Armen Y. Petrosyan, *The Problem of Armenian Origins. Myth, History, Hypothesis*. Journal of Indo-European Studies Monograph No. 66. Institute for the Study of Man, Washington, DC. 2018. ISBN 978-0-9845353-6-1, ISBN 978-0-9845353-5-4. $102.00 / $78.00. 232 pages.

In general terms, academic writing can be assessed along three broad criteria: the authors' command and analysis of the existing literature; their contribution to the ongoing discussion, be that through addition of material or novel analysis; and the clarity with which these latter two criteria are expressed. If an article or book can convince in two of these fields, any reader should be satisfied that they have spent their time profitably in reading the work in front of them. In the case of Armen Petrosyan's *The Problem of Armenian Origins: Myth, History, Hypothesis*, this is, alas, not always the case.

The monograph consists of an introduction and four thematic chapters, followed by abbreviations, bibliography, and an index; a map showing all the places mentioned is also included.

Petrosyan (henceforth: AP) begins by outlining the goal of his discussion: establishing the origin of the Armenians in both historical, geographical, and cultural terms. Defining the Armenians as a "unified community with a common legacy (real or alleged) and some cultural characteristics" (p. 1) such as a common name, myths, and homeland, he assumes from the

outset that their origin is to be found in the Armenian Highlands. Equally, he assumes that there is a biological succession, that the modern Armenians inhabiting the region are incontrovertibly related to those whom he calls the Earliest Armenians, admitting however that further research in this regard is necessary. Next to a genetic succession, he outlines the cultural and linguistic elements that contribute to this continuity; these take the form of ethnogonic myths and traces of Armenian in neighbouring languages' onomastics, and vice versa.

Chapter 1, *Traditions on the origin of Armenia*, provides an account of the mythographic, ethnographic, linguistic, and historical data on the origin of the Armenians in their own tradition, as well as briefer accounts of the pre-Armenian populations and other people's perspectives on this question. AP relies on well-known Armenian sources such as the *History of the Armenians* by Movsēs Xorenac'i,[33] and focuses the discussion on the mythical patriarch of the Armenians, Hayk, and his successors Aram and Ara. These individuals are seen as pivotal owing to their onomastic afterlife (endonym *hay* 'Armenian' < Hayk; Mt. Aragats < Ara; etc.), but equally owing to their relationships with better established historical figures. The most important such figure is Shammuramat (Gk. Semiramis), a queen in the Neo-Assyrian Empire of the late 9th and early 8th century, who according to legend launched a military campaign against Ara; this campaign, likely directed at the kingdom of Urartu, is taken by AP as one of the key links between the Earliest Armenians and the Urartian Kingdom. The further corroboration of this link is a recurring theme in this and the following chapters and finds expression in AP's suggestion that Hayk's three sons represent the three peoples shaping the Armenian ethnogony—Armenian, Hurrians, and Urartians—as well as in comparisons of these individuals with the gods of the Hurro-Urartian pantheon like Teššup or Ḫaldi.

The ensuing delineation of the various polities which across time held sway in the Armenian Highlands and the surrounding area forms the core of chapter 2, *The earliest tribal*

[33] AP dates this author to the 5th century CE; this date is not unchallenged, cf. Thomson (2006).

state formations of the Armenian Highlands and the problem of their succession. AP's central argument here focuses on political or administrative continuity, since "it is obviously [sic] that the same country survived as a kingdom comprising the majority of the Highland territory, with a comparable political role, which its population inherited from previous centuries, consisting of the same ethnic mass (regardless of the possibility of some quantity of new migrants, such as the Scythians), with a continuous history" (p. 61). What was to become the Armenian kingdom mentioned, e.g. in the late 6th-century Behistun inscription, had thus existed by another name long before then. AP follows Zimansky (1995) in assessing the previous incarnation of this polity, the Urartian kingdom, as a multiethnic and culturally syncretic state, governed by a small and ethnically difficult-to-define Urartian ruling class. In terms of historical geography, he challenges the notion that the later Armenian Kingdom had its origin in the Van-Vaspurakan region, preferring the more northern Ayrarat region and the connections this allows with the Hayasa-Azzi civilization, seen by some as proto-Armenians (cf. e.g. Kapantsyan 1947).

In Chapter 3, *The ethno-linguistic situation of the Armenian Highlands in the 2nd–1st millennia BC*, AP discusses in great detail the ins and outs of the region's onomastics and what conclusions may be drawn from it as to the origin of the Armenians. He takes into account Semitic, Hurro-Urartian, Indo-Iranian, Anatolian, and a number of other languages, asserting that "the most unequivocal argument concerning people's ethnic origins can be the linguistic affiliation of their personal names" (p. 81). The result of this discussion is the refutation of two key hypotheses previously advanced: the association of the Armenians with the Hayasa-Azzi, which AP sees more closely associated, at least on the basis of onomastics, with the Macedonians; and the notion of an identification of the Mushkians as proto-Armenians (cf. Diakonoff 1984). He argues that the latter were a Phrygian tribe and, after the collapse of the Hittite Empire, invaded the Van region, eventually becoming the ruling class of the Urartian Kingdom.

This line of argumentation continues in chapter 4, *Hypotheses concerning the identification of the Earliest Armenians*, in which AP discusses more explicitly the question

of the Indo-European *Urheimat* as well as more Armenian-specific theories such as those advanced by Diakonoff and Kapantsyan, who favour a Mushkian or Hayasa-Azzi origin for the Armenians. After refuting these explanations, AP proposes that the Etiuini people of the Araxes river are to be identified as the proto-Armenian people. Having been conquered by Urartu and partially resettled in the central Armenian Highland, after the fall of Urartu, dated here to after the mid-7th century, these proto-Armenians became the dominant people in that region, the northern central Armenian highlands (Ayrarat). In support of this hypothesis, AP offers four key contributing factors: the geographical and chronological coincidence of the Armenian ethnogonic tradition with the Etiuni; the identification of these Earliest Armenians as one of the two regional powers in Urartian times; the view of the immediate post-Urartian period as a power transition from south to north, and from the Urartians to the Armenians; and finally the Armenian etymologies of Etiuni names. Concluding with a discussion of the political and nationalistic dimension of the overarching question concerning the origin of the Armenians, AP summarises that "the history of the Armenian people should not begin with the post-Urartian period, but should also include the period of Urartu and pre-Urartian states" (p. 179).

AP has been very diligent in bringing together all the data presented here and discusses in detail the theories he seeks to refute or at least problematise. On the whole, he is even-handed in judging the strengths and weaknesses of arguments—those of others and his own—and has compiled a treasure trove for anyone looking to find potential equivalences in the anthroponyms or toponyms of the various cultures in this region.

The key contribution of this monograph, that is the identification of the Etiuni as proto-Armenians, and the concomitant establishment of the Armenian homeland in the Ayrarat region and thus the approximate location of the modern Republic of Armenia, is not an unattractive hypothesis. Inevitably, however, it suffers from the same issues as its predecessors: the lack of incontrovertible and unequivocal data and the over-reliance on onomastics as the principal source of linking peoples and places to a particular language and culture.

Beyond this inherent and unavoidable issue, this volume suffers from at least three principal shortcomings, which will be briefly discussed in turn: a lack of overt structure and clarity of expression; the problematic assumption of a link between genetic and cultural-linguistic succession; and a *laissez-faire* approach to linguistic detail.

The most significant issue of this book is the impossibility of distinguishing at any one point whether AP is simply re-iterating an established analysis, affirming it, or setting it up himself; in short, literature review, analysis and novel propositions are insufficiently separated or at least signposted. The domains of data on which his analysis relies—mythography, historical data from non-literary sources, and onomastics—are similarly and unhelpfully interwoven, making it difficult to judge how much credence to give to any one piece of information. The new analysis that AP suggests does not come to the fore until the last 30 pages of the book and unnecessarily leaves the reader without orientation and in suspense for too long.

More problematic for his general argument, which relies heavily on the supposed Armenian onomastics of Etiuni names, is the implied entanglement of the Armenian language with the people he refers to as Earliest Armenians, suggesting that "present day Armenians generally are the biological and cultural successors of the earliest population of the Armenian highlands" (p. 7). The genetic dimension of this claim seems to find ever more corroboration in recent studies,[34] making it plausible that the ancestors of the modern people known as Armenians should have been historically endemic to the Armenian Highlands since at least the late Bronze Age and that their offspring continuously resided in this area. Ascribing to the same people a distinctly identifiable culture which could be readily differentiated from others in the region in the 2nd and 1st millennia BCE seems rather self-defeating, however, particularly in view of all the comparisons, syncretic structures, and equivalences AP draws up between them. The most problematic fact is that these very people need not have spoken proto-Armenian; the history of Mesopotamia, the Caucasus,

[34]Cf. Haber et al. (2015), Margaryan et al. (2017).

and Central Asia richly illustrates that languages can die out (Hittite, Luwian, Bactrian, etc.) or be abandoned in favour of another language (the Parni adopted Parthian, the Parthians later Armenian);[35] the plausibility of Armenian structures borrowed into Urartian and lexical borrowings from Urartian into Armenian provide a *terminus ante quem* for the arrival of the (proto-)Armenian language in the region, but do no more prove that the Etiuni spoke it than do the dozen or so Etiuni names with supposed Armenian onomastics.

These latter are the final crux of AP's work, and with them many other etymological suggestions that do not hold up to scrutiny; the reader is curiously forewarned about this problem since AP announces the minimization of "specific linguistic analyses" (p. 11) early on in the book despite his (repeated) assurance that the "best indicator of the ethnic affiliation of a people can be the linguistic affiliation of their personal names" (p. 167). One illustrative instance of these problematic equivalences is that of the Etiuni theonym *Aniqu*, the local goddess of the Ararat valley, twice mentioned in Urartian inscriptions,[36] and related by AP to Arm. *hani, hanik* 'grandmother' (cp. Gk. ἀννίς 'mother-in-law', Lat. *anus* 'old woman', Hitt. *ḫanna-* 'grandmother' < PIE *$h_2$en-).[37] A number of issues arise: the form *hanik* is a later, dialectal version of this noun, likely formed with the diminutive suffix of Iranian origin and thus postdating the time period in question; the alternative etymology of the suffix, supposedly deriving from PIE *-kon-, is not corroborated in any way and contravenes phonological expectations. Similarly, the loss of word-initial aspiration in the equivalence *Aniqu–hani* is neither explained nor readily motivated. Furthermore, AP does not explicitly discuss the semantic relationship between the two ('grandmother' and local goddess), but this is of least concern. Unfortunately, this type of careless and imprecise use of linguistic data is not singular, but rather pervasive in the volume and therefore casts doubt even on potentially plausible suggestions.

[35]Cf. Meyer (2022).
[36]Note that here and throughout, the reader is not given any reference to where or in which inscription such names are found.
[37]AP erroneously writes *$h_2$an-; cp. Martirosyan (2010: 388).

While this volume can redeem itself to a certain extent by its compendious iterations of previous theories and the available data, it has to be read with care and caution to disentwine literature review and AP's own analysis. The latter is often overly ambitious given the limited data available, and too frequently relies on erroneous or unlikely etymologies. While the Etiuni origin he proposes is not entirely without merit, it can be no more or less substantiated than previous approaches to the question and thus remains effectively moot.

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