a life long as water' (a blessing said to children).

Essentially, water, as a vital and life-giving element, plays an important role in both practical and symbolic terms in child-rearing. It is no coincidence that water holds a special place in daily life and in the imagery of folk traditions. Even today, in Shirak, the reduplicated verb *chop-chop-el (*to splash) is used when bathing babies, where the repeated 'ch-p' sounds stimulate joy in the child.

One teller from Shirak shared:

'When the baby is eight days old, they must be baptised, and then forty days later, the *karasunq* is held. It's something related to Jesus. The baby's undershirt is removed, torn in the water, and they say: "We've cut the *karasunq*, the *karasunq* is complete". Before placing the baby into the water, they would say: Jesus and Christ. The baby recognises the mother after the first forty days, and the father after the second. When the baby recognises the mother, her hair starts falling out'.

A lullaby recorded by Sp. Melikyan also touches on this theme:

'When your forty days pass,
And you recognise your father and mother,

May your father and mother be filled with wheat,
Lullaby Avik, sweet little child,
Lullaby, lullaby, lullaby'

(Melikyan, 1952, p.7).

Teller Ashkhen Davtyan notes: 'Before the child's *karasunq*, the mother should not go out at night or cross over a small stream—it was believed that evil spirits could harm the newborn. No one was supposed to see the baby until the *karasunq* was complete. A blue bead would be tied to the baby's arm, and a prayer book or Bible placed under the pillow to protect them from harm by angels'.

When the forty days were over, relatives and guests would gather. A basin was filled with water, rose petals were sprinkled in it, and gold jewelry placed inside—to bless the child with health and divine favour. A woman would often sing:

'God, look upon this child with sweet eyes,
Keep them away from evil and suffering,
Strengthen them, and make them worthy of Your glory. Amen'.
A feast would follow.

For forty days, the grandmother would bathe the baby daily. To protect the child from the evil eye, pain, or curses, iron objects, copper coins, burning wood pieces, or charcoal would be placed in the bathwater.

Every baby had a special *khandzarur* (baby swaddle bundle), crafted and decorated by village carpenters. The baby was wrapped in *khandzarur* and placed in the cradle. The bundle was made of several layers:

- *Hogshor* (ground cloth),
- *Porkash* (stomach cloth),
- *Votshor* (leg cloth),

- *Boghcha* (outer cloth), and
- *Kapots* (fastening strip).

The *hogshor* was folded a few times so the baby would not touch the bare ground. The baby's legs were wrapped in a large cloth, fastened tightly with the *otshor*. Then everything was bundled in the *boghcha* and tied with a long strip. This entire wrapping was called *balul* or *ghondagh* (Hakobyan, 1974, p.193).

In Artsakh, after the baby's bath, salt was sprinkled over the baby's entire body—especially behind the ears, around the joints, between the thighs, and under the arms—before wrapping the child and laying them beside the mother (HAB, vol. 8, p. 73).

In Van-Vaspurakan, during swaddling, a bit of earth was placed with the baby. They would say: 'The child of the soil will be clean, and have a sweet smell' (Shaghoyan, 2007).

Rose petals and gold are also poured into the baby's bathtub during the ritual. We have already seen Shirak teller Tsovinar Margaryan's detailed descriptions and interpretation of the ritual, including the positioning of the child and the blessings used for them.

The ritual was accompanied by the folkloric text:

May success guide you throughout your lifetime,
May your parents be proud of you!

Baththime Texts

Baththime is a special childcare time. Many folk beliefs, customs, songs centre on the child. In Shirak people are convinced that bathing a baby 'brings weight' to the child. Shirak tellers bathe their children and praise their body and bless the children, as in these two examples:

Wide Forehead,
Arched eyebrows,
Slim nosie,
Almond like mouthie,
Soft waterie,
Long neckie,
Long neckie.
(Praise text)

May you get older as a grandpa,
May you go to church
And come back with your nose up.
(Blessing)

The bathing texts are also rich in folkloric linguistic thinking. In Shirak, it was believed that bathing a newborn brought strength to the child. Below are examples of such bathing texts, presented as told by tradition-bearers and in accordance with the descriptions of the rituals.

Teller Lena Galstyan emphasised that:

'We used to bathe the baby every day. If the baby wasn't calm, we'd bathe them twice. We often saw babies with long necks. Sometimes, we'd put a piece of meat in the bathwater so the baby wouldn't become weak. My son had once been weak, and my mother-in-law would look into

his mouth and say, "The child is spiritually afflicted. There's bitterness in his palm".

As the bathing progressed, the bathing grandmother would gently touch and praise the baby's features:

'Broad forehead,
Arched eyebrows,
Bean-shaped nose,
Almond-shaped lips,
Light, soft skin,
Long neck,
Slim waist'.

They would also say, while lifting the baby headfirst out of the water:

'May you be as high as the mountain!'
'May you be this tall on earth!'

Elders would gently mould the baby's head and face while bathing, reciting:

Broad forehead,
Arched brows,
Big eyes,
Small nose,
Beautiful, small mouth.

Someone might say: 'Have you seen how they wrapped the baby in swaddling cloth? They bathed them on a *satr*—a platform with cloth laid over it. It was placed in the middle of the room. That was called *satr*. In the old days, people even gave birth and slept on it'.

A traditional lullaby or phrase might follow:

'May the best of the land and its meat be yours,
May my own sleep be yours'.

After lifting the baby out of the water, it was considered a bad sign to put the baby back in again. The household elder would dip their finger into the bathwater, shake it off and say:

'Long neck, slim waist…'

They would draw the sign of the cross in the water to keep the child in the path of faith, saying:

'Stay strong, stay steady'.

'We stretched the neck so it grows long', and then they would sing:

'Little bird, little bird, flutter,
Swim in the water,
Then come out, love,
Wrap around your mother'

Or:

'Jump, let me toss you,
Feed you black hen meat,
Take you to the bathhouse,
Then put you to sleep'.

One mother would touch her baby's ribs while saying:

'May your ribs be strong,
May you never have fractures,
May your hands and feet always work,
And always reach each other'.

Mothers would often say blessings with anxiety, to ensure good fortune. In Shirak, they said: 'A mother's gaze is sweet—it easily attaches to the child'.

In Voskehask the grandmother would gently press the baby's forehead to make it smooth and beautiful, and mould the nose from both sides, saying:

Long neck, soft skin,
May your papa and mama's sleep be yours'
(Hovhannisyan, 2005, p. 226).

After bathing, a small cup of sun water was left—traditionally believed to be sacred. Until the 40-day mark, meat was placed in the bath to make the baby 'meat-loving' (strong). The grandmother would tie a blue evil-eye bead and tap it against the cradle, to shatter the evil eye. In Talin, to protect the newborn from all kinds of evil, they would first bathe the baby, then sprinkle salt on the skin (Israyelyan, 1977, p. 51).

In Shirak, during the bathing of the newborn, the grandmother and mother would press the baby's ears together and then lift the baby gently, chanting: 'Long neck, soft water,' in order to strengthen the baby's nerves.

From birth up to about two years of age, when putting the child to sleep, they would sprinkle local soil under the child's body—especially under the buttocks—to prevent the baby from being 'disturbed' or harmed, and to prevent the appearance of sores or boils in that area (Eminyan, 'Azgagrakan Handes', 1901, p. 255).

Folklorist H. Harutyunyan from Shirak recounts that when her newborn son was to be bathed for the first time, she asked an elderly woman for help—Astghik Ghazaryan, born in 1921. According to tradition, the baby should be bathed only after 40 days. However, the woman declined, saying that she was a widow of a martyr, and instead requested they find a woman with better fortune for the ritual—as that would bring better luck to the child.

PART IV

THE NURSERY RHYME AS A FUNDAMENTAL PART OF CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE

Games constitute a large proportion of the recorded samples of children's folklore. Games are accompanied by game-related expressions and speech forms, including pre-game expressions,game-round expressions, and various speech forms. Folklorists and ethnographers have conducted extensive study of games and game-related folklore.

Ethnographer K. Bazeyan, in the article *The Game in the Urban Culture of Alexandropol*, filled a previous gap in the study of game culture in Alexandropol. According to her thesis, games, as an inseparable part of social practices, can say a lot about the customs and ideological frameworks of the given community. In community, games are encoded information about the social structure's historical development, national identity, physical education methods, ethnocultural interactions, and more.

Items of children's folklore, especially game songs, have latterly been an increasing focus of research. H. Cholakyan, in his work 'Kesap', presents five groups of children's songs:

a) Songs performed by children during everyday activities such as playing in the yard, bathing, eating, walking, and chores. These are mostly performed by adults for children.
b) Songs performed in interaction with puppets.
c) Ritual songs, which are part of ritual games, involving ritualistic actions and performances done both by children and adults.
d) Work songs and associated dialogues based on human or other phenomena, many of which hold significant cultural and communicative value.
e) Riddles or decision-making games.

Game songs can either be traditional folk creations or free compositions with folk elements, such as improvised songs (Cholakyan, 1988, p. 319).

The following example recorded in Shirak was composed by tellers through an improvisational method to capture children's everyday speech patterns:

'Whoever wakes up with the ball,
Come work, whoever is a dove,
My precious child (*tarlans*, *atlas*, *khass)*,
Home is a dove…'

The text is woven with original words — *tarlnas*, *atlas*, *khass* — and rhymes. The rhyme, typical for folk creations, strengthens the speech's tempo and makes the scene vivid.

'Come work, whoever is a dove,
Home is a dove.'

In Kesap, a praise text is also composed for a child's performance:

'Let me know who you are,
You are the fruit of the vine,
You are the strength of my father,
You are the great fortune of our home,
You are the great fortune of our home.'

The game song is performed by the mother or grandmother when taking the newly awakened child from the yard (Cholakean, 1988). The child's connection is associated with the house's destiny—as in the two-line phrase: 'You are the great fortune of our house'.

The idea of protecting the home is connected with boys. Using vivid imagery, people in Shirak say: 'The son is the pillar of the house, the owner and protector of the home, the son is the glowing hearth of the family'.

Protection of the home is linked to protecting the household's roof, but also to the defence passed down from ancestors. For every family, the home is sacred. Visiting someone's home starts with greeting the household. Since ancient times, this custom has been repeated. The household is the family's council. The expression 'youngest of the big household' signifies 'the heir of a wealthy family', and the family roof is 'the symbol of family solidarity' (Abeghyan, 1975, 61).

In Aghavni's "Shirak" novel, the newborn boy is described as a man: 'In the yard lies my newborn brother. He is still very small, so much so that I wonder how such a tiny man can exist in the world. That is, our relatives call him a man—a man, oh, a man... a new man has come into the world. And this one man has become the most important person in our entire family' (Aghavni, 1982, 7).

The same idea is found in H. Shiraz's *Seven-Prophecies* poetic work:

'If I say roses to those eyes—many have said it, but what are roses?

The sunrises are my dawns,
The little ones are my eagle feathers,
My children are the dreams I lived yesterday'

(Shiraz, 2012, p.26).

Folklorist E. Khemchyan notes that the children's game songs in Tavush are also loving praise songs aimed at the child, preserving and nurturing every precious event so that the child may become wings and feathers for the father:

Ha t'yri, t'yri, t'rts'nem,
Hord t'evin hasdnem.
(I will fly, fly, let me fly,
To your father's wing you will arrive)
(Khemchyan, 2000, 179).

With similar phrasing, such songs also prevail in Shirak children's folklore:

Trri!, trri!, trts'nem,
Hord boyin hasdnem…

Or:

Trri!, trri!, trts'nem,
Hord hatsin hasdnem,
Mord mazin kapts'nem…

These texts (containing the component "hop, hop") are proverbial and created with connection to metaphorical ideas such as 'to deliver to the wing', 'to deliver to the finger'. The metaphorical idea of 'delivering to the wing' is generally associated with meanings like being under the wing, becoming wings and feathers.

Children's verbal texts therefore explicitly mention this, indicating the ethnic connection with the child:

'Fly, fly, let me fly,
I'll bathe my house,
I'll put the house to sleep,
Come and see who's the baby,
Little Zarik, the baby,
Bringing berries with loads,

With hands full of hazelnuts,
Tash-tash, tash...'

(Teller: Zardar Ghandilyan)

In a literal sense, the praise of a boy is linked inseparably to the house:

'We have a boy, we have a house,
Call him outside, let's see him...'

Or:

'You are my dear boy,
You are my bone's marrow'

(Yeremean, 1923, 4-5).

In the folkloric collection of the National Archive of Armenia, we were able to find a sample of a children's play song whose main plan included two purposes: to play with the child, and then to put him to sleep:

Come fly, fly, let me fly,
Let me drink some honey dew,
Maybe I'll drink some wine,
I'll put the little one to sleep gently,
Thousand bears of Bizirgiya,
Barna is in India,
Makh margarit with its song,
Top, top the uncle,
Kor, kor... the uncle...

(National Archive of Armenia, Fund 484, List 1, File 9 II Page 103 (2200)).

Study of these texts shows that both children and their caregivers actively express ritual components in the children's play songs, deeply rooted and formed by archaic thinking patterns and

characteristic words and expressions. The children's verbal texts are also transmitted for specific practical purposes, such as giving water or feeding. Through special clear signals, the caregiver invites the child to eat or drink something. A typical example is the Shirakian play song 'Did you give water to the donkey?'— the phrase 'give water' originally referred to giving water to an animal.

The caregiver pulls the child's ear and says:

Did you give water to the donkey?
Yes, I gave.
Was it warm or cold?
It was warm.
Oh! The donkey's stomach is hot, cold!
It's cold!
Hot, the donkey's stomach is cold.
It's hot!
It didn't go... it's cold...

These texts are proverbial: the player verbally describes the game before starting:

'They played, they caught us by our ears, they tied us up and said: I was a child, this is a game from our elders, they came and taught us:

Did you give water to the donkey?
With warm or cold water?
Warm...'
Another time they would say cold.
The donkey's stomach got cold...
Did you give vinegar to the donkey?'

This dialogue continues a few times with pulling the ear until the ear is released.

These verbal samples develop children's speech and memory, aimed at question-answer dialogues formed with a similar method—in one case saying cold, in another case cooled.

A similar example is found in Kesap's children's verbal texts:

Ear, ear,
Double ears,
Give water to your donkey!
(A rhyme for giving water)
(Cholakean, 1988, 325).

In children's verbal texts, extensive use of repetition of sounds is very common. In children's play songs, alliteration is often used to facilitate the child's pronunciation. Alliteration is the clustering of the same or similar consonant sounds, which enhances the speech's expressiveness, imagery, rhythm, musicality, and also produces certain auditory illusions (Khlghatyan, 1976, 17). In the following example, repetition of the consonant "թ" (t) sound can be seen. The player, holding the child's little hand, gently pats while saying:

Totol tatik, jur ber,
Plav epem du ker,
Yes ch'em ude, du ker,
Ker, ker, ker
(Recorder: H. Galstyan).

The consonant repetition here has a double semantic function: it is used both in a verbal (figurative) sense and at the ritual level (literal

meaning). In this regard, note the figurative meanings of oil and honey, nuts and sugar.

It is also mentioned in the epic *Sasna Tsrer*: David was feeding on the breast of Ismil Khatun, but one day refused milk. By order of Melik, therefore, they brought butter, oil, and honey from Sasun to feed him.

Here are excerpts from the *Davit of Sasoun* epic:

> Your house is destroyed,—said Melik—
> His father has many cattle, doesn't his father's house have honey and butter?
> Aren't there any sweet, sweet breads?
> Batman Boslen's oil,
> Let it go to Mher's house,
> Go and bring a load of honey,
> Go and bring a load of butter,
> If you bring it, you'll be rewarded, the boy will eat...
>
> *(Davit of Sasoun, 1981, 132).*

Butter, cream, and honey have widespread symbolic significance in Armenian culture. In the Armenian national epic, the advice to nourish with honey and butter is explicitly mentioned:

> 'With honey and butter, Davit kept Ismil Khatun:
> While other boys grow up with years,
> Davit grew day by day…'
>
> *(Davit of Sasoun, 1981, 134)*

According to tellers from Shirak, it was customary to give children honey water before putting them to sleep, which is calming and induces sleep. In conversation, teller Kh. Mikayelyan explained: 'They gave children nuts and sugar as a sweet treat. True, nuts were not

easily available, but they were cherished as a sign of affection. Honey and butter back then were a luxury—whoever could keep honey, would sweeten with honey; whoever had butter, would give butter. But every child wouldn't get an apple every day to eat, or play with it afterwards. We used to sing with rhymes and motions—"You are round and soft", comparing children's cheeks to apples and softness. "My round one, my apple, you are both round and soft"'.

The folkloric samples intended for feeding children are largely counting rhymes—often accompanied by finger games. Thus, the counting text is said to be for entertaining infants during cuddling. In this case, the counting rhyme acts as a significant game connector. The counting text has been preserved through oral tradition and has evolved through generations.

Teller R. Aristakesyan recalled a counting rhyme from her mother-in-law: 'My mother-in-law is called Dzyunik, she was from Alashkert. She heard this game from her mother-in-law. She would rock my two daughters in her arms, open her hands wide, and say this counting rhyme:

"*Ekeduke dunashe,*
Charokh, chmbukh pupushé,
Marde kochak, shan plochak,
Jan ari, jook kangni"

Another example from Alashkert begins with the same '*Ekeduke'* counting rhyme:

Ekeduke,
Tumaza,
Chalan chuke,

Pupuza,
Makhti kochak,
Dam plochak,
Jan jook
(Grigoryan, 1970, 194).

Folklorist L. Ghrejyan provided us with an interesting finger game practiced in the region of Gavar:

Titoghik, tit maroghik,
Zurna pchik, epats gatan,
Yeghy veren kepychpycha,
Esi uti, esi khma,
Esi hlni dus.

The linguistic text for children's play gives us an opportunity to also clarify the commercial and cultural connections of the Armenian people, which have deep roots. Many children's game texts contain Indo-Aryan elements, mentioning 'Hindu city', 'Hindustan' and 'India'. Historical data helps understand the memory of India in Armenian linguistic and literary creations. The following text is a useful illustration:

Jiu, jiu, jito-na,
Harsin taran batona,
Yes paronin tghan em,
Tagavorin pyesan em,
Paron aghbar durs ari,
Dzid u dzorid indzi tur,
Hetnem ertam Hindustan,
Kyezi berem matnstan,

Matd dnes polkstan,
Budaghlar hab (bolor) bostan
— Shirak.

Here, the mythical hero wants a horse and a yoke to go to Hindustan to bring back *matnstan*. The semantic complexity of the word *matnstan* is noteworthy. The suffix '-*stan*', which can also carry the meaning of a place or land, is classified among the latest borrowings into Armenian. G. Jahukyan, in his book *The Essence of the Armenian Barbarism* addresses its meaning of place or state, and lists related forms '(stan, star, stank, stun); akraner (-akrestan)' (Jahukyan, 1972, 8). This suffix was important in the formation of new dialectal and semantic meanings. A strong and semantically rich unity was formed here by the combination '*Matd dnes polkstan*' (You put your finger on the *polkstan* boy). '*Polkstan*' is noted in the *Dictionary of Armenian Dialects and Barbarisms* with the meanings of 'shining, glittering' in Shirak dialect (*The Armenian Dialect Dictionary*, 2012, 13). S. Malkhaseants's *Explanatory Dictionary of Armenian*, gives the phrase '*poli-poli*' used as a child's stepping motion in a counting rhyme (Malkhaseants, 1945, 506). According to the meaning, the quoted text refers to a child's midpoint, which has been transformed by the suffix *-stan*.

In another version from Shirak, a similar midpoint is created with the terms *gindstan-Hindstan*:

Gini, gini, gindstan,
Ear me unim Hindstan,
Manr honli sharogh er,
Tavday shapik karogh er
(Shirak, Basen).

Hindustan (India) becomes an important place in children's texts. Phonetically and rhythmically similar, we find the following children's rhyme:

De tri, tri trtnim,
Chal havi mis kirtsnim,
Karmir gini khmtsnim,
Papuk tighum kntsnim,
Nazar bkon bizrtsian
Barna eta Hindstan
Mag margarir ir kngan,
Top, top shilen mor kvor,
Yor, kor dzovir hor kvor.

From other traditional oral compositions, some descriptions of Hindustan's nature, climate, and the trees that grow there can be pieced together by reading Derenik Demirchyan's 'Pui-Pui Mknik':

There was a place—Hindustan,
There was a mouse—Chstchststan,
In the forest of Hindustan,
In the thorn of the coconut tree:
He lived for himself,
For the crops without care,
And one day good, one day bad,
Life was more or less.

In Armenian folk folklore, the Indian land also receives attention:

'*Me tsarn ka Hindu kaghak,*
Chogher tale kaghke kaghak,
Hmen choghin kyarsun chrag,

En mek choghin — sinamahavk'

(Harutyunyan 1965, 75).

S. Harutyunyan clarifies this image: the depicted tree is not a coniferous tree but a deciduous and spreading tree located in the Hindu city (Hindustan). This tree has spread its branches all over the world ('*Chogher tale kaghke-kaghak*'), meaning it is borderless and universally spread. On the single branch where the cinematic bird sits, on all other branches, the light of candles burns. All this symbolises the mystical nature of the tree, representing especially in its last branches the sky and celestial light (the sun or moon and stars). Thus, the tree rises from the Earth (the Hindu city) and spreads its branches as the sky and heavenly light over the whole world. This shows the symbolic nature of the folkloric tree, connecting the two parts of the world—Earth and Sky—while the Hindu spreading city is understood as the centre of the world.

As we see here, the legendary ancient city is represented as Hindustan. In many Armenian folk tales, India is described as a mythical land of the world—a corner beyond the seven worlds. For example, in the Shirak tale '*Avtsi Shaburi Tghen*', the importance of the Indian land is stressed:

'…One day this boy was passing by the western fields, the valleys, and the caravans, This caravan started on the road, went far, went a little, more or less—God knows, traveled day and night, passing by the Indian land' (HZH-4 1963, 31).

In Shirak's children's songs, the city Aleppo is mentioned. Teller Knarik Mutafyan explained that modern residents of Gyumri used to travel to Aleppo, stop at caravanserais (inns), rest and continue their journey. The harmony of the phonetic elements of the songs created a strong resonance; for children's linguistic texts, the sound and rhythmic

harmony of the story is very important. Strong resonances are especially created for children. Let us quote a children's song from Shirak, in teller Knarik Mutafyan's rendition:

I have a daughter of mine,
I don't give her a thousand scolds,
I'm raising her wisely,
So she could take Aleppo's goods.

S. Vardanyan argues that mastery of the linguistic 'music' begins in early childhood, even from the cradle: 'By hearing the mother's speech and its "musicality", the infant, still in the cradle, expresses a corresponding response. If the maternal speech is warm and affectionate, it evokes satisfaction in the child, whereas an angry or harsh tone can lead to discomfort and crying. It is at this very age that the imprint of the mother tongue's "music" is placed upon the child's speech, an imprint they carry throughout their life' (Vardanyan, 1989, p. 187).

According to E. Jrbashyan and H. Makhchanyan's *Dictionary of Literary Studies*, rhymes are highly diverse by nature. Primarily, they are classified based on the position of the final stressed syllable. If a line ends in a stressed syllable, the rhyme is called masculine (Jrbashyan, Makhchanyan, 1980, p. 174).

In the children's play song from Kesap, we also find a reference to the place name Aleppo:

Little horse, little horse, carry me,
Cross me through Aleppo's gate,
Feed me with a silver spoon,
Quench my thirst with a golden cup
(Cholakean, 1988, p. 326).

In Shirak's Ascension (*Hambardzum*) songs, the place name Tiflis (Tbilisi) is especially remembered, reflecting the connection of Armenian life with the Georgian capital. Teller Hranush Hovhannisyan conveyed her version of an Ascension song:

What a beautiful costume we made / bestowing the name upon the worthy one/,

Dear flower, dear, dear,
We brought fabric from Tiflis,
Dear flower, dear, dear.
We made Arto's costume,
Dear flower, dear, dear.
Dear blossom, dear, dear,
Bring brocade from Tiflis,
Dear blossom, dear, dear,
Tailor my brother's costume,
Dear blossom, dear, dear.

The children's folkloric texts of Shirak, as examples of metrical creation, are also notable for their phonetic structure. The masculine rhyme (with stressed final syllables) dominates the song endings.

Children's play songs require a specific environment. Domestic relationships and daily life play an important role in their creation. Culture provides the coordinates and essential components that foster the formation, preservation, and sometimes transformation of children's songs. In rural settings, the *oda* (community room) was well known—a place where people gathered and shared stories. S. Virabyan's book "Gegahnist of Shirak" outlines the role of the *oda* as follows: 'In comfortable *odas*, during long winter nights, neighbours gathered to converse on various topics and also to tell fairy tales' (Virabyan, 2013, p. 83).

The *kursi* (a low table with a blanket and heater underneath) brought together both the young and the old, serving as a hub where fairy tales and play songs were born. This is also reflected in literary works. In one of A. Isahakyan's short stories, Oskan's family is described thus: 'Oskan's entire family, from old to young, had gathered around the *tonir* (clay oven); cooking pots were placed over the fire, and the children, one by one with skewers in hand, were roasting bits of liver and spleen behind the pots'.

Elder tellers emphasised the symbolic power of the *kursi*: it was a space to both lull a child to sleep and play with them. Teller Zardar Mamikonyan recalled: 'The elders would sit beside the *kursi* and hold the little ones in their arms. I'd place the baby's cradle near the tonir. If it was warm, the baby would sleep. I'd rock the cradle with my foot and sing:

Spin, spin, my spindle,
Grow my little boy with your socks.'

This composition in some ways reminds us of Gh. Aghayan's poem 'The Spinning Wheel':

Spin, spin, my spinning wheel,
Spin white ribbons,
Spin thick and wide threads,
So I can weave away my sorrows.

The writers of Shirak sometimes turned to depictions of daily life in their creative works. Hovhannes Shiraz, for example, wove scenes of life using artistic imagery in his verse.

'When my father would lay the golden foundation of a fairy tale,
We'd gather around the *kursi* and listen, whether inside or outside,

Even the winter nights would weave a warm fairy tale,
The moon, like the Virgin Mary, would give birth to stars…'

(Shiraz, 1974, p. 334).

According to H. Gyoletsyan, people from Gyumri generally stayed around the *kursi* during winter. Children and the elderly would always sit under it. The *kursi* room was usually a fairly spacious area, lit by a skylight opened in the fabric covering the *kursi*.

Informant Kh. Mikayelyan's childhood memories are connected to village life—especially the *kursi*: 'I remember from when I was little, maybe 8 or 9 years old—we used to play with our neighbours, or when the *tonir* (oven) was lit, we'd gather around it, sit beside it when the fire had already died down and there was warmth. A woolen *kursi* would be hung over it for warmth, and we'd stretch our legs underneath. There'd be hot food and bread—*lavash* or whatever was available—and we'd play and sing:

Ata, bata, shamamshuk,
Shamshi lacher jitambuk,
Pears, apples…

Folkloric creations around the *kursi* were found not only in Shirak but also in other ethnographic regions of Armenia. From oral recollections of contemporary storyteller Vanush Galstyan, another notable sample was recorded—an old-style chant created around the *kursi*:

It is the time of a fairy tale/winter/
Bring good news, speak of blessings,
Shake the *kursi*, shuffle it.

When the flowers bloomed, people would go to the fields, gather seven types of flowers, bring them back and place them in the *khnots*. When spring arrived, those flowers would offer a blessing—and the *khnots* was always full.

The elders used to say:
'Let's see which child brings flowers for the *khnots*'.

Grandfathers would place their grandsons on their knees and recite sayings like:

A golden feather in his mouth,
Let him reach the apricot tree!

Here, the apricot tree with a golden belt represents blessing—a child destined to become a king. My grandfather would seat the child on the *khnots* and sing:

'*Butter churn*, *churn,*
I brought you a container,
Took out the butter,
Carried it to the village.
And as a lullaby, I sang:
Sweet baby, let me rock you,
Sweet baby, sleep has come.
Boy, boy, golden necklace,
Girl, girl, dog's tail.'

In Shirak, the song '*Khnotsi, harotsi*' (The Butter Jar and Ladle) served not only as a work song but also as a children's chant:

I take, I bring, I take, I bring,
Scoop out the butter, feed my little one…

In an article on 'The Work Song as a Vital Genre of Shirak's Lyric Folklore', we examined one of the types of Shirak's lyrical folklore—the work song. We came to the conclusion that work songs, in their original application, were ritualistic in nature: the act of working was viewed as a ritual or ceremonial process (for example, churning butter in the *khnots*). Since each type of labour had its corresponding song forms, children's lullabies and care songs were also considered part of this broader category of work-related processes (Matikyan, Nikoghosyan, pp. 147–160).

It is useful to cite some of the folk samples we have recorded:

Khnotsi, harotsi,
I churned, the butter I lifted…

Or:

Khnotsi, harotsi,
The butter for me, the buttermilk for you…

One sample recorded by V. Arakyan closely resembles a love song in tone:

Sit at the butter churn and churn,
Dear love, come to our door,
One glance steals your beauty,
May God take my soul anew.

To keep children entertained in Shirak, they would often wrap them in a shawl and say:

Matsoon, matsoon, sour matsoon,
Who wants some?

Or:

Sour matsoon, sour matsoon, who wants it?
They'd offer it, and another child would say,
'No, no, no, it's sour!'
Then the rhyme would continue:
The butter—to Arman,
The buttermilk—to grandma.
(Narrated by teller Anzhik Grigoryan)

Or:

That matsoon has spoiled,
Left just a little for us—
Hop, hop…

'The game would calm the child, stop them from crying. We'd give the baby milk, sing a sweet song, place them in a wooden cradle. The game was important so the baby would fall asleep quickly. After playing, they'd quiet down and doze off… That way, the mother could return to her work. My mother, poor thing, would sing a lullaby she had inherited, passed down from a humble village girl just trying to survive' (Told by Varsik Ghukasyan from Toros village, born in 1931).

Work songs, like lullabies, are inseparable from the daily lives of both me and my little one. One of our favourite songs is the 'Butter Churning Song', which I usually sing while doing housework to keep my child entertained. Sometimes I even 'churn' her like the butter churn—rocking her in my arms, pretending. In our mother-child language, I say 'I'm *khnots*-ing you'. This is both a playful game and, at times, a gentle 'punishment' to help her settle down after an energetic play session, listen to my singing, and let me finish my chores—so I can eventually devote myself fully to her.

With the music of the *Khnotsi* song, I also narrate our daily life while working:

Just wait, I'll finish everything,
Then come play with you again.
We'll sweep and clean the house,
Then go out and walk around.
Let's go breathe the forest air,
Greet the trees and share a prayer.
The tall trees will shade our way,
Echo our song as we play.
Forest spirits will arrive,
And join our joyful, dancing vibe.

I also sing the same song with some modifications as a lullaby, especially changing the first few lines:

Sleep now, my sweet darling,
Mommy's kind little boy.
Sleep and grow strong,
My child, you've become precious.
Then we'll walk outside again,
And breathe the fresh forest air.

A children's play song from Kesap echoes a similar theme:

Churn it, churn it (the *khnots*),
Churn it so the *matsoon* thickens,
Let my son Grigor live long,
May he eat well,
Drink buttermilk,
Grow up tall,
And bring joy to his father

(Cholakean, 1988, p. 324).

In Shirak's children's folklore, there is a great variety of play songs that begin with the phrase '*Hekyat, hekyat paps*' ('Tale, tale, my grandpa'). These songs are often highly variable. As folklorist S. Harutyunyan points out, variability is a defining trait of folklore. Folkloric texts exist not in fixed forms but through their variants. Harutyunyan identifies four key factors that cause such variation, all of which are applicable to children's folklore:

1. Psychological factor: individual or shared creative tendencies within the same ethnic group;
2. Spatial factor: influence of the geographic or ethnographic environment;
3. Social factor: influence of different social classes or community groups;
4. Historical factor: influence of time and changing eras (Harutyunyan, 2010).

A folkloric text is a combination of fixed and changing elements. In children's rhymes, repetitive phrases tend to remain constant. In H. Movsisyan's recordings, a version of the '*Hekyat, hekyat*' rhyme is distinguished by a vivid development of actions. Here is the full version he recorded:

Tale, tale, my grandpa,
A shawl under my arm,
I'll fly away to Yerevan,
Bring a toy whip from Yerevan,
Give it to my chickens,
The chickens will lay eggs for me,
I'll give the eggs to the tinsmith,

The tinsmith will give me a knife,
I'll give the knife to the shepherd,
The shepherd will give me a lamb,
I'll give the lamb to God,
God will give me a brother,
Brother, brother, dear brother,
Sugar and sherbet, brother,
I'll grind the sugar and feed it to you, brother.

Another variant, recorded by H. Hovhannisyan, has a dialectal flavour and historical themes, mentioning Kars:

Tale, tale, my grandpa,
A shawl under my arm from Kars,
I'll set out for Yerevan,
Bring a toy whip from Yerevan,
Give it to my chickens,
They'll lay eggs for me,
I'll give the egg to the tinsmith,
The tinsmith will give me a knife,
I'll give the knife to the shepherd,
The shepherd will give me a lamb,
I'll give the lamb to God,
God will give me a handsome son.

These children's rhymes are often rich with information about local trades and artisans. One Alexandrapol version, preserved in Kajberun, includes a reference to a carpenter:

I'll take the egg to the carpenter,
The carpenter will give me a saw…

The presence of craftsmen's names in Shirak rhymes is significant. As noted in *Ethnographic Sketches of Alexandropol*, every major trade in the city, like in all major Armenian artisan centres, was subdivided into specialised branches. For example, in metalwork, there were distinct roles: blacksmiths, locksmiths, and carpenters (Bazeyan and Aghanyan, 2014). In the book *The Fiery Horse*, we find reference to the blacksmith:

I gave the egg to the blacksmith,
The blacksmith gave me a horseshoe.

In Vrezh Margaryan's variant, the imagery shifts slightly, changing 'shawl' to 'world':

Tale, tale, my grandpa,
The world is under my shawl,
The chickens…
I'll give the eggs to my grandson…

Older narrators tend to preserve the beginning phrases, while modifying the middle structures of the rhyme. The word *k'urak* (shawl) has its own character. It often implies elegant movement, and is associated with good posture or grace in walking. Another variant, which conveys this explicitly, ends with market imagery:

Tale, tale, my grandpa,
My shawl walks gracefully,
I'll go to Yerevan,
Where there's chaka-chuka,

Chaka-chuka—
A market, of course, a market…

In the domain of children's folklore texts, the egg becomes an unchanging symbolic unit. In her article 'Egg Preservers in Armenian Folk Beliefs', A. Israyelyan describes the mystical properties attributed to hen eggs: 'One of the most important functions of the egg was to protect women in childbirth and newborns from the evil eye and malevolent forces such as spirits and witches, which were considered especially dangerous in the prenatal and postnatal periods. This belief gave rise to the custom whereby the first food given to the mother after childbirth was scrambled eggs. Moreover, during the infant's first bath, an egg would be placed in the water. Eggs were also used to help children learn to walk and talk' (Israyelyan 1999).

In Voskehat village of the Shirak region, playing with eggs was a regular pastime for children: 'Among the oldest and still practised daily children's games in Voskehat are Nurin, Khrtsik, Vzhdik, Jrtshanotsi, Khorozakriv, Ghayishotsin, and egg battles, as well as the popular and widely played games like Tuntunik, Paymtotsi, and Pampast' (Hovhannisyan, 2005, pp. 268–271).

H. Gyoletsyan notes that in Gyumri, young men and boys were engaged in egg fights at home, in courtyards, and in the streets. The boys played a game with eggs called Gldoran or Glolmantic (Gyoletsyani, Gyumri/Alexandropol, Leninakan, 1976, Notebook No. 2, Yerevan, HAI BA).

Eggs were a vital part of daily life, especially during ritual games, where adults would give children eggs. Children were also given eggs during the Jangulum game. Teller Svetlana Piloyan explained: 'We used to play Jangyulum. We'd gather in a house, at night bring jugs, fill them with

water, and go house to house. As we sang the *Gyul* (flower) song, they'd give us eggs'.

Teller Hranush Hovhannisyan recounts: 'When there was no rain, there was a woman named Manan who'd drape herself in a veil and pour water on us kids. We'd go house to house, and they'd give us eggs, bulgur, sometimes yogurt. She'd cook it for us, and we'd eat it. She'd hit her sleeves and act the rain ritual. We'd hold a skirt, and they'd pour water over us—like a rain ceremony. At one house, we'd sing: "Nuri, Nuri has come...", and the woman would come out and give us eggs'.

In the Nuri-Nuri game, objects with practical functions were sometimes used. Shirak-born teller Osan Mkrtchyan noted that placing a sieve on the head symbolised Nuri:

Nuri-Nurin egel e,
Shale shabig hakel e,
Karmir godin kabel e,
Ber Nuriin pay tur,
Astvats kezi jur ta.

In 'The Functional and Ritual Significance of the Sieve in Folklore Texts', H. Galstyan also analyses the sieve's symbolic role: 'Many everyday objects have secondary functional meanings and play an important role in the ritual life of the people. The sieve, for instance, appears in various forms in folklore texts. In both folk and Christian ritual systems—childbirth, wedding, and funeral ceremonies—the sieve is used not only as a tool for holding, cleaning, or sifting, but also carries ritual significance. In folk cosmology, the sky is imagined as a sieve, from which people expect rain and abundance' (Galstyan 2023, pp. 232–250).

Children's folklore in Shirak contains few walking-related texts, but those that do exist are rich in linguistic imagery. In such texts, repetitive units correspond with the child's alternating steps, which gradually increase in speed in rhythm with the text:

Ghojo, ghojo, ghojo,
Todoyid taka mernim,
Ghujju, ghujju…

Another large group of children's play songs begins with the phrase '*Tri, tri, trtsnem*' ('Hop, hop'), which is widespread across Armenia.

The children's folklore text is inherently performative. As folklorist Gary Alan Fine has noted, child performers maintain reverence for the traditional text, but in performance, they often introduce creative innovations. Thus, while the text remains stable, the context (co-text) is fluid, and performance can lead to a blending of tradition and creativity (Tucker, 2008, p. 4).

From the perspective of the issue we are exploring, we shall refer to several criteria proposed by R. Bauman, which are essential for successful performance in folklore

Special encoding
Figurative language
Distinct extralinguistic features
Set formulas
Reference to tradition
(*American Folklore*, 2006).

These criteria are also at work during the performance of folkloric children's play texts. The performer, as the primary 'creator' of the text, fulfills the following conditions: encodes their speech by selecting a text appropriate to the emotional state or by recreating a new one; enriches the language with figurative expressions, using various lexical units—even the simplest words—to playfully engage, feed, or bathe the child. The children's folklore text is characterised by a performative context and distinctive performative features such as intonation and pitch.

The nurse applies extralinguistic means—for example, lifting the child up, rocking them, etc.;

In play, children would often recite:

'Bring wool, bring cotton,
We'll weave a shawl, we'll weave pants,
Fly up to Grandpa's roof…'
While moving the child's feet, they would chant:
'Tiny goat of Alodj,
Fatty tail of Lambi,
Little grub of Khlezi…
Some children's play songs reflect gender distinctions:
'Girl, girl, stone bat,
Boy, boy, golden thread.

Sometimes, alongside praise, the playleader offers a moral lesson, advising the child to be careful while walking. As Svetlana Smbatyan puts it:

'The girl should walk gracefully and gently,
The boy should look at his father's mouth and gaze.
The boy is revealed through his cradle,
The crow is known by its beak,
The wolf by what it hides'.

Each region exhibits unique folkloric thought. For instance, in Ijevan, the phrase 'They rock the chick inside the egg' is used as a metaphorical expression of early childhood behaviour. Children's folklore from Shirak is particularly enriched with references to types of food:

'For me the *khnotsi* (milk curds), for you the *harotsi* (whey),
Butter for me, yogurt for you'.

The text continues:

'I don't know whom I was giving the yogurt—perhaps to the sleeping child. We lived in one house, but were of different kin. There were four of us cousins; We'd tie the khnotsi from a string, listen to the songs and swing it back and forth until it was ready'.

Gayane Harutyunyan (b. 1987, Toros village, ancestors from Basen) vividly described the difference between *խնդիր* and *ձմուռ* (both traditional dairy preparations), drawing a parallel with cradling: 'My grandmother taught me a song about *khnotsi* and told me to sing while swinging it. I'd sit down, take the jar in my lap and rock it under the window light. She couldn't use the old churn anymore, so I did it manually. I'd say *glorak* (ball) while rocking, like how you rock a cradle. The *dzdzum* was tied to a tree, like a little wine barrel. Two of us would stand and swing it together, back and forth. It made a sound like a lullaby, and just like the cradle rubs gently on the base, So too did the butter churn'.

The phrases *ձձմել* and *խնդիր հարել* (to churn milk or metaphorically to sway/sleep) hold layered meanings. To churn can be

used figuratively to mean dozing off while sitting, or swaying due to intoxication or weakness (Aghayan, 1976, p. 589).

Mothers or caretakers would sit the child on their lap, hold their hands from behind, rock them back and forth simulating the *dzdzum-harotsi* process, and sing:

'Ha, *dzdzum*, ha, *dzdzum*,
I'll carry you across the mountains.
Ha, *dzdzum*, ha, *dzdzum*,
I'll carry you around the fields'
(Bdoyan, 1983, p. 22).

One popular play-song used to entertain children begins:

'Moon, moon, my moonlight,
You're a prince, a perfect round,
You give light through the night,
With your lovely little cheeks'.

These children's songs from Shirak are deeply meaningful folkloric texts that spread from domestic environments into kindergartens, presumably ensuring entertainment for preschool children. In his book *Children's Folkloric Entertainments*, A. Sargsyan presents examples of children's humorous folklore, emphasising their entertainment value. He devotes a special section to adult-created children's entertainment narratives and dialogues (Sargsyan, 2016).

Contemporary children's folklore is gradually losing certain traditional forms, a process largely dictated by the imperatives of modern life. Nonetheless, in some rural environments, elements of

children's traditional play genres are still preserved, particularly those that include counting-out rhymes.

A. Hakobyan, a native of Tavshut village in Shirak province, shared with us a counting-out rhyme and a children's game that he had heard from his grandmother:

Alm-alm apanak,
Jakht jakhdi chapanak,
Kyapanaki ikhti yogh,
Boyani, boyani.

(A counting-out rhyme used in the game of Paḥmtots [hide-and-seek])

Another children's rhyme, functioning as a question-and-answer style narrative, follows a sequential logic and displays folkloric creativity:

There was grass here—where is it?
The cow ate it.
Where is the cow?
The cow went to the shed.
Where is the shed?
Where is my share?
We put it in a pan.
The cat took the pan away.

These examples demonstrate the oral transmission and regional resilience of children's folklore, which continues to live in speech, memory, and performance—especially in more traditional or isolated communities. Despite the pressures of modernisation, such folkloric fragments retain cultural significance, forming part of the communal identity and intergenerational continuity.

Counting-Out Rhymes

The counting-out rhyme, as an entry point into the game, is fundamentally determined by its verbal conceptualisation. The introduction to the game involves a counting rhyme, which in some instances includes explicit counting using Armenian numerals—*mek* (one), *erku* (two), *yerek'* (three), *chors* (four)—as in the traditional phrase '*Avton hasav Yerazgavors*' (literally "The car got to Yerazgavors"), or the use of letter names from the Armenian alphabet—*ayb, ben, gim*—in the form of alphabetic recitation. In other cases, nonsense syllables or formulaic meaningless words serve as counting rhymes (e.g., *tsan, tsan, tsan*).

Counting rhymes have been recorded and analysed by Armenian folklorists (A. Petrosyan, A. Sargsyan, H. Asatryan, H. Galstyan).

H. Asatryan's monograph *Social and Cultural Particularities of Games among Armenians: Tradition and Modernity* enriches the scholarship devoted to Armenian play culture by examining the purpose, semantic content, structure, rhythm, and performative features of the game texts (Asatryan, 2018).

Counting rhymes characteristically rely on repetitive syllables and sometimes incorporate meaningless or opaque words. For example, a counting rhyme from Kesap children's folklore demonstrates this pattern:

Bi bi bilma ta
Tale tale silma ta,
Her gush na yepar,
Yepary ichinta,
Pir ichinta,
Pir kush ke zar
(Cholakean, 1988, p. 334).

Frequently, the texts of counting rhymes contain elements of humour or playful nonsense. Within the corpus collected in Ijevan, formulaic lines such as the following are common:

Tsan, tsan, tsan,
Mishi malenki patsan,
Mer havery zargatsan,
Kut utel moratsan,
Ijevani pati takin choratsan...
(Counting rhyme for the game *hide and seek*)

Or another:

The girls fetched water,
The boys made a mess,
Dirty Lusik
Lost her underwear,
The bee is coming along the street,
Hunting the honeybee.
Tsan, tsan, tsan,
The honeybee.

There are counting rhymes similar in style and function to the Shirak tradition found in Ijevan, such as:

Mama, papa,
Bread and butter,
Hop, stop.

It is important to note that live play enactments clearly demonstrate the active presence of counting rhymes within the traditional children's verbal culture of Syunik, as reflected in several of our collected examples. For instance:

The bear went to the theatre,
Carried a curtain behind,
The curtain tore,
The bear's belly tore.

This text reflects a sequential logic of action and consequence, highlighting a key feature of verbal material related to children's games.

Another example illustrates the use of playful and rhythmic texts designed to engage participants socially and cognitively:

The Bald went to the threshing floor,
The rooster got scared,
At night the cats came,
The hut was guarded by the dogs.

Children's verbal creativity also embraces nonsense, humour, and exaggeration. Such play rhymes reflect a deep interaction between language, cognition, and socialisation. The texts are often cyclic or repetitive, creating a strong rhythmic structure conducive to memorisation and social interaction.

In summary, Shirak's children's rhymes span a broad thematic field, comprising both meaningful beginnings and formulaic verbal constructions. The performative aspects of these rhymes play a crucial role: in some cases, they focus on representational speech, and in others, they nurture children's cognitive and creative thinking in a playful context.

These rhymes are still actively used in Shirak, as evidenced by the presence of traditional children's games such as '*Hekiat, hekiat*' ('Once upon a time'), '*Tsiw, tsiw*' ('Fly, fly'), '*Tri, tri, trtznem*' ('Fly, fly, I will fly you'), and '*Dzdum, dzdum, ha dzdum*' ('Rattle, rattle').

Significantly, the Shirak children's rhymes display inter-genre hybridisation, with sequential and functional rhymes sometimes merging with children's songs or work-related rhymes, underscoring the spiritual and social contexts of play. This blending also reflects the textual and performative mechanisms unique to this tradition, involving particular insertion techniques and memorisation strategies.

S. Bronner's definition of counting-out rhymes is widely applicable across children's culture: Counting-out rhymes help children choose up 'sides' or decide who will be 'it' for many kinds of games engaging them typically between the ages of five and twelve. The rhymes appear to offer a random way of choosing players, but observation shows that the reciter can alter the rhyme's start with a certain player or alter the rhythm of the rhyme to ensure a desired outcome.

Kinship terms and food names are among the widely used objects in children's folklore. In American children's lore 'potatoes' are centre of attention among the food names, above all in:

> One potato, two potato, three potato, four,
> Five potato, six potato, seven potato, more (Bronner 1988)

For Bronner, rhyming is also an effective childhood strategy of fashioning oral tradition. Rhymes, are, after all, an effective aid to memory. And within the easily comprehensible rhyming structure, a child can improvise, thus commenting on local conditions and personal preferences (Bronner 1988).

Analysis of children's folklore shows that children are the bearers of tradition and creators of new folkloric samples. William Wells Newell, author of Games and Songs of American Children (1883) suggested that

children are both conservative and creative; once they learn traditional texts, they will pass them along to others, adding creative changes of their known. Folklore scholar Gary Alan Fine explains that Newell's paradox—the combination of tradition with creative variation—makes sense in terms of text, context and performance. Texts tend to stay stable while context changes and performance brings together imaginative and traditional elements. (Tucker, 2008).

The Shirakian culture maintains counting-out rhymes, though outdoor games are rare: children prefer to play computer games.

In summary, we should mention that Shirak's children's songs have a wide thematic field, with stable starting formulas. Stylistic transitions in the songs perform an important function. At one level, they provide the imagery of the speech, at another, they develop the cognitive and creative thinking of the child even while it is still playing in the caregiver's arms, making them aware of the various sounds of nature and sometimes also the social problems of life. Even today, children's songs beginning '*Heqiat, heqiat, paps*' and '*Tsiv! Tsiv*!' are still popular in Shirak.

Riddles, Tongue-Twisters

Riddles and tongue-twisters are important expressive functions of children's language, possessing significant pragmatic and communicative features. Many linguists find it difficult to clearly distinguish interrogatives in child speech. Nerses Shnorhali devoted a special section to child riddles, which are written in the contemporary spoken language. He established a didactic type of interrogative sentence, which later becomes a type of explanatory assertion (Shnorhali, 1984).

According to S. Harutyunyan's definition, a riddle consists of two heterogeneous parts: the interrogative image and the underlying core (or cores) of the interrogative, which must be interpreted (Harutyunyan, 2010, 250). In our view, the interrogative image is formed by means of stylistic language devices.

Being a genre with a distinct expressive nature, the riddle differs in essence from other productions of this genre. The most general distinguishing feature of the riddle is that by its construction it consists of two mutually conditional parts: the riddle core or inherent meaning, and the riddle form or external image (Harutyunyan, 1960, 14).

The simplest form of the riddle is the question. In the Shirak dialect riddles, the following introductory phrases prevail: *en inchn e* ('what is it'), *en inchy* ('what exactly'), or *krnas hanes* ('can it be said').

Riddles, according to the classification based on the solution of the core meaning, are grouped under the relevant core meaning and encompass all the diverse interrogative forms associated with that meaning. These forms have evolved over time by the accretion of layers of meaning. Thus, first, all symbolic and substitutional image-representations related to that core meaning are assembled in the corpus, reflecting their full spectrum and richness; second, the

pragmatic intermediary, conditioned by the historical evolution of the corpus, reveals social-historical, cultural-ethnographic correspondences and interrelations that affect its meaning.

Stylistic devices emphasise and highlight the child interrogatives of Shirak. Qualitative forms are typical. According to linguists, the interrogative shapes the child's thought, expands the horizon of thinking, and develops grammatical competence.

Riddles addressed to children gradually become narrative: the interrogative utterance, supplemented by enumerations and explanations, completes the questioning process until the child finds the answer to the interrogative. Teller K. Mutafyan explained the mechanism of teaching riddles by means of two fundamental interrogatives.

If a child describes dry and arid conditions with the answer 'Snake' it can be considered as not very precise, but if we say, for example, that a snake can harm a person greatly and is dangerous among animals, it is easier to imagine what is being talked about. And if the child answers 'Mouse' it shows that they know what a mouse is:

It moves but has no feet,
It's a worm, but has no tail
(snake)
There are four brothers under the worm
(mouse).

Vocabulary related to village farming work is often difficult for children to understand, especially if they have not experienced that farming environment. In Shirak folk songs, the village farming elements have life and children sometimes become unaware participants in the farming activities. A notable example is the folk song 'The Scythe and the Sickle', which is sometimes sung by adults and sometimes by

children nearby. That is, a child closely engages with this environment, observes the activity of using the scythe, and can memorise this by associating it with the word 'scythe'. We managed to find a folk song from N. Shnorhali about 'The Scythe':

It's sharpened by the soil,
It's tempered by the fire,
It's cut from the flax,
It reaps the field.

For children, the memorable phrase is 'it reaps the field', since this is commonly repeated in children's folk songs. We can mention, for example, V. Margaryan's words:

The scythe and the sickle,
It reaps the field,
The plough comes out of the soil...

Another folk song with the answer 'scythe' reveals the characteristic feature of this vocabulary item being associated with a farming tool, which makes memorisation challenging:

A silent ox,
A stubborn bull,
It rumbles and rumbles (I'll put it) into the sea:
(Shirak – Akhurian, Garni)

Another riddle works on word-play, which also reflects the importance of village life and farming activity in Shirak:

Five brothers,
Two of them pull,
Five carry a load,

To build a house
(tool for work).

The vocabulary, as a structural linguistic creation, has a specific function. For example, the following Shirak riddle:

Eat and don't eat,
Eat the middle part,
Shake off the skin
(wheat stalk).

Or:

The egg is there, but not a hen,
The cow is there, but not a calf
(sheep).

In Shirak folk vocabulary, qualitative elements predominate; colours have wide distribution in children's texts:

What it is,
It is green inside,
Green outside,
White seeds
(cucumber).

In children's semantic samples, the main unifying feature becomes the memorability of the riddle. Folklorist A. Jivanyan, analysing the unifying factor as a hyper-category of folklore, notes that unlike transformations, unification does not violate grammatical rules, and impossibilities are not implied (personal communication with A. Jivanyan). Essentially, through unification, the speaker attempts to lead the child to the revealing formula of the riddle.

Examples include:

What is it?
Inside it has seeds,
Yellow, green, like the colour of autumn leaves,
And it's a fruit
(apple).

Or:

It looks like a flag,
Its stripes are yellow,
Inside white
(banana).

One of the main expressive means or lexical tools in Shirak folk vocabulary is the explicit indication of place (foot-hand, down-up, winter-summer, east-west) etc.:

In winter cold,
In summer heat,
Green leaves,
With fruit
(cornel).

They lie in winter's shade,
They get up and flee at the sun's rays
(dew).

S. Harutyunyan, describing the generic characteristics of riddles, points out that the lexical images of riddles are mostly formed by unification of distinctive features of different phenomena, some of which bear metaphorical or metonymic similarity with the object of the riddle (Harutyunyan, 1960).

Size gradation is another important stylistic device often used in folk texts:

The hand is a little finger,
The little finger has no nail
(cabbage).

Or:

A thousand needles under the skin,
The thorn is coming out from the soil
(sheep).

In Shirak folk riddles, we notice a semantic-pragmatic intention to reveal one thing and imply another:

It has no foot, nor hand,
It opens our door
(door latch).

Traditional objects related to sheep raising sometimes involved making musical instruments from hazel branches, making whistles from sheep's horn. If a riddle was not solved correctly, the child had to go to herd the sheep (Khachatryan 1995, 62).

The following example shows how the sound of the hazel branch turns into a violin:

Our door has a hazel branch,
Your door has a hazel branch,
Is our door's hazel branch a hazel branch?
Or is your door's hazel branch a hazel branch?
(teller Hasmik Galstyan).

In conclusion, we note that Shirakian folk riddles are interesting not only for their diversity but also for their linguistic and stylistic characteristics that vividly reflect different aspects of dialects and culture.

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The monograph is devoted to the study of Shirak's folkloric heritage in two milieux: in childrens' and adults' lore. The subject matter of the research was the study of folklore-ethnographic materials of Shirak region, specifically children's folklore as compared to other culture's materials and studies. Thanks to our interdisciplinary research, we revealed deep layers of folk thinking embodied in ethnographic and literary fields.

Within the frame of our research we have examined:

a) the formulas of wishes, folk beliefs addressed to the child and the expectant woman,
b) the important functional significance of the midwife,
c) ritual procedures intended for children or carried out by them,
e) child-care rhymes (lullabies, bath time songs, tooth ceremony and fortieth-day event rhymes, baptism),
f) nursery rhymes (Counting-out rhymes, riddles, tongue-twisters) from form and content perspectives.

With this work, we have enriched the samples of Shirak children's folklore by adhering to the dialectal variants of the collected material which can serve as a platform for dialectological study purposes.

We have extended the field of our study by analysing traditional fairy tales which are related to the expectant woman (cravings) and the child (newborn), his/her cradle and environment. Folkloric archival funds and the materials recorded and collected by us provided a large field for comparisons and analyses.

The book delved into the study of the folkloric materials that are in circulation or out of use (gender reveal party, first tooth ceremony,

etc). Our study shows that some changes are also observed in the performance of the tooth rituals. Mostly the objects for the tooth ritual ceremony are missing (for example: comb, scissors, book). Today in many cases the child's future occupation is written on a piece of paper.

The samples of folklore materials developed mainly on the basis of the Shirak way of life, customs, rituals and beliefs. It should be noted that nowadays some pieces of children's folklore have fallen out of use due to changes in everyday life, but memorable examples related to rural life and nursery still remain in the memory of the tellers. In the Shirak region, the folklore text mainly manifested itself in the combination of customs and traditions.

Studying the samples of children's folklore of Shirak, it can be noted that the region generalises the highest units of folklore thinking of the population from Mush, Kars, Alashkert, the Inner Basin and Karin. In Shirak's samples of children's folklore, especially in children's songs, there are manifestations of sudden creativity that still retain the formulas of the traditional text in their origins. Each player weaves the verbal texture according to his/her dialect, background, way of life, and feeling.

Shirak's children's songs are characterised by an abundance of narrative and variant texts: the ontology of the folklore text is unknown. Variation is an important phenomenon in children's folklore.

In the context of children's folklore, the following genres were identified: lullabies, fairy tales, riddles, tongue-twisters. It was observed that lullabies exhibited inter-genre and inter-thematic links with other children's play texts (bath texts, texts for walking, counting-out rhymes and rhymes for feeding children).

Our research indicates that folkloric texts frequently converge, particularly within the context of specific historical periods and settings.

The generic uniqueness of children's folklore is characterised by a metrical structure, rhythmic composition, high level of emotional expression and visual imagery.

Cross-genre penetrations are noticeable in Shirak's children's songs: love and work songs sometimes also serve as nursery rhymes, for example. This is not only determined by the psycho-emotional state of the playmaker, but also by similar structures, formulas, and the unique mechanism of text introduction of the imaging system found in the mentioned genres.

INFORMANTS' BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Hasmik Matikyan's Fieldwork 2018-2025)

1. Khanum Mikayelyan, born in 1932 in Mets Sepasar village, Shirak region. Her ancestors are from Alashkert.
2. Hayastan Khurshudyan, born in 1930. Her ancestors are from Khnus. She has lived in Voskehask village, Shirak region.
3. Donara Zargaryan, born in 1967 in Gyumri. Her ancestors are from Kars. She currently lives in Gyumri.
4. Svetlana Smbatyan (Sargsyan), born in 1942 in Qarakert. Her parents are from Sarakap, Shirak region. She now lives in Isahakyan.
5. Ruzan Khachatryan, born in 1954 in Arapi village, Shirak region. Her ancestors are from Mush. She lives in Arapi.
6. Olga Darbinyan, born in 1929 in Harich. Her ancestors are from Basen.
7. Zvart Setoyan, born in 1938. She is a housewife, engaged in agriculture. Her ancestors are from Kars.
8. Valya Yeghiazaryan, born in 1942 in Leninakan. Education: secondary vocational. Her ancestors migrated from Mush.
9. Areknazan Mkhitaryan, born in 1952 in Leninakan. Lives in Mets Mantash. Her ancestors are from Basen.
10. Zardar Ghantilyan, born in 1941 in Abadan, from Iranian Armenia. Education: secondary vocational. Lives in Gyumri.
11. Anzhik Grigoryan, born in 1943 in Leninakan. Education: secondary. Lives in Gyumri.

12. Shushi-Shushan Tumanyan, born in 1988 in Shnogh, Lori region. Education: higher, German specialist. Maternal ancestors migrated from Mush-Bayazet during the Russo-Turkish War (1877–78) and settled in Kuchak. Paternal side is from the village of Koghb. Her paternal grandfather was adopted by the Tumanyans of Shnogh.
13. Vanush Galstyan – The narrator heard the material from Temul Mirzoyan, born in 1932 in Zovuni. Ancestors are from Khoy.
14. Hamaspyur Khachatryan, born in 1951 in Leninakan. Lives in Gyumri. Ancestors are from Aygebats. Education: secondary vocational.
15. Margush Sargsyan, born in 1948 in the village of Geghanist. Has secondary education. Ancestors are from Manazkert.
16. Vrej Margaryan, born in 1943 in Kaps village; lives in Kaps. Ancestors are from Kars. Education: secondary vocational.
17. Emma Khachatryan, born in 1948 in Akhurik village; lives in Kaps village. Ancestors are from Mush. Education: secondary vocational.
18. Rima Madoyan, born in 1946 in Lusaghbyur village. Ancestors are also from Lusaghbyur. Education: secondary vocational.
19. Maran Khachatryan, born in 1941. Had 6 sons and 1 daughter. Now lives in Dzitankov.
20. Susanna Tovmasyan, born in 1956 in Marmashen. Lives in Marmashen.
21. Lusya Margaryan, born in 1977 in Leninakan. Ancestors are from Basen.
22. Satenik Harutyunyan, born in 1987 in Lanjik. Ancestors are from Mush.
23. Susan Smbatyan, born in 1941. Ancestors are from Lusaghbyur. She has 6 grandchildren and currently lives in Lusaghbyur.

24. Lena Galstyan, born in 1948 in Toros village. Education: secondary vocational. Ancestors are from Toros.
25. Hranush Hovhannisyan, born in 1931 in Bughdeshen (Baghravan). Lives in Isahakyan. Has 10 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren.
26. Osan Mkrtchyan, born in 1945 in the village of Takhnali, Ashotsk district. Education: secondary vocational. Ancestors are from Takhnali.
27. Hasmik Harutyunyan, born in 1963 in Gyumri. Education: higher. Ancestors are from Kars.
28. Svetlana Piloyan, from Dzitankov. Married. Has 10 grandchildren. Lives in Dzitankov.
29. Svetlana Smbatyan (Sargsyan), born in 1942 in Qarakert. Married. Has 11 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren. Lives in Isahakyan.
30. Lusine Ghrejyan, born in 1976 in Gavar. Education: higher. Married. Has 2 sons. She is engaged in collecting and researching folklore and ethnographic culture of the Lake Sevan basin.
31. Qnarik Mutafyan, born in 1936 in Gyumri. Has 4 children. Lives in Gyumri.
32. Manya Shahinyan, born in 1937 in Yerazgavors (Arlykh). Lives in Haykavan.
33. Gegam Gharibyan, born in 1956 in Yerevan. Ancestors migrated from Western Armenia, from Bitlis.
34. Rima Avagyan, born in 1942 in Voskehask. Lives in Voskehask (also known as Molamusa). Has 4 children. Profession: accountant.
35. Qnarik Arshakyan, born in 1969 in Hoghmik village. Works as a history teacher.

36. Susan Smbatyan, born in 1941. Ancestors are from Lusaghbyur. Has 6 grandchildren. Lives in Lusaghbyur.
37. Ruzan Shahinyan, born in 1945. Ancestors are from Western Armenia. Has 4 children and 9 grandchildren. Lives in Haykavan.
38. Sirush Baloyan, born in 1955 in Khndzoresk. Education: higher. Profession: Library and Information Science.

COLLECTORS AND RECORDERS OF FOLKLORE MATERIALS

39. Goga Hovhannisyan, born in 1997. Material is from the collection of H. Asatryan, Shirak region, Artik town, Republic of Armenia, 2013.
40. Lena Chakhoyan, born in 1931 in Vahramaberd. The material was collected by Hasmik Galstyan.
41. Tarlan Sukiasyan, born in 1958 in Marmashen. Has secondary education. The material was collected by Hasmik Galstyan.
42. Lusya Grigoryan, lived in Artik. Has secondary education. Material was recorded by Varditer Arakyan.

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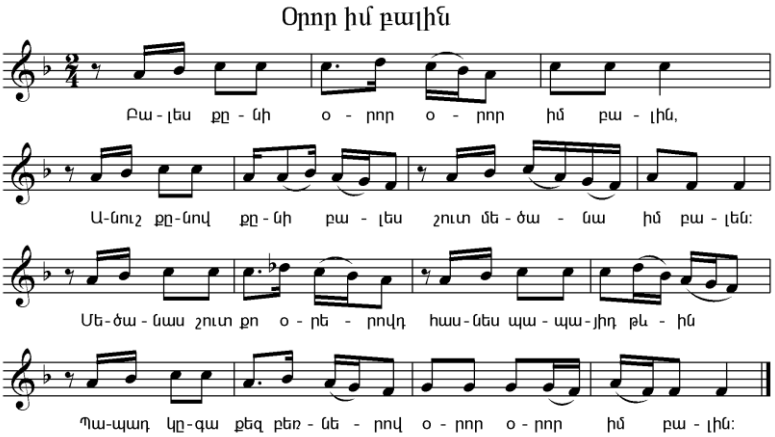
APPENDIX

Shirakian lullabies[1]

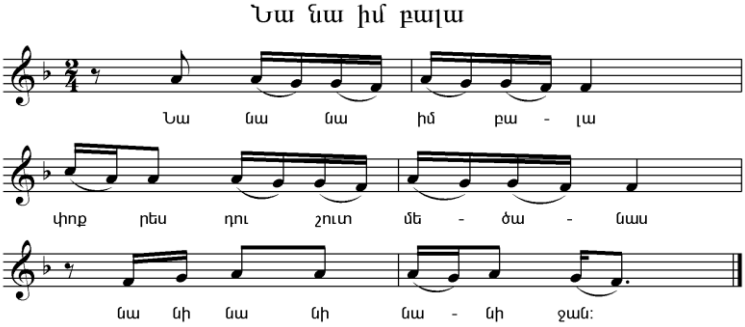


Sleep, my baby, lullay, lullay, my little one,
Sleep with sweet sleep, my baby.
Grow up quickly, my little one,
May your days help you grow fast.
May you reach your father's arms.
Your father will come with loads for you.
Lullay, lullay, my little one.

Բալես քնի, օրո՛ր, օրո՛ր իմ բալին,
Անուշ քնով քնի բալես,
Շուտ մեծանա իմ բալեն,
Մեծանաս շուտ քո օրերովդ,
Հասնես պապայիդ թևին,
Պապադ կգա քեզ բեռներով,
Օրոր, օրոր իմ բալին:

(Shirak region, village Tavshut, teller Kh. Mikayelyan)

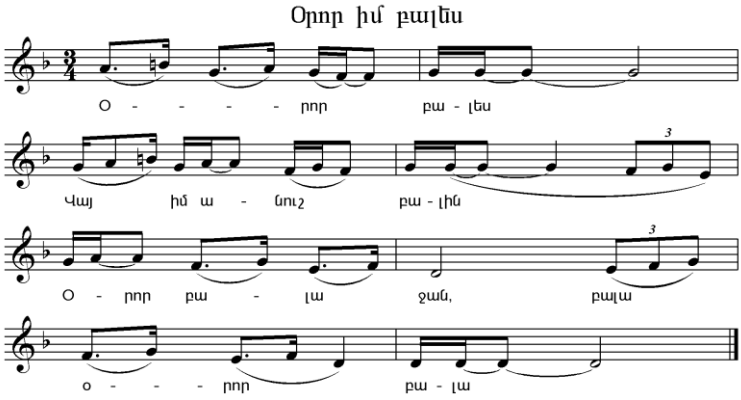
[1] The lullabies have been recorded by H. Matikyan and noted by Y. Varosyan.



Նանա, նանա իմ, բալա
Փոքր ես, դու շուտ մեծանաս
Նանի, նանի, նանի ջան…

Nana, nana my child,
You're little now, may you grow up soon.
Nani, nani, dear nani.

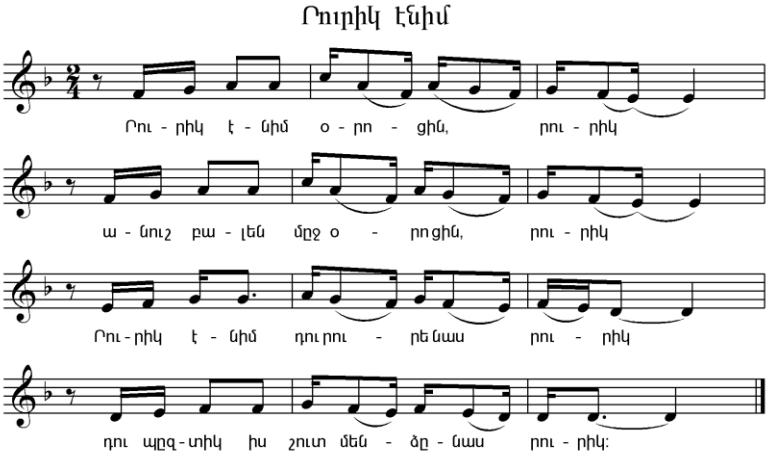
(Shirak region, village Voskehask, teller H. Khurshudyan)



Օրոր բալես,
Վա՛յ իմ անուշ բալին,
Օրո՛ր բալա ջան, բալա
Օրոր բալա…

Sleep, my baby,
Oh, my sweet baby,
Sleep, dear baby, my child,
Sleep, baby.

(Shirak region, village Tavshut, teller V. Khachatryan)



Ռուրիկ էնիմ օրոցին, ռուրիկ,
Անուշ բալեն մըջ օրոցին, ռուրիկ,
Ռուրիկ էնիմ դու ռուրենաս, ռուրիկ
Դու պզտիկ իս շուտ մենձընաս, ռուրիկ:

Rurik, my sweet, rock the cradle, rurik,
My sweet baby is in the cradle, rurik.
Rurik, my dear, may you sleep calmly, rurik,
You're little now — may you grow up quickly, rurik.

(Shirak region, village Toros teller V. harutyunyan)

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