

SOME ISSUES CONCERNING THE ORIGIN OF THE ARMENIAN PEOPLE

For more than a century, a host of scholars have studied the origin of the Armenian people. Although there is a great deal of literature on the subject, we cannot think by any means that everything has already been said. On the contrary, archaeological, linguistical and historiographical findings in the last twenty or thirty years allow us to state that future is full of surprises.

Specialists are not the only ones who have discussed this problem. A lot of people who are not directly connected with the subject or specifically trained have tried to work on this complex theme, making sometimes important contributions to our knowledge.

We think that all kind of people can deal with any field of science if their work is serious enough. We know several examples of people who have made great discoveries in areas where experienced scientists had failed before. Let's remember Michael Ventris, an English architect, who in the 1950's deciphered the Mycenic «linear B» writing.

Turning to our subject, we have frequently come across with highly speculative hypothesis, made by people who seem sincerely interested in solving the enigmas about Armenian ancient history. That is the case of an article by Hovhanness I. Pilikian, «The First Indo-Europeans», printed in *Ararat* (Winter 1985, pp. 86-88)¹.

The writer presents a variety of daring opinions, mainly referred to an alleged genetic relationship between Armenians and Jews.

As we all know, Armenian is an Indo-European language and Hebrew is a Semitic one; both of them belong to well-differenced linguistic families (some scholars are looking for a genetic unity between them, the so-called «nostratic» theory, but it does not concern us in the scope

1. Page references will be made in the text.

of this article), and this is out of discussion. Pilikian tries to skip this well-established fact by stating that «... even that difference is resolved if one accepts the Old Testament myth about the Tower of Babel, which constitutes an attempt at explaining away the language differences among nations by assuming an ultimate single source, a mother tongue (perhaps the Armenian language itself)» (p. 86).

Until the birth of Comparative Linguistics, the origin of languages had been explained via the Biblical myth; today, 200 years later, when we know enough about linguistic families, grammar and phonetic laws, borrowings, etcetera, to go back to that explanation is not a scholar treatment. And as far as Armenian as a mother tongue is concerned, this opinion used to be in fashion among Armenian writers until the 18th century: when God spoke to Noah and instructed him to build an Ark, he must have spoken in Armenia; God also spoke in Armenian to Adam and Eve...

In the past century, taking into account Semitic massive borrowings in Armenian language, some scholars believed that Armenia was Semitic people's homeland. But we know at present that Semitic-speaking people came from the Arabian Peninsula, a fact that has been accurately proved. To ascribe a Hebrew origin to the word «Ararat» (there are a lot of etymologies of this word, none of them having a general consensus), as Pilikian does (p. 86), does not show any further connection with the expansion of mankind after Deluge which began in Armenia, according to the Old Testament. Perhaps, in a very cautious way (we are dealing with a legend after all), it could be said that migrations after Noah may be a far echo of Indo-European migrations from Middle East. Two Soviet scholars, T. Gamkrelidze and V. Ivanov, have recently made strong claims after a relocalization of the Indo-European homeland in Eastern Anatolia, Armenian Highlands, Southern Caucasus and Northern Mesopotamia. This theory is still in discussion and refinement stage, but we think it has a consistent basis.

One of its arguments is the existence of proto-Semitic borrowings into proto-Indo-European (reconstructed) language, a claim made by Soviet linguist Vladimir I. Svidich some twenty-five years ago. Pilikian writes:

«The Soviet linguist V. Ilyich Svitich argued that the roots common to both proto-Indo-European and Semitic groups appear in their simplest forms in the Indo-European, therefore, the latter must be the borrower. I would argue the reverse for precisely the same reason; the simpler forms are evidence of origination (in the proto-Indo-European), as

opposed to the processes of sophisticated use and development (compounding, declension, etc.) among the borrowers» (p. 86)².

It is obvious that the author has not properly read his source. Prof. Raphael Ishkhanian actually says: «Ilich Svidich also demonstrated that mentioned words were originally found in proto-Semitic (their meaning here is more primitive, some of them are compounded in the Semitic languages, meanwhile in Indo-European languages they are regarded as simple roots, etc.) and then they have passed to the proto-Indo-European»³. For instance, proto-Indo-European *septm* («seven») is a simple root, but proto-Semitic *s-b-tu* («seven») is a composite word (*s-b* + *tu*) (Hebrew *siba*, *seba*, Aramic *siba*, Akkadian *sibittu*, *sibu*); so, *septm* came from *s-b-tu* and not viceversa.

Pilikian states that «Abraham, as a shepherd prince, was probably a Hyksos...» (p. 86). The ethnic identity of the Hyksos has not been resolved yet. Probably they were a group of Semitic tribes, mingled with some Hurrian elements, which invaded Egypt ca. 1730 and ruled upon Egyptians during 150 years. But Abraham came from Ur of Chaldea and his movement can be traced at the beginnings of the second millennium B.C. Egyptians clearly distinguished Hyksos from Jews.

Pilikian shares Sooren Ayvazian's views, which were originally published in Armenian in the Yerevan-based *Sovetakan Hayastan* monthly (January 1980) and reprinted, without changes, in a small book, *From the History of the Ancient Culture of Armenia* (Yerevan, 1986). Ayvazian states that the Hyksos were Armenians. This hypothesis relies mainly on the apparent similitude between *hekashasu*, the Egyptian name for Hyksos, which means «shepherd-kings», and *hay(k')*, Armenians' national name.

Ayvazian writes that the name *hayk'* appears in Egyptian sources as *hak'*⁴. Only Eusebius of Caesarea and Flavius Josephus have spoken about Hyksos; they have borrowed information from *Aegyptiaca*, a work (now lost) by the Egyptian priest Manethon (III century B.C.). Eusebius writes: «And their whole nation was named Hyccusin, i.e. shepherd-kings in translation, for Hyc in Egyptian noble [i.e. sacred] language meant king and ussos is shepherd; they were shepherds and, besides, because of their common and vulgar speech; compounding each

2. He mentions as source R. ISHKHANIAN, «The New Discoveries in Comparative Linguistics and the Problems of the Origination of the Armenians and their Earliest History» (in Armenian), *Banber Yerevani Hamalsarani*, n° 2, 1979, pp. 85-111.

3. ISHKHANIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

4. S. AYVAZIAN, *From the History of the Ancient Culture of Armenia* (in Armenian), Yerevan, 1986, p. 111.

other, we have Hycussos. But some people say of them that they were Arabs. And in other case the name Hyc does not mean king. On the contrary, it indicates prisoner and shepherd. Because Hyc, also in Egyptian, or Hak with aspirated alpha clearly means prisoner. And this seems more probably to me and more coincident with old history»⁵. We see that *hyc* or *hak* (not *hak'*) are Egyptian words with two opposite meanings («king» and «prisoner») which have no relation with Armenians. For instance, Moses Xorenac'i knew the Hyksos and called them *Ho-vivk'* («shepherds»), following Eusebius.

It is not our purpose here to start a lengthy discussion of Ayvazian's theories. It is enough to say that his book has been strongly criticized by the orientalist Nerses A. Mekertchian in a review published in Armenian Academy of Sciences' organ *Patma-Banasirakan Handes* (n° 4, 1986, pp. 211-218), which wholly discredits Ayvazian's claims as «unscientific» and «amateurish», proving that they have no serious grounds and have been formulated in a very sensationalist way. Mekertchian's review was supported by the editorial board of the journal in a long note (n° 2, 1987, pp. 245-249).

Pilikian writes: «Therefore, I suggest that the Armenian Hyksos naturally carried their progenitor god Wahakn with them to Egypt, only to be taken out of Egypt by the Hebrews to Israel as Khawa [Eve's Hebrew name. - V. M.] and Ya-hawa [or Yahwah, Jehovah's Hebrew name. -V. M.]» (p. 87).

He makes this statement on the basis that «Hebrew is an extremely language. The vowel-abundance in 'Yahwah' makes it a very uncommon Hebrew word» (p. 86). Taking a remark by a Soviet Armenian scholar, Prof. K. Ghafadarian («A is the letter most commonly used in the Armenian language»), he concludes that Yahwah is a metamorphosis of Armenian god Vahagn (Wahakn, in his spelling); Nawah (Noah) and Khawa (Eve) are mere versions of Waha(k)n... read backwards in both occasions. He seems to be not aware that Bible's Hebrew texts originally had no vowels, which were included later.

In his opinion, «Ararat, Noah's (N-awah) mountain in Genesis, was Waha-N's mountain in ancient Armenian mythology» (p. 87). No Armenian or foreign source mentions this detail. Let's forget for a moment that the Old Testament tells about «the mountains of [the land of] Ararat» and not «Mount Ararat».

5. "Eusebii Pamphyli Caesariensis episcopi Cronicum bipartitum... (Old Armenian text with Latin translation), edited by J. B. Aucher, Part I, Venice, 1818, pp. 226-7.

Then he uses the myth of Prometheus as a bridge between Armenians, Greeks and Jews. Thus, he states that, since the mountains of Caucasian Armenia were Prometheus' punishment place (in fact, the myth tells about Caucasus without referring to Armenia), and Noah Ark's mountain was Ararat, Greeks and Jews were the highlanders and lowlanders of Armenia, and they migrated respectively from Eastern and Western Armenia. On these premises he makes an astonishing discovery: «Western Armenian would be closer to Hebrew, while Eastern Armenian is closer to Greek, and classical Armenian is cognate with both» (p. 87). Any support for this? Could it be expected, when we know that the division of Armenian language into two branches did occur in the XVIII century A.D.?

We must add that Pilikian also considers the Hittites an Armenian tribe; this is another version of an old claim, made by the German scholar P. Jensen in 1898 (he considered Armenians as a Hittite stick), which has been fully rejected a long time ago. In general, linguists agree now that Armenian and Hittite were not closely related.

On the other hand, he writes: «Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, should have been a dialect of Armenian. The word derives from the Greek 'Aramaios' meaning 'the descendents of Aram', who was the first great king of Urartu, an Armenian kingdom. 'Armen' or 'Arman' were classical references to the Armenian tribes, and both forms derive from 'Aram'» (p. 88). If we follow his logics, we conclude that Aramaeans (ca. 1250 B.C.) were the descendents of Aram (860 B.C.), that Aramaic, a clearly Semitic language, is cognate with Armenian, a clearly Indo-European language, etcetera.

We have no need to quote *ab nauseam* these series of extravagant claims, which alas, as we have tried to show, have not any link with true science. They are a mixture of some bits of serious data randomly taken from here and there with a fertile dosis of imagination. As far as we know, this cannot be regarded as a very orthodox method of scientific research and it can only mislead readers.

Of course, we know Schopenhauer's dictum: «Any original idea is first ridiculed, then vigorously attacked and finally consecrated», but we believe that this is not the case.

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Վերջին տասնամյակներուն, զգալիօրէն աշխուժացած է հետաքրքրութիւնը՝ Հայոց ծագման ու հնագոյն պատմութեան հանդէպ: Կատարուող հետազոտութիւններն ու յայտնագործումները աստիճանական կերպով նոր լոյս կը սփռեն կնճառոտ խնդիրներու լուծման ճանապարհին վրայ:

Մասնագիտական կարծիքներու կողքին, դժբախտաբար յայտնուած են նաեւ զանազան տեսակէտներ, որոնց սիրողական մակարդակը լուրջ մտահոգութիւն կը պատճառէ, թէ՛ ըստ էութեան եւ թէ՛ իբրեւ խոչընդոտ՝ վաւերական լուծումներու: Հեղինակը քննութեան տակ կ'առնէ Յովհաննէս Փիլիկեանի «Առաջին հնդեւրոպացիները» անդլերէն յօդուածը, ուր կը խօսուի հայ-հրէական ծագումնաբանական ենթադրական կապերու, ինչպէս եւ յարակից խնդիրներու մասին:

Հեղինակը մէկ առ մէկ կը հերքէ Փիլիկեանի դրոյթները, ցոյց տալով անոնց մեթոտաբանական սխալները եւ ոչ-գիտական բնոյթը: