

# Forefather Hayk in the Light of Comparative Mythology

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In this article it is argued that the legendary forefather of the Armenians, Hayk, is an epic figure who combines the traits of several divine archetypes (god creator, father and patriarch of gods, thunder god, war god, dog-slayer, leader of *Männerbund*). Although he is derived from Indo-European prototypes in the south of the Armenian Highland he was juxtaposed with some local Hurro-Urartian and Semitic deities.

## Cosmogony and Ethnogeny

In archaic myths the most important place is taken by stories of the “beginning” (creation, cosmogony). They tell about the origins of the universe, the gods and heroes of that period. The cosmogonic action frequently is described as a very dramatic event such as the first murder. Cosmogonic myths are closely associated with anthropogonic and ethnogonic myths, which may be regarded as special cases (Eliade 1959: 6 ff.).

The Armenian ethnogonic myth of the patriarch Hayk, forefather of the Armenians, and his descendants (Khorenatsi 1.10-15; Sebeos 1; for the English translation: Thomson 1978: 82 ff., 357 ff.), evidently represents the epicized version of the creation myth of the beginning of the universe (countries, mountains, rivers, months and hours were named after Hayk and the first Haykids, while the naming in mythology is equivalent to the creation itself). It combines theogony, cosmogony, and ethnogeny, and carries anthropogonic and sociogonic elements. Hayk and his descendants are the epicized figures of the oldest Armenian gods (theogony; see below); lands, provinces, mountains, rivers and settlements are named after them (cosmogony); Armenian ethnonyms *Hay* and *Armen* are derived from the names Hayk and his descendant Aram (ethnogeny). The large family of Hayk reflects the structure of the oldest Armenian pantheon and patriarchal family (sociogeny). The beginning

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of time is also associated with the myth of Hayk—the months and hours of the day were considered to be named after the sons and daughters of Hayk (Brutyan 1997: 156 ff., 385 ff, with bibliography). The divine line ends with the death and supposed resurrection of Ara the Handsome, the last divine patriarch. The mythic sacred time ends with his death and our real (profane) era begins.

Hayk the patriarch represents the epicized and localized version of the earliest demiurge, the patriarch of the family of gods, who figures as the creator and progenitor of Armenia – the Armenian universe. Notably, his successors Aram and Ara the Handsome are also regarded as the epicized figures of ancient gods (see, e.g., Matikian 1930; Petrosyan 1997; Petrosyan 2007c).

### **Indo-European associations**

1) Ancient heroic epic, unlike some other genres of folklore, is formed in the process of ethnic consolidation and is in a lesser degree liable to international influences (Meletinskij 1986: 62). Thus the core of the ethnogonic legends, which are to be regarded as the earliest Armenian epic, would represent a native Armenian, i.e. Indo-European myth. As has been shown by S. Ahyan and G. Dumézil, the pivotal characters of the legends—Hayk, Aram and Ara the Handsome—constitute an Indo-European “trifunctional” triad, associated, respectively, with the first (sovereign), the second (military) and the third (fertility) functions of Indo-European mythology. Moreover, Hayk and his son Aramaneak present the two aspects of the first function. The characters of the opponents of Hayk, Aram, and Ara—Bel, Baršamin, and Šamiram—functionally correspond to the respective Armenian heroes and also form an identical trifunctional system (Ahyan 1981: 270-271; Dumézil 1994: 133-141; for the Indo-European aspects of the ethnogonic myth, see also also Petrosyan 1997; Petrosyan 2002; Petrosyan 2007a).

2) Hayk journeyed to Armenia with his patriarchal family, which included his sons and daughters and sons' sons, martial men about three hundred in number, and other domestic servants and outsiders (Khorenats'i 1.10).

The Armenian patriarchal clans, which survived until recent times, were usually called *azg*. *Azg* is a familial kin-group,

which includes families of several generations, usually six-seven, rarely eight, the descending and lateral patrilineal branches derived from the ancestor-founder, whose name becomes the generic term (Karapetyan 1966: 25). In addition, *azg* means 'people, nation.' The same is true for the other terms used for clans (*c'et* 'branch, clan, tribe, nation,' *tun* 'house, clan, nation' etc.).

Linguistic analysis suggests that in Armenian no ancient term concerning family relationship is lacking except one (*\*nepōt-*), whereas the other Indo-European languages have lost several, or did not have them. The Armenian preservation of those terms is the more striking inasmuch as Armenian is neither an archaic nor a conservative language, and moreover, has lost a great deal of the Indo-European lexicon. This shows without any doubt that the ancestors of the Armenians had faithfully preserved for a very long time the large patriarchal family (Bonfante 1984: 29).

Thus, the Armenian traditional family, survived to the 19<sup>th</sup> century would represent one of the most archaic successors of the Indo-European kin. Hayk's large family would present the mythological prototype, the most archaic version of the Armenian patriarchal family. The root of the name of Hayk *hay* was regarded as the generic name of Hayk's *azg*-family and *azg*-nation and the historical Armenian *azg*, i.e., the nation of Hayk was conceived of as the current state of Hayk's initial (mythic) family.

3) In several Armenian dialects the elderly women mention their husbands in their absence as *mer haya* 'our *hay*' i.e. 'husband, chief of our family' (for this appellation, see especially Khachatryan 2003: 19). This word, very plausibly, can be etymologized from Indo-European *\*poti-* 'master, lord, master of the house, husband' (cf. Lat. *hospes*, Russ. *gospodi* < *\*ghos[t]- pot-* 'host,' Gk. *pois*, Avest. *paiti-*, Ind. *pati-*, Toch. A *pats* 'husband,' etc). Hayk is described as the head of a patriarchal family consisting of three hundred men and their own families. Thus, Hayk's name can also be associated with *\*poti-* (cf. also *\*dems- pot-* 'master of the house' and *\*wik- pot-* 'master of the clan, community').

The constellation Orion was named *Haykn* after Hayk (Alishan 1895: 119-120). This alludes to the Indo-European suffix *\*-kon* (*\*-ko-n*), which in Armenian was conflated with

the Iranian suffix *-ik*: *Haykn*, *Hayik* > *Hayk* (for this suffix, see Djahukian 1987: 238). This diminutive/ venerable ending is peculiar to the appellations of the elders and mythological names: cf. *hayr/ hayrik* ‘father,’ *pap/ papik* ‘grandfather,’ theonymic *Astlik* ‘Venus,’ lit. ‘Little star,’ and Aramaneak (son of Hayk), with an analogical suffix *-ak*. Notably, the second part of Hayk’s consistent epithet *nahapet* ‘patriarch’ presents the Iranian reflex of the Indo-European *\*pot-* (Petrosyan 2002: 58, 61, 161, with bibliography).<sup>1</sup>

4) In the Indo-European past, a boy first moved into the category of an “(armed) youth” as a member of the war-band of the unmarried and landless young men. Then at about the age of twenty they entered into the tribe proper as adults: *\*wiHro-* or *\*Hner-* ‘man.’ The adults constituted the true *Männerbund* or *comitatus*, the warrior group headed by a particular war-leader/chieftain (Mallory and Adams 1997: 6 f.; 531, 632 f.). The troop of Hayk in the battle against Bel, the manhood of his adult descendants/tribe is to be regarded as an echo of the earliest *Männerbund*. Notably, in Khorenatsi they are mentioned as mighty *ark* ‘pl. ‘men’ < *\*Hner-*.

5) Hayk kills his adversary Bel with an *erek’t’ewean* ‘three-winged’ (triple-fleshed) arrow (Khorenats’i 1.11). The best Indo-European parallel is found in India, where the constellation Orion was personified by the god progenitor/creator Prajāpati who was transfixated by a three-jointed arrow (*iṣus trikāṇḍa*, probably, the belt stars of Orion) shot by the god Rudra (Allen 1963: 309 f.; Forssman 1968: 58, with the reference to the sources; Fontenrose 1981: 239 f.; Tjomkin and Erman 1985: 16-18, 276 f.). Obviously, Hayk, as the shooter of a triple arrow and the father and leader of the *Männerbund* of *Hays* (Armenians) corresponds with Rudra, the father and leader of the *Männerbund* of Rudras / Maruts, his sons who were called by his name (For Rudra, as the leader of *Männerbund*, see Kershaw 2001). However, Hayk as the progenitor of Armenia and personification of Orion

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<sup>1</sup>For various considerations on the etymology of the ethnonym *Hay*, see Djahukian 1961: 386 ff.; Djahukian 1987: 284. In his later works Djahukian accepted the etymology of *Hay* and Hayk from *\*poti-* (Djahukian 1988: 68; Djahukian 1990: 26; Djahukian 1992: 18), which makes unnecessary its special linguistic argumentation.

corresponds with Prajāpati as well. Notably, the second element of the characteristic epithets of Rudra (*ganapati*, *vrātapati*, *bhūtapati*, *paśupati*, *grhapati*, *sthapati*, *sabhapati*), as well as of the name of Prajāpati, are derived from \**poti*- (Petrosyan 2002: 55; Petrosyan 2007b: 30 f.).

6) Before the battle Bel suggests that Hayk become the head of his young hunters. In return, Hayk calls him “dog, from a pack of dogs” and kills him (Sebeos 1). The comparison of enemies with dogs in many traditions is related to the mythologem of the Indo-European warrior deity the “dog slayer,” cf. the Balkanic theonyms Kandaulēs, Kandaulas, Kandaōn ‘dog strangler,’ Irish Cuchulainn, the slayer of Culann’s dog, etc (See Ivanov 1977: 210-211, with the reconstruction of the figure of the Indo-European “dog slayer”). In Greek tradition, Orion is a Boeotian giant hunter, who the Boeotians call *Kandaōn*. Kandaōn is referred to as worshipped by the Thracians (Crestonians) and there is a reference to a human sacrifice conducted with the “three-fathered sword of Kandaōn” (Lycophron, *Alexandra* 1.328; II.937-8; Tzetz. ad Lyc. 328). The associations of Kandaōn with the constellation Orion, hunt, human sacrifice and triple weapon are comparable with the characteristics of Hayk. Thus Hayk can be regarded as a parallel figure to the Balkanic Orion-Kandaōn, the Armenian heir of the Indo-European “dog slayer.”

7) Hayk’s fight with his adversary may be considered in the context of the myth of the thunder god and his adversary the serpent (for the reconstruction of this myth, see Ivanov and Toporov 1974). According to a legend, the “Armenian king” (= Hayk) killed Bel-Nimrod and burned him up on Mt. Nimrod/Nemrut (to the west of Lake Van). By God’s will, the fire turned into water, and a crater lake on the summit of the mountain was created. In other variants, Nimrod built a grandiose building on Mt. Nimrod and rebelled against god. He was destroyed by thunderbolts and a storm. The lake on the summit of Mt. Nimrod was created and drowned him and his palace (Ghanalanyan 1969: 72 f.).

In Latin mythology, one of the kings of Alba rebelled against Jupiter and tried to imitate the thunder (similar to the Greek Salmoneus). He was smitten by a real thunderbolt, and

the waters of Lake Alba overflowed and destroyed the king's palace (for a comparative study of this myth, see Dumézil 1973: 67 f.)

In these legends, Hayk and his substitutes (Armenian king, God) correspond with the god of thunder and storm.

#### **Near Eastern Associations**

1) The name of the deified Babylonian tyrant Bel, adversary of Hayk (identified with Nimrod), is derived from the Semitic *b'l* 'lord, master.' It was used as the name or epithet of the great gods (especially the Babylonian Bel-Marduk). It is characteristic that Hayk transfixes Bel with an arrow as happens in the Babylonian cosmogonic myth where Marduk kills his adversary Tiamat. Thus, Hayk in the Armenian myth plays the role of Marduk in the Babylonian myth. The second eponymous patriarch Aram and his adversary Baršam would represent the "second figures" of Hayk and Bel (Abeghian 1966: 55; Petrosyan 2002: 56, 62, 83; Petrosyan 2007a). Significantly, Baršam is also derived from Semitic *b'l* (West Semitic Ba'al Šamin 'Lord of Heaven'). Thus, the name of Hayk (*\*poti-* 'lord'), most probably, corresponds to that of his adversary and functional counterpart Bel.

Several adversaries of Indo-European gods and heroes may also be derived from the West Semitic Ba'al. This is explained as a result of ancient contacts of the Indo-European and West Semitic tribes. In those myths, as it seems, the Semitic god is represented as the negative mirror-image of the Indo-European divine heroes (Petrosyan 2007a; for the Indo-European and West Semitic early contacts, Ivanov 2004: 45 f.).

2) On his way from Babylon to Armenia, Hayk sojourned first at the foot of a mountain to the south of Greater Armenia, and then left it to his grandson Kadmos. The area of Hayk's first sojourn is situated in the extreme south of the Armenian Highland (the region of the "House of Kadmos," Assy. Kadmuhi/Katmuhu). The mountain of Hayk's sojourn should be identified with the most significant mountain of the area, Mountain of Corduene in the east of Kadmuhi (Assyr. Nib/pur, Arm. Ararat of Corduene, Turk. Cudi dağı). In the 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> mill. BC, the city/land Kumme/Qumenu of this locality was the center of worship of the Hurro-Urartian thunder/storm god Teššub/Teišeba. In this context Hayk may be considered the

late epic version of Teššub/Teišeba (Hmayakayan 1992; Petrosyan 2006). Notably, the name of Hayk's second son Xoř, who is regarded as the eponym of the Hurrians, coincides with that of the second son of Teššub Hurri (to read: *Xořa*).

3) Several ancient sources and folk traditions locate the landing place of Noah at the Mountain of Corduene (Petrosyan 2006). Thus, in this context, Hayk the progenitor of the Armenians could have been juxtaposed with Noah, the progenitor of the human race. Accordingly, the three sons of Hayk, the eponyms of Armenian provinces correspond with the three sons of Noah, the eponyms of humanity.

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Thus, Hayk is a complex epic figure that combines the characteristics of the god creator, the father and patriarch of gods, the thunder god, and the war god. He is derived from the Indo-European prototypes yet was influenced by some Near Eastern figures.

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