

J. R. RUSSELL,
Fresno State University

ARGAWAN: THE INDO-EUROPEAN MEMORY OF THE CAUCASUS

Preface

This essay examines an episode in the fragments of the oral epic cycle of King Artašēs I (Gk. Artaxias; from an Old Persian form *Artaxšassa, Old Iranian *Arta-xšathra-, “Whose rule is through right/order [Aša]”) and his Alan bride Satʻenik. Artašēs was the eponymous founder of the Armenian Artaxiad dynasty, which came into being in the early second century B.C. as Seleucid rule receded from Anatolia; it endured down to the dawn of the Christian era, when a branch of the Parthian Arsacid dynasty established itself in the country. A major figure in the Artaxiad cycle is the crown-prince, Artawazd: his character has been telescoped, however, into that of a much later monarch, Artawazd II (r. 55–34 B.C.), who came to the throne after the death of the only Armenian ruler who ever played a significant role in Roman and Near Eastern history, Tigran II (“the Great,” r. 95–56 B.C.). Of particular interest to this study is a Median nobleman living in Armenia, Argawan.

The primary source for all this material is the *History of the Armenians* (Arm. *Patmutʻ iwn Hayocʻ*) of Movsēs Xorenacʻi. The work is rich in genealogical, mythological, and epic lore; so in Armenian tradition Xorenacʻi has acquired the status of a Herodotus, as the *Patmahayr*, “Father of History”, of the nation. His dates are accordingly assigned to the so-called *oskedar*, “golden age” of Armenian literature – the period in the fifth century immediately following the invention by St. Mesrop Maštocʻ of the Armenian alphabet. Much in the *History* is demonstrably derived or patterned upon earlier or non-Armenian works (Łazar Pʻarpecʻi, Josephus, the *Alexander Romance*), or is anachronistic; and it is likely therefore that Xorenacʻi lived later, perhaps as late as the eighth century. However there is no reason to doubt his assertion that he heard with his own ears the minstrels (Arm. *gusan* < Pth. *gōsān*)¹ recite the epic songs to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument: Xorenacʻi’s renderings are in all respects careful transcriptions of a primary, oral source.

The Armenians lived for centuries in close proximity to the Alans – speakers of a North Iranian language, a branch of the Scythians. The modern Ossetes are direct descendants of the ancient Alans, with the same language and culture; and in the republic of Georgia Ossetic- and Armenian-speaking communities are still contiguous. The Armenian oral epic *Sasna cr̄er*, “The Wild Men of Sasun,” first transcribed in 1874 in the region around Lake Van, has very ancient Anatolian and Iranian strata: a lady of the lake, a sword cast in water; and rock-births, and other evidence of proto-Mithraism. This combination of Old Anatolian and Iranian themes can be observed farther to the north in the Ossetic oral epic, the sagas of the *Nartæ* (pl. of *nart*, “hero, manly man”); so it is probable that the Armenian epic tradition served as a conduit for such material, perhaps as long as two millennia ago, if one gives credence to the hypothesis that Alan lore was the source of these themes in Arthurian legend. There are thematic parallels in Armenian and Alan epic; so in addition to borrowing from Armenia it would seem there was much cross-fertilization as well. This is what one might expect: cultural influences between close neighbors over a long period are generally not a one-way affair.

The Ossetic Nart sagas are recited, in various versions, by other peoples of the Northwest Caucasus such as the Abkhaz and Adyghe (Cherkess, Circassians). A narrative of the Narts in Adyghe contains a version of the story of the marriage of Artašēs to Satʻenik and the intervention of Artawazd. These three characters have different, Ossetic, names; but a fourth player, Argwana, is plainly the Median Argawan of Movsēs Xorenacʻi. This character is not mentioned in the Ossetic versions themselves; so it is probable that the Adyghe story reflects an older Alan narrative that is now lost in its original – Argwana is a *Nebenüberlieferung* then – testimony for a name that undoubtedly existed once in the Ossetic *Nartæ* proper. By any historical and textual standard of priority this name and character came from the Armenian epic transcribed by Movses Xorenacʻi at least a millennium before any Nart saga was transcribed. The Adyghe Nart tale provides proof of a borrowing from ancient Armenian oral literature; it is also the first independent attestation of the material in the epic cycle of Artašēs quoted in Movsēs Xorenacʻi’s narrative outside Armenian – nay, outside his own book². It provides a strong argument, if any still be needed, for the antiquity and authenticity of his narrative concerning Artašēs.

The Kartvelologist Georges Charachidze published in 1987 a short, elegant book, *La mémoire indo-européenne du Caucase* (Paris: Hachette) in which he suggests that the oral Nart sagas, originating in Ossetic and widely diffused amongst non-Indo-European speakers in the Western and Northwestern Caucasus, enshrine Indo-European institutions, beliefs, and values that had become essential to social and personal life but were not – or could not be – overtly ex-

pressed in the canonical religions of the Ossetes and their neighbors. The title of this essay is offered in homage to his insight. That Indo-European memory is not only Ossetic, but Armenian, since Armenia is a major source for the Narts; and partly because oral epic in Armenian society in Anatolia and the Transcaucasus occupied a niche analogous to that of the Narts farther north, as a kind of Indo-European secular scripture.

The relevant Armenian passages are cited in the original, with my translation; and the other texts considered, systematically summarized – in the final section of the essay, with important terms explicated in the footnotes thereto.

Actualité

When one studies an epic there is a tacit sense one deals with archaic culture (Homer), with alien or primitive ways of life, or with a highly self-conscious re-employment within the West of a form that is acknowledged to be obsolete in any living context of serious literature since the Romantic period. Indeed, several of the epics of that latest age in which the genre seems to have thrived as a serious high literary form, are inauthentic: they are not just the products of self-conscious, individual artifice (no one would condemn Milton's *Paradise Lost* on these grounds), but forgery. Macpherson's *Ossian*, though it inspired or interested a number of creative artists, from Felix Mendelssohn to Vladimir Nabokov and Osip Mandelstam, is, strictly speaking, a fake; and a heated argument rages around the theory that the great epic of the East Slavs, *The Lay of Igor's Campaign*, with all its poetic brilliance and haunting imagery, was not composed soon after a war that took place in A.D. 1185, but is in fact the work of the late-eighteenth-century Slavist Josef Dombrovsky³. The passion that informed both forgers and debaters was often nationalistic: the neo-paganism of the Renaissance and the secular philosophy of the Enlightenment, supporting the methods and findings of the new discipline of comparative philology, rejected the universal authority of the Bible and cast into doubt its authenticity as a genealogical document. It was left to individual peoples to discover the texts that cast light on their own antiquity. Many of these texts were epics; and those like the *Nibelungenlied* were believed to express the mores and spirituality of an ethnic group – often heroic values at variance with the teachings of the Christian Church. In Germany, epic has been a tool used to extol chauvinism and cruelty⁴. In the Soviet Union, as will be seen presently, epic was to become a weapon in the class struggle.

The first recitations of the Armenian epic of Sasun were discovered and recorded in 1874, though oblique references to the epic in Armenian tradition and the testimony of visitors to the country go back to at least half a millennium

earlier; and it was only in the 1780s that Movsēs Xorenac‘i’s text began to be studied as a source of national and epic tradition. The Armenians thus caught the wave of nationalism in their treatment of their epic. Study of the Nart sagas is much more recent; but both the *Nartæ* and the Sasun epic were manipulated by the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union in the cultural campaign to exalt what was supposed the unmediated genius of the Folk over the art-for-art’s sake work of “Formalists”. As writers, poets, and theatrical directors were being shot *en masse*, bewildered *ashughs* were hauled before applauding audiences to demonstrate the “people’s art.” Thus, 1939 was chosen, rather artificially, as the one thousandth anniversary of the Sasun epic, and sumptuous editions the size and shape of Bibles were printed. Fortunately for scholarship, the Soviet state also supported the serious ethnographic study of epic, in the Caucasus and elsewhere; so the picture is not entirely depressing. Given the use and misuse of epic by nationalist, fascist, and totalitarian ideologists, though, it is not surprising that the genre has now gone underground, as it were. It is not favored in sophisticated literature; but in shadowy, powerful ways, epic is present still in the cultural products of the present age. I wish to argue and emphasize this, in order to impress upon the reader that the cultural and spiritual role of the *Nartæ* and the Armenian epics in the Caucasus of the present day is neither a quaint archaism to be examined by Orientalists at a fastidious distance, nor is it the artificial outcome of cultural policies imposed from above. Once one accepts that these epic songs are intellectually and aesthetically intricate and actual in themselves, it becomes possible fruitfully to explore their depths of meaning, as living literature. The reader is invited to a brief digression into the actuality of epic in present-day Anglo-American culture – to see, as it were, the workings of epic within his own cultural consciousness.

Iranists deal familiarly with the enduring presence of the *Šāh-nāme* in the context of a living and extremely sophisticated poetic tradition subordinate to none; so there is perhaps less cultural prejudice in this branch of Oriental studies than elsewhere. However I should like to argue briefly that the epic genre exists and thrives in contemporary Western culture, even when driven underground, as it were, since it addresses actual and relevant issues in the most effective way. The epic form is often excluded from contemporary literature, so it re-emerges in the lower realms of popular culture. One finds it in Westerns and in fantasy novels; and where it does appear in good literature, it is barely noticed. Here are some examples of epic low and high. When I first presented my findings on the sources of the Armenian epic of Sasun to an interested audience in a lecture at the Armenian Library and Museum of America, almost a decade ago, I had just watched the movie *Legends of the Fall*, which is all about the concept of the hero and his place in an unrecoverable past. Shortly before beginning this essay, I

joined the crowds at the Boston Common cinema and watched part three of the epic *Lord of the Rings* on a big screen: the hero Frodo made it to Mt. Doom and threw the malign Ring of Power into the fire, accomplishing his great task. It is all gray and downhill for the enervated hero thereafter, which is as it should be, despite the requirement of happy endings in the movie business. Tolkien's invented epic has been around for half a century;⁵ and the dénouement recalled the structure of a recent novel, Jonathan Lethem's *The Fortress of Solitude*. The reviewers have failed to notice that the book is an epic, half-Biblical, half-Tolkienish. The hero is a Jewish boy named Dylan Ebdus who grows up in a bad neighborhood of Brooklyn where he is mistreated and robbed by some Gentile Blacks but also initiated by others – a homeless man, a close friend and his father – into a realm of wonderful language and music. He is given a magic ring that enables him to fly, and, later, to become invisible (the latter power is the same as Frodo's, in Tolkien). His name is typical of that of *digenes*, “twy-born,” heroes (cf. the Greek Akritic cycle) and reflects both halves of his epic childhood: his first name is mantic/artistic, and conjures up Dylan Thomas (poetry) and Bob Dylan (music), in that order. Lethem's hero in an earlier novel, *Motherless Brooklyn*, is a boy whose family name is Essrog, the Ashkenazic (i.e., Eastern European Jewish, but on the Armenian reflex of Askenaz, “Scythian,” see below!) pronunciation of the Hebrew word *ethrog*, “citron.” So Ebdus just might be Lethem's idea of the Ashkenazic / *avdus*/ for *'avdūth*, “slavery”: God took the Israelites out of Egypt, *mē- 'avdūt lā-hērūt*, “from slavery to freedom” – and Dylan does cross the East River/Red Sea to Manhattan's Stuyvesant High School and beyond.

The issue of a dual identity is significant in the Armenian epic episode we are shortly to consider: Artawazd is the son of an Alan mother, but it is unclear whether his father is an Armenian (Artašēs, the king), a Mede (Argawan), or a demon (Arm. *dew* – when he is accused of being a changeling). The situation expresses the ambiguous position of a dramatic character: Telemachus tells Athena he is assured he is the son of Odysseus, but then he adds, ruefully, that he doesn't know, for “No man knows his own father”. The extreme treatment of this epic – and very human – situation is the murder by Oedipus of his father, Laius, and his marriage to his mother, Iocasta. The Armenian epic treats this paradigm of the family triangle with only slightly less violence. First, the character's origins are established, with programmatic treatment of their inherent problems. But then the epic character must grow into manhood; so we return to the novel and its middle passage.

After high school, Lethem's Dylan makes a mess of the middle period of his story, at a New England college for which his previous life has not prepared him. For this hard middle passage of the epic hero, in which he is an alien and a wanderer, compare the ambiguous, hard time of Tolkien's middle book, *The Two*

Towers; or the episode of Mec Mher in the second *čiwł* (“branch,” i.e., chapter/song) of the Armenian epic of Sasun, for that matter. It is *de rigueur*, the long journey. As an adult in Berkeley, California, he becomes a music critic obsessed with what he now correctly discerns as his epic childhood, in a future world that seems thin and without substance. The ring can do only evil now: though he uses it, and loses it, in destroying his archetypal enemy (not Sauron’s great Eye, but a mean mugger who has plagued him since the first pages of the novel), he is spent. A major epic hero often has one best friend, practically a lover, who is sacrificed for him: Achilles had and lost his *therapon* Patroclus; Frodo had his trusty Sam Gamgee;⁶ and Dylan has Mingus (named after the famous jazz musician), who ends up in prison. All that is left is to write down the story: one recalls the tablets mentioned at the end of the Epic of Gilgamesh. Exodus, loss, and enervation provide an epic patterning to Biblical narrative, too: after the crossing of the Red Sea and the encounter on Sinai, Moses is a different man, so shaken that his face remains veiled for the rest of his life after his encounter with God. Deuteronomy is one great dictation of what happened; and Moses makes one last, great, unheroic plea for life before God takes him into an obscure occultation not unlike the end of Little Mher in the epic of Sasun. Moses and Ebdus/*’avdūth*, rings and Hobbits, all came together as one read Lethem’s novel.

It is probable that the average reader entering the fortress of solitude of Lethem’s tiny hero will not be aware that the strong aesthetic satisfaction and deep emotional truth of the book derives in large measure from the way it draws subtly upon epic themes and symmetries. The large armature of epic is often a tripartite structure, consisting of a problem, the struggle to solve it, and the resolution and after-effects. The structure can be developed in various ways, from strong and overt plots to more delicate, emotional, even introverted types. The strongest presentation of the problem is war; the mythological reflex of it, the *Drachenkampf* or dragon-fight. The most delicate expression of the same tripartite problem-pursuit-resolution is a plot centered on love: here is the ambiguous nexus between the epic genre and that of romance. In the epic fragment on Artasēs, we are to observe the playing out of parallel themes of love and war, with all their subtleties, ambiguities, and problems. Such is the essential structure of many a folktale, too. The person who deals with the problem is a hero – larger than life, and therefore legendary – but still possible and therefore not mythological, even if he walks in a world of mythological phenomena and possibilities. Tolkien and Lethem both invented their epic worlds, though the sources are real and painful: England in the Great War, a Brooklyn ghetto boyhood. But most epics are not really the inventions of one man, even a genius like Homer. They are shaped out of the collective experience, tradition, feeling, values, and accumulated wisdom of a whole community; and to that extent an epic

is organic rather than artificial. The idea that something is organic is dangerous if misused – to promote some intangible, archetypal national essence, as fascists did with Nordic epic; or to wage a campaign of folk culture against the practice of art for art’s sake derided as “formalism,” as Stalinists did with Armenian and other epics. In fact epics move freely from orality to writing and back (as is the case with the Kurdish *Mam u Zin*)⁷ and from one nation to another. For high culture is as “organic” as any other kind: all are human.

That does not mean, of course, that all manifestations of culture are of equal aesthetic or intellectual merit, or should be regarded as such for fear of causing offense; and still less should they be treated by scholars with uniform seriousness of method or on the same level. I have alluded above to *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien’s epic is popular because it answers a need, and that is an interesting fact to observe. But Tolkien’s characters are without subtlety and his writing is stilted. So a diet of Tolkien alone is junk food. But if reading Tolkien leads one then to read *Beowulf* and Homer, one will be intellectually nourished. Jonathan Lethem’s novel is a good, ephemeral book; it will not enter the American literary canon. In citing Tolkien and Lethem I do not mean to imply that either of them is as good as a Classical epic poet, only to suggest that epic form is of relevance still to the everyday lives of Americans, and to affirm that it exists in the liveliest domains of Western culture.

The features of epic I have outlined above are deeply embedded in the Biblical (Moses), Greco-Roman (Homer), and Germanic (the *Nibelungenlied*, courtesy of J.R.R. Tolkien) literary cultures: these form, in various combinations and proportions, a large part of our spiritual and cultural inheritance in this country. They affect the way we organize the raw material of life into meaningful patterns. The *Epic of Sasun* in Armenia, the *Mahabharata* in India, the *Šāhnāme* in Iran, and the *Nartæ* in the Caucasus perform analogous social, artistic, and spiritual functions and are often more consciously valued in those more traditional societies for the character of their role and message. As long as people speak and write artistically of their own high aspirations and tragic failures, of war and the enigma of life’s transience, and of meaningful love, there will be epic.

Scythians, Sarmatians, Alans, and Ossetes

The ancient North Iranian peoples of the Eurasian steppes – Scythians, Sarmatians, Alans – are vividly described for us by the “Father of History”, Herodotus, and by subsequent Classical authors⁸. The way of life best suited to the Scythians was not one of architecture or road-building; but this does not

mean they were technologically or ecologically primitive by comparison with their more sedentary neighbors along the Black Sea littoral and in warmer climes. They perfected the technology of horseback-riding and horse warfare, inventing such useful items as the stirrup and trousers; they were masters in the production of felt, which is warm and waterproof and relatively light. The artistic forms that adorned their everyday objects were pleasing and enduring: the designs on the felt saddle-cloths and horse-trappings preserved by permafrost for twenty-five centuries in the Scythian kurgan (burial mound) of Pazyryk, in the Altai mountains of Siberia, are similar to those on the felt equipment of Central Asian horsemen today. The famous “animal style” of visual art portrayed flying and running beasts and swirling water and clouds: perhaps it may be seen as a celebration of life as motion, vitality, and change.

The Scythian peoples did not embrace Zoroastrianism; and the fear and hatred peaceful Mazdaeans felt towards the marauding *mairyas* (the Avestan term carries with it the implication of violence; but cf. also Phl. *mērag*, just a young man) creates a mental dichotomy between these North Iranians and their Eastern and Southern Iranian cousins who chose another religion and way of life. But the division need not be seen as quite so stark. The view of the living world adumbrated in Scythian art may indeed exist as well in the usages of the Zoroastrian faith – which originated amongst nomadic pastoralists, in Central Asia – where the Avestan word *yaoždāthra-*, rendered imperfectly in English as “purification,” actually means “making lively, stirring up” (cf. the Arm. l-w *yoyž*, adv., “stirringly” > “very, powerfully”); and the epithets for “holy,” Av. *spānta-* and Phl. *abzōnīg*, mean, respectively, “bounteous” and “incremental,” i.e., productive of burgeoning life. Horses were central to Scythian culture; and Zarathustra also employed the terminology of the horse race in his vision of the progress and resolution of time. (The image of the Bridge of the Separator, elaborated in Zoroastrian eschatology, may have existed in Scythian shamanism, too, as I will suggest shortly in a discussion of the magic powers of the musical instrument of Alan epic bards.) Speakers of Avestan, like Scythian artists, envisaged peace and repose in terms of the image of a horse unharnessed and hitched after a long ride. The Scythian animal style lent inspiration to the art of the Celts, who inhabited Eastern and Central Europe in antiquity and were thus contiguous to the westernmost Scythians; and the fanciful, intricate menageries in the miniatures of the mediaeval manuscripts of Ireland and northern Britain – the best-known examples are the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels – in many respects echo, and not very distantly at that, Scythian art. The Scythians drank fermented mare’s milk, as Central Asian and Mongolian nomads still do; and they inhaled hemp-smoke in psychedelic steam-baths. Their religious institutions included shamanistic practices;⁹ and they believed in a pantheon of goddesses and gods.

On the territory of modern Ukraine, and especially on its Black Sea littoral, the Scythian peoples came into close contact with Greek settlers and interacted with them for well over half a millennium. Hellenic goldsmiths – or local artisans trained in Greek workshops – vividly portrayed Scythians and their style of life in magnificent sumptuary objects of gold and silver. These were found in Scythian burial-mounds, the *kurgans* that dot the Ukrainian and South Russian steppe; most of these luxury items, along with more perishable objects of wood and felt preserved by the permafrost of the Altai, have been excavated by Russians, from the time of Peter the Great onwards. Accordingly, they have found a new home in the collections of the Hermitage museum at St. Petersburg. The “Royal Scythians,” as we know from Greek texts, were called *Paralatai* – cf. Av. *paradhāta*, “made foremost,” which we find in the form *Pēšdād* in the Persian national epic, the “Book of Kings” of Ferdosi, as the name of Iran’s first royal dynasty. The North Iranian peoples inhabited an area stretching from Eastern and Central Europe to the borders of China: around the jade-rich oasis of Khotan, in what is now the province of Xinjiang – Chinese Turkestan – the sophisticated Buddhist culture of the Sakas (their name is a form of the same word “Scythian”) flourished till around the year 1000. (Turkic and Islamic invasions gradually doomed the multicultural civilization of the Silk Road.)

Some of the heraldic symbols of the Sarmatians, an Iranian people related to the Scythians, were used by Polish noblemen, leading to the rather Romantic claim of Polish nationalists that their nobility were descendants of the Sarmatians.¹⁰ Russians and Ukrainians, likewise imbued with a nationalistic fervor impelling them to seek ancient and romantic forebears, have claimed Scythian origins at various times: a typical example is Alexander Blok’s revolutionary poem *Skify*, “The Scythians,” which exploits the image of the Scythian as Noble Savage.¹¹ It is true that the Eastern Slavs live on the same land that was Scythia once; and there are important Irano-Slavic linguistic and other connections. But the last descendants of the Scythian Alans are the Ossetes (properly, Os: the Georgian toponymical suffix *-eti*, cf., e.g., Geor. Javakheti, Arm. Javakhk’, has been absorbed into their name, Rus. *osetin*, *Osetiya*) and they survive in the Caucasus to the present day.

These peoples – the Yas/Ass/Os/Ossetes in particular – were related to Armenians through intermittent invasion, dynastic intermarriage, and long cultural contact, from the eighth century B.C. down to the Middle Ages. Because of old invasion and more recent Biblical anthropology, Armenians have long called themselves Ask’anaz, the Biblical word for a Scythian. There is a district north-east of present-day Armenia called Šakašēn, i.e., “Scyth’s Home,” known in Strabo by the Greek form *Sakasēnē*. The ancient Iranian province of Drangiana, Avestan Zranka, was invaded by Sakas and acquired its present name, Sistan,

from Middle Iranian Sagastān, “Scythian country.” The epic hero Rostam, whose name means “he who possesses the strength of a river” (<OIr. **rautas-taxma-*), came from there: thanks to the testimony of Movsēs Xorenac’i, we know that tales about Rostam *sagčik*, “the Saka,” were popular in Armenia long before he became the principal hero of Ferdowsi’s great poem.¹² Subsidiary epic narratives, Pers. *dāstāns*, about Rostam were still related orally in Armenia down to the early years of the twentieth century, in various local dialects.

As is well known, a large proportion of the vocabulary of Armenian derives from Northwestern Middle Iranian speech of the Parthian period. The Armenians lived under the rule of the successive dynasties of pre-Islamic Iran: Achaemenians, Parthians, and Sasanians. Even after the last Armenian Arsacids forsook Zoroastrianism and embraced Christianity, and the nation consciously chose a Western orientation, the relationship to Iran remained close. When we speak of Iranica with respect to Armenia, it is therefore the country corresponding more or less to the republic of Iran today that we have in mind. Since all that is left of the once-vast North Iranian domain is Ossetia, historical myopia tends to reduce the role of the Scythian peoples, of the “Other Iran,” to near insignificance. However when one considers that Perso-Scythian wars were important enough to the Achaemenids for a festival called Sakaia to be instituted,¹³ that Scythian masters taught the Achaemenian princes how to ride; that Rostam was a Saka, that Sakas ruled India and created a Buddhist civilization on the Silk Road; that the Alans play a role in the legend of the Apostolic foundations of the Armenian Church – the Other Iran is no small player, it is not even Other. There was a time when the Ossetes, now a small people, were very widespread indeed. One way of tracing them is to note the places where useful phrases of their language are recorded. The common Alan and modern Ossetic greeting is *Da bon xorz*, “Y’all have a nice day” (the word *xorz* is from the same Iranian root as Armenian *axoržak*, “appetite”):¹⁴ in the Middle Ages, a Byzantine scholar heard the greeting in the streets of Constantinople and recorded it in a list of phrases from that polyglottic metropolis, and somebody else scribbled it on the back of a Latin deed in Hungary. And long before then, Marcus Aurelius – the same Roman emperor who penned the Stoic *Meditations* – who had defeated the Alans in Germany, drafted some into his cavalry and sent them to Roman garrisons in Western Europe – from France all the way to north Wales.¹⁵

Rostam is not the only – not even the most important – Scythian in ancient Armenian literary tradition. The epic fragments about king Artaxias I (Arm. Artašēs) and his Alan bride Sat’enik (her native Alan name would be Satana, unrelated to the Hebrew term for the Adversary at the Divine court from which we get Satan, despite Nicholas Marr’s unfounded hypothesis) and her descendants appear in the *History* of Movsēs Xorenac’i, and in the complex Apostolic

legends of the Oskean and Suk'iasean martyrs.¹⁶ The modern Ossetes are the descendants of the ancient Alans (whose name in turn is perhaps a form of the same word as Iran), and now live mainly in the central region of the north Caucasus, divided between the post-Soviet Russian Federation (North Ossetia, capital Ordzhonikidze) and the republic of Georgia (South Ossetia, capital Tskhinvali). But these political boundaries are somewhat deceptive, as Armenian- and Ossetic-speaking populations are still just barely contiguous, meeting at a midpoint in the republic of Georgia; and in ancient times, too, they were neighbors: Artašēs met them on the banks of the Kura.

Georgian literature might be considered as one vector whereby Armenian traditions spread to the north, since St. Mesrop Maštoc' invented the Georgian alphabet and Georgian Christian architecture derives its basic forms from Armenian models. There are numerous Armenian loan-words in Georgian, as well. The Georgian chronicle *K'art'lis c'xovreba*¹⁷ mentions Artašēs, corrupting his name to Artašan, in the presentation of a version of the narrative known in Movsēs Xorenac'i, and knows also of his tutor Smbat. The text mentions numerous Alan-Georgian alliances against the Armenians; however, neither the name of Argawan nor the incident concerning him and Artašēs to be considered presently, appears in the Georgian sources. So in the area of epic literature, direct contacts between Armenians and Alans, which were frequent and easy, seem to have been the most likely route of transmission.

Nartæ

The Ossetes still sing a cycle of heroic songs about the clan of the *Nartæ*, literally, "manly ones," the descendants of the lady Satana.¹⁸ The bards use the twelve-stringed *fændyr*; cf. the *p'andirñ* of the Armenian *gusans* that Movsēs Xorenac'i heard (both words are probably loans from an ancient Lydian original, meaning "lyre"). The Alan lyre was used first by the water-born Nart Syrdon; and the *xidgäs*, "bridge-guard" has one. (Oss. *xid*, "bridge"; cf. Av. *haētū*, "idem," in the river-name Haētumant, modern Hilmand.) In Zoroastrian literature, the souls of the departed must cross the *činvatō pārətu*, "Bridge of the Separator" into the next world. The third-century Sasanian high priest Kartīr describes in his inscription a visionary trip into the next world where, thanks to his spiritual powers, he succeeds in opening passage of the bridge for his royal patron. Overcoming obstacles and transporting souls is a shaman's job; so the complex of functions of the bardic lyre of the Ossetes can be seen to include shamanistic features, with the employment of old Iranian symbolism. The Ossetic word for an epic song is *kadäg*; the word, passing into Georgian as a loan,

kadagi, means “foreteller”: this suggests that the Ossetic bard had some mantic power; and indeed the *fændyr* is spoken of a horse one can ride, like the horse-headed fiddle that becomes the “mount” of Turco-Mongolian shamans. The recitation of the Nart sagas occupies the niche filled in antiquity by both bards and shamans.¹⁹

Profs. Scott Littleton and Linda Melcor published ten years ago an audacious and fascinating book, *From Scythia to Camelot*, in which they advanced the hypothesis that certain episodes in Arthurian epic that are evidently alien to wider Celtic tradition might have been borrowings: the ancient Celts heard Alans in Western Europe (some of them, presumably, the descendants of the cavalrymen settled there by Marcus Aurelius) chant songs related to the modern *Narts*, where these aspects are present. Some of them are: the rock-birth of the heroes (of Sanasar and Baldasar in the Armenian epic of Sasun), their sea-goddess mother (cf. Armenian Covinar, lit. “Lady of the Lake,” parallel to Satana), and the casting of the heroes’ magic sword back into the water it came from at the end of the epic (in a legend about P’ok’r Mher from the Šāhbāyī district of Van)²⁰ – appear as integral features of the Armenian Epic of Sasun. What is more important, they are attested also in Armenian sources relating to the period of the beginnings of Armenian Christianity (that is, they are pre-Christian images and tales used to shape the national legendry surrounding the birth of the new faith on Armenian soil) or in foreign writings of the pre-Christian era whose locus is Armenia and whose ultimate source is ancient Anatolian mythology (the *De fluviiis* of Ps.-Plutarch, on Mithra and *petrogenesis* on the banks of the Araxes; cf. *Mec* and P’ok’r Mher, i.e., Mithra, in the Sasun epic: Trubetskoy studied the Old Anatolian material to explain the *De fluviiis*, but missed the Armenian connection). On the basis of the chronological priority of the old Anatolian and Armenian sources and the thematic integrity of the Sasun narrative as a single and unified epic poem, I propose that, unless and until evidence to the contrary can be produced, we are compelled to accept that Armenian Anatolia was the *primary* source, of which the Alan epic of the Caucasus was but a *secondary* recipient, of the materials that Littleton and Melcor term Alan/Old Ossetic in the Arthurian cycle.

The Narts may be considered, then, the principal surviving literary monument of the North Iranian culture of the early Alans, shaped some two millennia ago under the partial influence of the earlier oral literary culture of ancient Armenia. The Nart sagas and their reciters occupied the privileged niche in Alan spiritual culture that had belonged to the bards and shamans of earlier Scythian society. This cycle of epic songs or sagas was received and elaborated by the various indigenous minority peoples of the Caucasus, whose secondary elaborations of the tales are the subject of a new book: Prof. John Colarusso, *Nart Sagas*

from the Caucasus: Myths and Legends from the Circassians, Abazas, Abkhaz, and Ubykhs, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002. Later arrivals in the area – Turkic tribes like the Balkars – also have versions of the *Narts*. Colarusso and several colleagues have produced an English translation of the Ossetic *Narts* (Madison, WI: Turko-Tatar Press, in publication). The present volume, under a Princeton imprint, will see very much wider distribution in the English-speaking world than that of Dumézil’s earlier French translation, so it is regrettable that the author, bafflingly, underplays and sometimes even undermines the North Iranian (which he often calls, imprecisely, Indo-Iranian) origin and essence of this epic cycle. He does this to such a degree that the overall presentation should mislead the uninitiated reader to suppose these secondary versions to be the primary sources.

In fact it is the North Iranian Ossetic tradition that is the *fons et origo* of all the others – Abkhaz, Adyghe (i.e. Cherkess, Circassian), etc. The great Ossetian scholar Abaev was right to stress this: it is manifestly wrong to suggest otherwise. The *Narts* are the only surviving *native* voice of the literary culture of once-vast Scythia. (The large corpus of written literature of Khotan Saka is overwhelmingly Buddhist.) Prof. Colarusso does acknowledge the true provenance of the Nart tradition in his voluminous, learned footnotes, where Iranian etymologies predominate. So perhaps his intention in stressing the non-Iranian narratives is to preempt and counteract a presumed Iranist chauvinism, and to argue, reasonably, that the recipients of another tradition can be seen to have dealt with it so creatively that it has become fully their own. There is certainly nothing superficial or parasitical about the role of the *Narts* among the non-Iranians of the Caucasus. The appropriation of Christianity from Semitic-language traditions into the Indo-European world is a fair example of such full and deep absorption of a tradition whose origins are in another culture and language-family, though the example points up the stresses and distortions that can occur in such a transfer. There are no such major distortions in the sharing of the *Narts*, though: the way of life of the Ossetes is not appreciably different from that of their various neighbors. The rival nationalisms of the Caucasus are a poisonous brew and Colarusso’s humanistic bid for pluralism is decent, even if perhaps he exaggerates his case at the expense of strict accuracy.²¹

The tales about the *Narts* are related to each other, and the chronicle of the clan (there are usually 101 Nart-men) has a clear beginning and end: both are features identical to those of the Armenian Sasun epic. But the numerous separate episodes are independent enough from one another for scholars to have described them as “sagas”; and Colarusso has judiciously adopted this term for his material. (The four principal “branches,” or chapters, of the Armenian epic of Sasun form one coherent narrative. But there are independent episodes within;

and many recitations contain additional, unrelated narratives, called by the Persian term *dāstān*.) The late Professor Ilya Gershevitch, a scholar of Ossetic, argued that there was “a Saka epic cycle centered around a predatory tribe called the Nart,” and that “the originality of the main motifs of the cycle, combined with the straight line which linguistically connects the present-day Ossetes with Sarmato-Alanic tribes of the beginning of our era, encourages the view that we are basically dealing with ancient Saka ‘oral-literary’ material.”²²

The Narts were born of divine twins, Äxsärtäg and Äxsär, whose names contain the pan-Iranian term for kingship, *xšathra-*. They kill each other, after which their mother, the lady Satana, gives birth to further progeny. According to one variant, she is naked in the river Terek, washing clothes and drying them on a rock. A shepherd on the opposite bank is so aroused by the sight of her beauty that he ejaculates powerfully. She flees behind the rock; but his semen flies across the river, striking the rock, and a son is born of it. In the Armenian Sasun epic, Satana’s equivalent, Covinar, declares she is thirsty, at which point a stone spurting a milky liquid rears up out of the waters of Lake Van. She wades in, drinks one-and-a-half handfuls, and gives birth after nine months to twins, one of whom is half the size of the other. But note that in Movsēs Xorenac’i’s narrative Artašēs takes Sat’enik – i.e., Satana with a diminutive suffix – to wife by casting a red leather strap across the Kura river and lassoing her around the waist. This is clearly a variant of the original from which the less aristocratic Nart story of shepherd and ejaculation emerged. On the SW face of Zimzimdagh, Van, near the spot where Covinar went into the lake for her drink, there is a carven blind portal, an Urartean “gate of the god”: the Armenians call it *Mheri durn*, “the Gate of Mher/Mithra” (Tk. *Meher kapisi*), and the last of the heroes of Sasun, P’ok’r Mher, waits behind it till Doomsday. And that narrative might in turn have had a religio-mythological basis. A cuneiform inscription of kings Išpuini and Menua on the portal invokes the divinities of the Urartean kingdom, including one *šu-i-ni-na-u-e DINGIR*, the Sea God (from the Urartean word *sue*, pronounced *l*tsve/* comes Armenian *cov*, “sea, lake”).²³ The Armenian and Ossetic incipits to epic are perhaps variants of an older type of a *hieros gamos*, in which a sea god captures and weds a woman who becomes the sea goddess. (In Scythian art, this is perhaps Argimpasa, who may be the divine being represented as a Siren-like woman above the waist; a Hydra-like congeries of writhing snakes, below.)²⁴

The semi-divine Narts wander about, hunting and feasting and fighting against enemies and, occasionally, each other. They foregather in a kind of mead-hall, the *nixās*, where they drink deep of the intoxicant potation *rong* from a magic grail-like cup, the *nartamonga*, which never empties and allows no coward to sip from itself. There is an echo here of Herodotus’ account (*Histories*,

4.66) of the bowl of wine the Scythians gave to the brave as a reward but withheld from cowards. The *nixas* contains also a stone slab: when one lies upon it, one forgets all sorrow. The Narts fight various monsters (this writer's favorite is the *uayg*, a chthonic thing that grabs at your ankles and drags you down to be smothered in dirt) and ride around on miraculous and ordinary horses, occasionally shooting their arrows at angelic beings, the *wasillas* (from *vaxš* "spirit, saint" Elijah) and *wastyrjis* (St. George). (The Ossetes dedicate shrines called *dzuar*, from Georgian *ǰvari*, "the Cross," at places where such spirits are believed to dwell.) Whenever God (Oss. *Khusau*, cf. Persian *Xodā*, "Lord") has had enough of Nart hubris for the time being, He throws the *calkh* ("wheel," cf. Persian *čarx*) Vālsāy at their knees, which kills them. (In Indo-European the word for knee [Gk. *gonu*, Arm. *cunr*, Rus. *koleno* meaning both "knee" and "generation"; etc.] is considered a genital organ, etymologically, socially, and symbolically: the Narts preserve this feature.) The metaphorical *čarx-e falak*, the Zodiacal wheel of fate of the Persians, is in Ossetia a literal discus. The epic of the Narts is all a ripping good read, without the artificiality and preciousness that mar J.R.R. Tolkien's rather pre-Raphaelite characters and landscapes of faërie (if you please). The Caucasians are interesting, full-blooded people who like strong drink, mettlesome horses, and honor.²⁵ Prof. Colarusso is a magnificent writer and story-teller, and he and his Caucasian informants and assistants have given us a wonderful book.

A large part of the volume is devoted to discussion of northwest Caucasian linguistics and to the morphological and grammatical analysis of terms and passages in the several languages of the texts. In a work meant to introduce the learned but general reader to the material, this might seem distracting and somewhat self-indulgent. A student of Caucasian languages might benefit from these parts of the work, but then – mused a Persianist friend about the book when I showed it to him – would a student of Persian reading a book in English of *dāstāns* from the *Šāh-nāme* epic benefit from a breakdown of the phrase *kār hamī konīd*, for instance, into "work (indef., acc.) [marker of continuous vb.] do (pres. 2 pers. pl.)"? Not much, but then Persian is easier and more accessible than, say, Svan. And if one can wade through Tolkien's appendices on his invented Quenya language (or put up with the actor Viggo Mortensen on the silver screen making subtitled comments in it, which sound more like lilting, cloying Irish than the intended Finnish, for that matter), then notes on Caucasian will have to do.

There is still much from an Iranist point of view to question. On p. 16, Colarusso wonders whether Ossetic *don* might perhaps be a North Caucasian borrowing. This suggestion is wrong: see OIr. *dānu-*, modern Oss. *don* (as in Mikhail Sholokhov's *Quiet Flows the Don* – and the Dnepr, Dnestr, and Danube,

all Alan riparian names). The Arm. river H(u)razdan, whose name comes ultimately from Frāzdānu, a lake mentioned in the sacred history in the Avesta of Zarathushtra's missionary career, also contains this base. The river, called the Zangu by the Tatars, flows in a deep gorge through modern Erevan.

Colarusso says Vedic Tvashtar, the name of a creator-god, comes from a term meaning "two stars": this is most unlikely. On p. 195, Ved. *vrtra-* means not "strangling" but "opposition." The Middle Iranian form of the divine name *Vərəthrayna-* is not Baram but Bahrām; and if the name Barambox is Iranian, as seems certain, then it should derive from Bahrām-boxt "granted (or saved) by Bahrām" (p. 195). Colarusso offers a convoluted explanation of the name Wardana on pp. 136-137, mentioning Odin and Ved. *vrddhana-* "giver of booty," without noticing that it is simply Parthian-in-Armenian Vardan, a very popular name of the great Ma- mikonean *naxarar-*clan,²⁶ whose native appanages in Tao-Klarjeti included Georgian-and Caucasian-speaking lands. The name means "growing, flourishing," and derives from the Middle Iranian act. part, *vardān*. There is a Mid. Pers. reflex of the name, Valān: cf. Arm. Varazvatan with the latter form. He suggests the name Batraz is from Turco-Mongolian *baatyr*; the latter Indo-European because of Rus. *bogatyr*, Pers. *bahādur*. This explanation is, I think, wrong on all counts: Batraz is not from *baatyr*; and the Russians and Persians got the latter word from the Mongols, not the other way around. These assertions, presented often as statements of accepted fact, somewhat undermine one's confidence in Prof. Colarusso's care in the consideration of things Iranian, and in his overall methodology. They do not detract, however, from the value and importance of the texts themselves, about which he always has illuminating things to say in his brilliant and important book.

A Noble Swineherd, or the Road to Eumaios: Argawan and Argwana

Movsēs Xorenac'i (*History of the Armenians* 2.44-51) relates that Argam, a prince of the Murac'ean clan and a descendant of Aždahak (here Astyages the Mede, whom Cyrus overthrew), fought for the Armenian king Eruand (Orontes) against Artasēs (Artaxias I). Some Medes had been settled around Mt. Ararat; so Argam had not come from afar. Artasēs, counselled by his wise tutor Smbat,²⁷ persuaded Argam to change sides, and, after victory, rewarded him richly and gave him second rank in the kingdom. (If Arm. *bdeašx*, Gk. *pitiaxēs*, etc., is to be explained as from Olr. **duvitya-* *xšaya-*, "ruling second," then that may have been the office promised Argam. But another possible derivation is **pati-axša-* "overseer," with no implication of a dual monarchy or even acknowledged se-

cond position). After these events, Artašēs confronted the Alans at the Kura river and abducted Satʿenik, who became queen. She bore him a son, Artawazd. The latter came to be jealous of old Argam, and incited a quarrel between him and the king at Argam’s banquet, fabricating the rumor of a plot.²⁸ Artašēs confiscated Argam’s possessions thereafter; and the prince, Artawazd, gained the coveted second rank of the realm. Satʿenik’s role in the stratagem against Argam is ambiguous: Movsēs alludes to the epic songs sung in Gołtʿn (a district in modern Naxijewan) about the ostensible passion of the queen for the descendants of Aždahak who later were slaughtered – that is, presumably, for Argam himself.

Xorenacʿi explains, believably, that Argam is the same person as the Argawan of the epic songs;²⁹ and an epic fragment cited earlier in the *History* (1.30) containing a number of enigmatic terms suggests Satʿenik desired passionately a crown or wedding veil³⁰ to be woven from certain herbs from Argawan’s pillow or banquetting-cushion (abl. pl. *barjicʿ*). That is, she might have slept with the man whom Artawazd contrived to show was a rival to his father Artašēs. And if she was made pregnant by him, then Artawazd might have been his son, rather than the true crown prince and heir of Artašēs. Certainly Artawazd later betrays some anxiety about his inheritance: much later, when Artašēs is dying, Artawazd objects, greedily and impiously, to the destruction accompanying the rites of mourning.³¹ His father pronounces the curse that Artawazd be seized by the *kʿajkʿ*, the mountain giants who dwell within Azat Masikʿ (Mt. Ararat). When Artawazd goes hunting, they seize him; and he is imprisoned in the mountain till the end of time.

The episode of father-son conflict followed by a curse and suspended animation till an apocalyptic *dénouement* finds a late echo in the Sasun epic (whose legendary-historical setting crystallized around the events of the Armenian rebellion of 851 against the Arab Caliphate). Artawazd is to remain imprisoned in Mt. Ararat, rather like Aždahāg in Damāvand, till the end of time, when he will emerge to ravage the world. Pʿokʿr Mher, cursed by his dead father, Davitʿ, is imprisoned behind the blind portal at Van that bears the Urartean inscription mentioned above: it is believed to open yearly on Ascension Eve; but only at the end of time will Mher emerge. In the interim he is covered with hair, like the abominable snowman type of Caucasian legend. He holds the *čarx-i falak*, the Zodiacal wheel (cf. the Zodiacal arch above the tauroctony scene in Roman mithraea, and of course the divine discus of fate in the *Nartae*) and rides his faithful magic horse. At the beginning of the Sasun epic, also, there are two Satʿenik-like figures, Covinar (“Lady of the Lake”) and *Kʿarāsun Deljun Cam* (“Forty Golden Locks”). The former provides the rock-birth of the founding twins; the latter is a sorceress who has to be won from her city that is difficult of access. One is progenetrix; the other, a sort of magician like the scheming Satʿenik of Movsēs’ narrative.

Thus the theme and structure – the ancient inner armature – of the Sasun epic can be seen to reflect the old Artaxiad cycle. Several narratives of the *Narts* mention the black³² hero Wryzmæg’s³³ courtship of Satana, who lives in a labyrinthine city and has a magical table. She will not marry him; so he sends an Armenian (*ermol*)³⁴ trader to fetch Argwana the Ugly, the Lord of the Pigs. He arrives mounted on his “boar-saddle” – that is, either a saddle fit for a wild boar or one made of boar leather – conquers the city, seizes Satana and her table, and carries them off. The maiden cries out in disgust that she will marry Warzamaeg if only the Narts will save her from the swineherd. They do; but later Argwana returns, finds her bathing in a stream, and rapes her. When Warzamaeg finds out what has happened, he makes war on Argwana and kills him (Colarusso, *Saga 4 “Setenaya and Argwana,”* pp. 34–48: an amalgam of four saga-variants).

The Argawan of Movsēs Xorenac’i is not a keeper of pigs and does not ride on a boar-saddle. Argwana of the Narts does; so it is important to examine the function of the sign of swine in the structure of the tale. Let us consider the play of these functional symbols – pig, banquet, bed – in another epic tale better known to the Western reader. It is the one involving the “glorious” swineherd of Ithaka, Eumaios. The latter, whose name is clearly marked to stress his positive role in the epic – it means “striver after good” or “kindly one” – is of noble blood: the son of a *basileus*, “king,” he was kidnapped in childhood and reduced to slavery (*Odysseia* 15.413–414). He welcomes Odysseus with a feast of pork before the hero, disguised as a beggar, goes down into town and wages the *selananeng* (“deceit at the table”) battle of all time. The suitors of Odysseus’ wife, Penelope, have been feasting in his own house – continuously, it would seem – since the hero’s departure for the war against Troy. They have thus violated the sacred law of hospitality, *philoxenia*, and of social restraint in every way, specifically against Odysseus’ family (his wife), his home (his table), and his kingdom. Elsewhere in the *Odyssey* the metamorphosis of Odysseus’ companions into swine provides a dramatic foreshadowing of the danger of the loss of human social identity that attends violation and excess. The suitors’ behavior is itself swinish: they wallow in the hall of the king enjoying themselves and indulging their gluttony.

Odysseus, demonstrating once more the qualities of his frequent epithets *ekhephron* “keeping his mind under control” and *polytropos* “versatile in his ways” employs the boundary between human and swine at the point of the *nostos*, instead of falling victim to it. He disguises himself as a beggar, and, with the help of the swineherd Eumaios, effects entrance into his palace, bearing the taunts and abuses of the suitors. There he traps and destroys them, regains Penelope, and recovers his kingdom. The later fortune of Odysseus is somewhat mysterious, involving places as uncannily alien as those he visited on his way

home from Ilion: it is prophesied that death will come to him from the sea in some wholly ordinary way, but only after travel to climes so distant that their denizens will not recognize an oar but think it a winnowing fan. Presumably, Telemachus will rule as king, but this is never related. Moreover, when the goddess Athena comes early in the poem to Ithaca disguised as an old family friend and questions Telemachus about his absent father, the boy replies ruefully that he has heard he is Odysseus' son, but nobody knows his own father. We know from the framing story of the Homeric epics that Telemachus is Odysseus' legitimate son, but the long absence of the king has introduced a dramatic uncertainty. This is something a Greek reader would have stopped to think about: after all, the fateful triangle of Oedipus, Laius, and Jocasta is central to the Hellenic tradition. The *topos* of a royal couple, interloper, and son of ambiguous origin is durable in later Greek literature, too: in the *Alexander Romance*, Alexander is the son of an Egyptian priest, Nectanebos, who comes in the guise of the god Zeus Ammon to Olympia, a woman in the harem of king Philip of Macedon. There is a battle later on at a banquet, where Alexander is accused of being a bastard – and Movsēs Xorenac⁴i, in turn, drew upon this scene for a description of a brawl involving an Armenian Bagratid prince!³⁵

In the *Odyssey*, then, the disposition of characters in the drama is: Odysseus, the dispossessed king seeking to restore his lands; Telemachus, the son anxious to restore his father's position and his own, but not quite sure of his own identity; Penelope, a *regina otiosa* weaving and unravelling, as though she were a remote goddess of fate; the helpful swineherd Eumaios; and the swinish suitors who seek to gain Penelope and supplant Odysseus. In the Artaxiad epic, as we have seen, Artašēs, Artawazd, and Sat'enik play out their analogous roles; but in the place of the multiple, swinish suitors there is the single Median nobleman Argam/Argawan. The latter is not marked by association with pigs; but the Argwana of the Nart saga is.

In the notes to this essay I have cited a study on a figure called in Armenia the Black Youth, in which I employed a method analogous to triangulation, considering Greek and Indian phenomena in their context at western and eastern poles from Armenia in order precisely to define an Indo-European prototype and then to explain its particular local development and permutation in Armenia. It is possible to employ the same method in the present instance, since there is Indian attestation of the *topos* of royalty and interloper, as well as a cultural dichotomy of boars vs. pigs: Prof. Stephanie Jamison has pointed out that ancient Indian legal texts deal with the issue of how long a woman need wait for an absent husband, how her suitors must act, who is entitled to give her away to a groom, and what the instruments emblematic of assumption of authority are to be (bows and arrows: Odysseus' chosen weapons)³⁶. The suitors are, in her view,

not without a case; so what Odysseus accomplishes is therefore a kind of lawful abduction. She regards the episode of Eumaios the swineherd as “a subtle underlining of the kingship theme”, with the pigs foreshadowing, as it were, the great recognition scene when the nurse Eurykleia recognizes Odysseus by the scar given by a boar during a hunt long ago. That scene of recognition, so masterfully analyzed in Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis*, restores everything to the long-gone, nearly nameless Odysseus at once: his maternal grandfather Autolykos (“Lone Wolf,” so like him!) with whom he was hunting, who had named him from the word *odyssamenos*, “causer of pain,” and the boar-symbol of his kingship.

Argwana, Lord of the Pigs, is not just a swineherd, else how could he share the noble company of the Nart heroes? He must have a *boar* saddle, too: this second kind of pig is a royal, even divine, totem. The dangerous boar is particularly appropriate to the Persian royal hunt, and the boar (Av. *varāza-*, Arm. 1-w *varaz*) is in the Avesta a totem of the god Vərəθraϥna; it served as the emblem of the Armenian Arsacid dynasty. But the domestic pig is not so noble; and Dionysius bar Salibi, a Syrian Christian writer who lived at close quarters with Armenians at Melitene, took advantage in his anti-Armenian polemic of the kinship of boars and pigs to declaim, “Your head [not a king! – J.R.R.] Tiridates was a pig [not a *varaz!* – J.R.R.] and so are you.”³⁷ As Prof. Nina Garsoian noted long ago,³⁸ the myth in the *History* of the conversion of the Armenians of Agathangelos of the transformation of King Tiridates IV the Great, persecutor of St. Gregory, specifically into a boar – on the Biblical model of Nebuchadnezzar’s metamorphosis into an ox, modified by local, Iranian symbolism – served to invert the Arsacid image. The divine boar became a sign of disgrace rather than nobility. In the Nart tale of Argwana, the same dichotomy may be employed to the opposite effect, without depriving the story, at the same time, of the special symbolism of pigs. For there is a vulgar and deprecatory sexual overtone attaching to pigs: cf. Boccaccio’s “order of the Porcellana” in the *Decameron*, a jocular euphemism for clerical sodomy; and the modern American slang usage “por-king,” used of intercourse generally. This is perhaps because these intelligent and inoffensive creatures, so close socially³⁹ and physiologically to human beings, perform without inhibition acts such as eating (in English a person without table manners or restraint “eats like a pig”) and copulating that human society surrounds with taboos of propriety and privacy.

I would suggest that the function of the pig or swineherd at the point of sexual conquest (of Sat’enic/Satana, by Artašēs or Warzamaeg) or re-conquest (of Penelope, by Odysseus) in an epic narrative is to signal the use of a force that is natural and violent but immediately contiguous to the social sphere and thus meaningful to its functions, of the necessary sweeping-away of social inhibitions

that have become obstacles. Pigs are the perfect symbol of the marginal wild animal. They are not so domesticated as to live in the very same room as their masters, as cats and dogs do; yet they live often under the same roof. Pigs eat, pigs copulate, not in faraway fields, but often within the same buildings humans inhabit. Swineherds take pigs out to graze on acorns, yet to the mediaeval commentator the accepted symbolism was so potent that the scene was interpreted as emblematic of gluttony and sexual excess, as well as the barrenness of unnatural intercourse⁴⁰. Violate the rules of the table or the marital bed, and you risk becoming a pig – or having the wronged party in an epic tale sweep custom away and use the direct force of swine against you. The suitors insist on manipulating the propriety of the table? asks Odysseus. I will show you how to play dinner politics! You are too fastidious to accept my suit, Satana, and hide in your labyrinth? asks Warzamaeg. I will let Argwana kidnap you, then! The outrage of the rape here, subsequent to the abduction, seems also to be a kind of breaking-in of a recalcitrant bride: one recalls that in the Ossetic Nart sagas Satana is naked in the river Terek when a shepherd on the opposite bank sees her, is aroused, and ejaculates. She hides behind a rock, but it is impregnated and her son, the first Nart, is born. So hesitancy, necessity, and result all find the locus of a river, as in the incident with Argwana: the setting mitigates or shades the meaning of the rape, perhaps. And one notices how in both the Armenian and Nart epics – as in the *Odyssey* and *Alexander Romance* – the banquet plays a role, as a human institution that has been violated.

The late Prof. C.J.F. Dowsett, who studied the Armenian material⁴¹, points out an incident in the Ossetic *Narts* parallel to the episode in Movsēs Xorenac’i involving Artašēs, Argawan, and Sat’enik: the Boratae family of Narts seek to kill Satana’s husband Uryzmæg (=Warzamæg) by ambushing him at a banquet in the Narts’ hall, the *nixās*. Satana and the hero Batraz thwart the plot. Dowsett suggested that Argawan is Sat’enik’s Alan father and not the same person as Argam even if Moses claims he is. Though I do not agree with the latter division of the two, Dowsett was surely on the right track in other respects, not only in citing the Nart parallel, but also in stressing that the “Armenian” Sat’enik of Movsēs Xorenac’i is older and nobler than the character Satana in the recently-recorded Nart sagas. He did not have access to the variants (presumably Ossetic at first, and perhaps also older than the existing Ossetic story Dowsett cites, but now attested only in extra-Ossetic *Nebenüberlieferungen*) that include the name Argwana, though. In these, it is Argwana’s son, Shebatinuquo,⁴² who replaces Batraz/Pataraz and, with Satana, saves his father from an attempt by the Narts to poison him at the banquet-hall (Colanisso, Saga 10). So the role of the swineherd in the thwarting of the scheming banqueters is present, though displaced by one generation. And Colarusso, who seems to be unaware of Dowsett’s and others’

studies of the Armenian epic sources, consequently fails to notice that the Nart tale is simply an intriguing retelling of a legend attested first in the ancient Armenian Artaxiad cycle. Not even the odd cameo appearance of an anachronous Armenian merchant sparked his curiosity, though it indicates to me that the tellers of the tale associated it still, obscurely, with the traditions of their southern neighbor⁴³.

In the tale collated by Prof. Colarusso, Sat'enik, a magic table, Argawan, sexual misconduct, and the killing all occur more or less in their right order. Instead of acting as the turncoat whose betrayal of Eruand secures Artašēs' victory, though, Argawan here is the conqueror for Warzamaeg of Satana – a telescoping of the two stories of war and abduction. The sexual betrayal and punishment follow. Colarusso, not recognizing the Armeno-Iranian name, speculates about the etymology of Argwana, which he thinks an “extraordinary” name “clearly” linked with Greek *Gorgon*. But Argawan/Argwana and the Gorgons really have nothing in common. Nor is Colarusso's ingenious etymology from Ubykh yielding the picturesque and functional **“vagina-crammer”* likely to be accurate, when the source of the tale is – as I have shown here – a historical episode of the pre-Christian period cast in epic, involving an Armenian nobleman of Median descent with a respectable and straightforward Iranian name, rather than an archetypal saga with a villain named Rapist. It has over centuries of retelling gradually been absorbed, rather, into the milieu such a tale, with the enrichment of the dynamic symbol of the swine – a feature whose function in epic narrative I think one can now define by recourse to the parallel case of the Homeric poem⁴⁴.

The etymology of the name Argawan is straightforward. It means “Valuable” or “Precious” (as the wistful Sméagol, back in J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle Earth, calls the Ring), or, more precisely perhaps as the appellation of an ancient *naxarar*, “Noble”. It is, as one would hope and expect, a Northwestern Middle Iranian name – suitable for an Armenian of the second century B.C. or later, or a descendant of speakers of “Middle Median”. The late Prof. D. N. MacKenzie observed that *’rg’w* “noble” in the Parthian documents from Turfan derives from **argāwan*, cf. Ossetic *āry*, “worth”.⁴⁵ Hrač'eay Ačarean in his *Dictionary of Armenian Proper Names*, vol. 1, pp. 271, 301, regards both Argawan and Argam as variants of each other (Argam < Argaw?) and considers them related to the name Arjewan, which we find attested in Armenian: Arjewan was a scholarly companion of Koriwn (the disciple and hagiographer of St. Mesrop Maštoc', 5th cent. A.D.) who travelled with him to Jerusalem. This form, Arjewan, is well known and very old: it appears in the Avesta as the name of a Zoroastrian believer, Arəjavan (Vast 13.117; and see M. Mayrhofer, *Iranisches Personennamenbuch* vol. 1, 1.23 s.v.). His name means “possessing worth” (Av. *arəjah-*), and is analogous to and synonymous with Argawan. The Armenian usage of the name Arje-

wan would seem to have been a conscious Avesticism of pious Zoroastrians at some point. Another Zoroastrian name in the same list in the *Fravardīn yašt*, Arəjāngahant, means the same thing. The verbal base *arg-* means “to be worth”, and is very productive, both in Iranian, and in Armenian loans such as *y-argem*, “I esteem”, *argoy* “precious, honorable”, *an-argem* “I dishonor”, etc.⁴⁶ Argawan, “Noble,” is not an Avesticism, just a suitable and normal appellation of a *naxarar*.

There remains to be considered the route of transmission of the Argawan episode. The first consideration of the data must be chronological priority. In this regard there is no doubt that Armenia is the source of the episode of Argwana in the Nartae, as the tale is first attested in the *History* of Movsēs, centuries before the first written record of the Ossetic epic – never mind the transmission and translations of the latter into Northwest Caucasian languages. However the clear rules of filiation of written texts cannot with equal certainty be applied to the development of oral literature; so a recently-transcribed oral text may well be as old, or older, than one that has been set down anteriorly in writing. And while it is the case that Movsēs himself insists that the entire tale is an oral epic he is transcribing from a recitation he has heard with his own ears, it is still possible that the parts of the story that he retells, rather than transmitting them in poetic form, and are, therefore, his own words rather than words he has heard, have been subjected to recasting. After all, Movsēs was no stranger to the *Alexander Romance* and other Hellenistic literature. Given his fondness for the devices of Euhemerus – the rationalization of ancient myths as human, earthly events – it is possible that Movsēs took an Ossetic figure of legend, a swineherd Argawan, stripped that character of all references to boars and pigs, and made of him another kind of animal, a *politikon zōon*, a Median nobleman moved more by affairs of state than by lower passions. Such a change might have made sense to Movsēs as a clarification of the historical record, rather than a distortion of an epic text with mythological elements. The Armenians’ rivalry with the Medes is a leitmotif that pervades the various epic fragments relating to the Achaemenian and Artaxiad periods. The epic of Tigran II (“the Great,” r. 95–56 B.C.) is the best and most obvious example. Tigran’s first problems and triumphs were both to the southeast of *Mec Hayk*, “Greater Armenia,” in Media Atropatēnē. It was simple enough to make of Astyages/*Rštivaiga (lit. “spear-caster”) both a political opponent and a mythical Avestan dragon-man (Aži Dahāka > Aždahak). The *Drachenkampf* has till recent times been durable political propaganda⁴⁷. Against the argument that Argawan was first proto-Nart swineherd and only later a Median nobleman in a rationalized Armenian historical text, one can note that the “Median”, pig-less component of Movsēs’ *History* exists, in respect of Argawan, in both the metric and prose passages; so there is no good reason to suggest that

Argawan-the-Mede was Movsēs' own innovation and was not known that way to the oral bards to whose songs Movsēs listened. The innovation, if there was one, might have been theirs, but guessing at a stage remotely previous to the evidence would seem a febrile undertaking. It should scarcely be worth mention, save for other aspects of the tale where the Armenian bards might possibly have resorted themselves to euphemism – though the euphemism is mythological, not real-world political – to escape calling a king a bastard. They sang that the progeny of the dragon (Arm. *višapazunk'*, i.e., the brood of Aždahak – the Medes!) stole the infant Artawazd and put a demon (*dew*) in his place. The narrative in the Nart epic makes it plain that the character parallel to Artawazd is not a changeling, but an illegitimate son. On the level of the logic of storytelling, that circumstance explains his later, anxious efforts to dispose of embarrassing witnesses better than his simply being a demon-child might do. Not that demonic children are alien to Armenian epic narrative: Pap, son of the fourth-century king Arsak II in the *Buzandaran*, has snakes writhing round his bedposts. And demons are as bad as pigs – maybe worse, if the demons are Medes besides.

The basic Indo-European *topos* of the episode is of a king, his abducted queen-bride, their son, and an interloper of noble birth or nature (a prince, son of a *basileus*, association with the sacred *varāz*-animal) compromised by station (slavery) or degrading associations (Median birth, common swine). In the *Odyssey*, the function of the interloper is displaced onto the suitors, but the trace of an older pattern remains in the swineherd Eumaios, whose character is manipulated in such a way as to play out the tricky versatility of Odysseus. In Vedic India, the *topos* becomes the occasion for the discussion of legitimate claims in marriage. In Armenia, the role of the interloper is absorbed into the large theme of Armenian struggle against the Medes, in the narrative of Movsēs Xorenac'i. The recurrence of the tale in a Circassian narrative deriving from a lost version of the episode in the Ossetic *Nartæ* shows a borrowing from Armenian through the presence of a character named Argwana (i.e., Argawan); but the latter's association with **pigs**, and the recollection of his compromised nobility by mention of a **boar**, would indicate a *secondary archaization* – the reapplication of an older set of images to a narrative that might have been pre-existing but that was reinforced by borrowing from Armenian oral epic narrative. Such recrudescence of archaic material in the Caucasus of the Golden Fleece, Prometheus, and a local legend of a Cyclops, is unremarkable. But the discovery of an independent witness of Armenia's Father of Histories after over a millennium is worth these remarks.

A nobleman finds a dynasty, or a king returns home to reconquer his kingdom. He must acquire, or recover, a wife. The woman is mysterious and obscure – maybe a witch, or a goddess, certainly an autonomous sexual being. Her husband can never entirely conquer or know her. Just beyond the boundary

of sight, or social station, or civilized propriety, is an ambiguous figure who is both needed and threatening – a source of both powerful help and of violence and lust. The issue of the royal couple, or of the tense triangle, is a son. The latter is anxious to establish his own position against his father, and he is not really certain who his father is, or who besides his supposed, legal father has diverted the passions of his mother. So he resorts to stealth and violence himself, ironically reinforcing by the character of his methods the ambiguity in his situation that he seeks so urgently to overcome. This Indo-European topos is played out in the armature of epic; and the plot retains its actuality, its relevance. It will be of perennial interest to any person interested in the nexus of family relations, political power, and human ignorance. And it is not unknown in the more dramatic moments of English literature: “...The base / Shall top th’ legitimate. I grow, I prosper. / Now gods, stand up for bastards.”⁴⁸ But that is another – though related – story.

Texts and summaries

I. *Movsēs Xorenac’i: the Artaxiad epic cycle*

(M. Abelean, S. Yarut’iwnean, eds., *Movsēs Xorenac’i, Patmut’iwn Hayoc’*, Tiflis, 1913: all translations my own.)

1. 11.44–46. Artašēs (Ārtaxias I) rebels against the king of Armenia, Eruand (Orontes). Argam, a nobleman of the Muracean clan, of Median descent, is persuaded by an emissary of Artašēs to switch sides, with the promise that he will be given second rank in Artašēs’ kingdom as a reward.

2.11.50 Later, Artašēs has captured an Alan prince: the latter’s sister Sat’enik comes to the opposite bank of the river and pleads for his release.

*Քեզ ասեմ, այր քաջ Արտաշէս, որ յաղթեցեր քաջ ազգին Ալանաց. եկ հաւանեաց՝ բանից
աշագեղոյ դստերս Ալանաց՝ տալ զպատանիդ. զի վասն միոյ քինու ոչ է աւրէն
դիւցազանց՝ զայլոց դիւցազանց զարմից բառնալ զկենդանութիւն, կամ
ծառայեցուցանելով ի ստրկաց կարգի պահել, և թշնամութիւն յաւիտենական ի մէջ
երկրոցունց ազգաց քաջաց հաստատել:*

“I tell you, brave (*k’aj*) man Artašēs, who have conquered the brave nation of the Alans, come and agree to the words of the lovely-eyed daughter of the Alans and give back the youth. For it is not the custom (*awrēn*) of heroes (*diwc’azanc’*)⁴⁹ to deprive of their life other races of heroes, nor yet to keep them in the rank of slaves by subjugating them to servitude and establishing thereby an eternal enmity between the two nations”.

3. Artašēs then desires Sat‘enik (Ossetic, Satana) and sends to the Alan king asking for her hand in marriage, but he replies that she is too precious.

Եւ ուստի՞ տացէ քաջն Արտաշէս հազարս ի հազարաց և բիւրս ի բիւրոց ընդ քաջազգւոյ կոյս աւրիորդիս Ալանաց:

“And from where will brave Artašēs give thousands of thousands and myriads of myriads in exchange for this virgin maiden of heroic race (*k‘ajazgwoy*) of the Alans?”

4. So Artašēs abducts her.

Հեծաւ արի Արտաշէս ի սեաւն գեղեցիկ, և հանեալ զոսկէաւղ շիկափոկ պարանն՝ և անցեալ որպէս զարծուի սրաթև ընդ գետն, և ձգեալ զոսկէաւղ շիկափոկ պարանն՝ ընկէց ի մէջք աւրիորդին Ալանաց, և շատ ցաւեցոյց զմէջք փափուկ աւրիորդին, արագ հասուցանելով ի բանակն իւր:

“The noble (*ari*) Artašēs mounted a beautiful black [steed], and, taking out the red leather lasso adorned with gold rings, and crossing the river like a swift-winged eagle, and casting the red leather lasso adorned with gold rings, he cinched it round the waist of the maiden of the Alans, and he caused much hurt to the waist of the delicate maiden, speedily bringing her to his encampment (*banakn*)”.⁵⁰

5. The wedding of Artašēs and Sat‘enik.

Տեղ ոսկի տեղալը ի փեսայութեանն Արտաշիսի, տեղալը մարգարիտ ի հարսնութեանն Սաթինկանն:

“Rain of gold rained when Artašēs was groom; pearls rained when Sat‘enik was bride.

6. Sat‘enik’s mysterious passion and the reappearance of Argam/Argawan.

Այլ և տենչայ, ասեն, Սաթինիկ տիկին տենչանս՝ զարտախուր խաւարտ և զտից խաւարծի ի բարձիցն Արգաւանայ:

“But they say Sat‘enik also desired a strong desire, for a *tiara/veil (*artaxur*, var. *artaxoyr*) of greens (?) and shoots of straw (?) from the banquetting-pillows (*barjic‘n*)⁵¹ of Argawan”.

7. 11.61 Artawazd is born: but is he the son of Artašēs or of the “dragon” (i.e., the Mede – Argam/Argawan)?

Եւ զայս նոյն երգիչքն յառասպելին ասեն այսպէս. եթէ Վիշապազունք գողացան զմանուկն Արտաւազդ, և դև փոխանակ եղին:

“And the singers tell this same thing in the bardic tale (*varaspelin*) thus: The progeny of the dragon (*višapaxunk‘*) stole the child Artawazd, and put a demon (*dew*) in his place”.

8. 1.30 Argawan plots against Artasēs.

Այլ և ճաշ ասեն գործեալ Արգաւանայ ի պատիւ Արտաշէիսի, և խարդաւանակ լեալ նմին ի տաճարին վիշապաց:

“But they also say Argawan made a feast (*čaš*) in honor of Artasēs, and plotted treachery against him in the palace (*tačarin*)⁵² of the dragons (*višapac*).”

[In 11.51, Movsēs claims Artawazd, son of Artasēs, was jealous of Argam’s second rank in the realm and falsely accused him at the feast of plotting against the king. Artasēs kills him.

Movsēs further explains:

Այս Արգամ է, որ յառասպելին Արգաւանն անուանի.

“This is Argam, who is called Argawan in the bardic tale (*yaraspelin*)”.]

9. The elegy of the dying Artasēs (cited by Grigor Magistros Pahlawuni, d. 1058, *Letter* 33).

Ո՞ տայր ինձ, ասէր, զծուխ ծխանի և զառաւաւտն նաւասարդի, զվազելն եղանց և զվազելն եղչերուաց: Մեք փող հարուաք և թմբկի հարկանէաք, որպէս արէնն է թագաւորաց:

“Who would give me – said he – the smoke of the smoke-hole and the morning of Nawasard⁵³, the running of hinds and the galloping of stags? We blew the horn and struck the drum, as is the way (*awrēn*)⁵⁴ of kings”.

[Cf. the Middle English elegy of the Wanderer: “Were is that lawhing and that song,/ That trayling and that proude gong,/ Tho havekes and the houndes?/ Al that is joye is went away,/ That wele is comen to weylaway,/ To many harde stoundes.”]

10.11.61 The funeral of Artasēs: Artawazd complains to his father about the destruction of property by the mourners.

Մինչ դու գնացեր, և գերկիրս ամենայն ընդ քեզ տարար, ես աւերակացս ո՞ւմ թագաւորեմ:

“Now that you have gone and taken the whole land with you, to what purpose shall I reign over these ruins?”

11. Artasēs then curses him, and the epic cycle reaches its apocalyptic dénouement.

Եթէ դու յորս հեծցիս յԱզատն ի վեր ի Մասիս, զքեզ կայցին քաջք, տարցին յԱզատն ի վեր ի Մասիս, անդ կայցես, և զլոյս մի տեսցես: Զրուցեն զամանէ և պառաւունք, եթէ արգելեալ կայ յայրի միում, կապեալ երկաթի շղթայիւք. և երկու շունք հանապազ կրծերով զշղթայսն՝ ջանայ ելանել և առնել վախճան աշխարհի. այլ ի ձայնէ

“If you ride to the hunt on Greater Ararat (*yAzat... Masis*), may the titans (*k‘ajk‘*)⁵⁵ seize you and take you up on Greater Ararat: there may you stay, and may you not see the light!’ Old women (*pařawunk**)⁵⁶ tell about him the tale that he stays imprisoned in a cave, bound with iron chains; and as two dogs daily gnaw at the chains, he tries to get out and make an end of the world. But, they say, from the sound of the smiths striking their anvils, his chains are strengthened. For this reason even in our time many smiths, following the bardic tale (*ařaspelin*), on the first day of the week strike their anvil three or four times, so that, they say, the chains of Artawazd may be strengthened”.

[NB. This must be the **ghost** of Artašēs speaking; so the parallel to the Sasun epic is exact: the **dead** Dawit‘ curses his son P‘ok‘r Mher (Mithra the Younger) with immortal confinement in Agrawuc‘ K‘ar, Ravens’ Rock, at Van till the end of time.]

II. The Circassian Version of the Narts: The Saga of Setenaya and Argwana

(John Colarusso, tr., *Nart Sagas from the Caucasus: Myths and Legends from the Circassians, Abazas, Abkhaz, and Ubykhs*, Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2002.)

1. Saga 4. The widowed Nart Warzameg⁵⁷ desires to marry Setenaya [i.e., Satana, Sat‘enik], who has a magical table that brings food whenever one wants it. But she refuses him, so he decides to conquer her city, Ghund-Ghund, and abduct her.

2. The city cannot be conquered without the help of the *swineherd* Argwana, so an Armenian (*yarmal*) trader goes to get him.

3. Argwana is mounted on a boar-saddle. He leads the Narts and captures the city, abducting Setenaya.

4. Argwana relinquishes Setenaya to Warzameg but comes back secretly and ravishes her: she will give birth to a son from him, Shebatinuquo.

5. When Warzameg undresses Setenaya on their wedding night, he sees her bruises and she explains her rape by Argwana. Warzameg has him killed.

6. Saga 10. Setenaya and Shebatinuquo save Warzameg from an attempt by the other Narts to poison him in the banquetting-hall.

III. The Odyssey of Homer

1. While Odysseus is away fighting at Troy, the young noblemen of Ithaka try to force his wife, Penelope, to remarry. They take over Odysseus’ palace and consume his possessions.

2. Odysseus' son Telemakhos ("fighter from faraway") tries to defend Penelope against the suitors' encroachments. Athena visits him and he avers that though he has been told Odysseus is his father he does not really know.

3. Odysseus returns secretly to Ithaka: the *swineherd* Eumaios ("Well-intentioned"), who is the son of a king and was abducted as a boy into slavery, receives him and helps him to return to his palace masquerading as a beggar.

4. The nurse Eurykleia ("Wide-Famed") washes the beggar's feet and recognizes him as Odysseus by the scar left by a wound from a wild *boar* when he went hunting as a boy with his grandfather Autolykos ("Lone Wolf"), who had named him (from *odyssamenos*, "causer of pain").

5. Odysseus and Telemakhos ambush the suitors in the banquetting-hall of the palace and kill them all.

6. Odysseus regains his kingdom.

NOTES

¹ In later times, the term *gōsān* was replaced, for reciters of lyric and romantic verses and cycles, by *ašul* /*ashugh*/, a loan from Arabic 'ašiq, "lover"; those who recited and chanted the heroic epic of Sasun were called *asac'ol*, "sayer, reciter" (cf. the mediaeval usage *asolik*).

² There is an elegy of the dying Artašēs, probably from the same cycle, in the *Letters* of Grigor Magistros Pahlawuni: see J. R. Russell, "Some Iranian Images of Kingship in the Armenian Artaxiad Epic", *REArm* 20, 1986–1987, esp. p. 259, reprinted in J. R. Russell, *Armenian and Iranian Studies*, Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies 9, Cambridge, MA, 2004 (=AIS). But the Circassian version of the Narts *repeats* a detail from Xorenac'i.

³ On the reception of Ossian in Russia, see Yu.D. Levin, ed., James Macpherson, *Poemy Ossiana*, Series Akademiya Nauk SSSR: Literaturnye Pamyatniki, Leningrad: Nauka, 1983, esp. pp. 277–458, with texts of over thirty writers, from Pushkin to Mandelstam, that deal with Ossian. On Igor see, most recently, Edward L. Keenan, *Josef Dobrovsky and the Origins of the Igor Tale* (Harvard Series in Ukrainian Studies, Cambridge, MA, 2003).

Vladimir Nabokov, who translated the Igor Tale, was cryptically inconclusive as to its authenticity in his commentary on the text. He enjoyed the intricate aesthetic possibilities of this very ambiguity, as can be seen from his own novel of epic poem and commentary, *Pale Fire*, where names appear as their own mirror-images, and, sure enough, one Conmal, the inverted Malcolm of *Ossian*, appears as the translator of Shakespeare into Nabokov's invented Zemblan language. (But there is a real Novaya "Zembla" with a Nabokov river!) The pure intellectual playfulness of Nabokov's literary art, a kind of verbal equivalent of his fellow émigré Pavel Tchelitchew's (Chelishchev) famous painting "Hide and Seek", raises the entire issue above the vulgarity of falsification and nationalism.

⁴ There is nothing of Russian playfulness and dreamlike invention in the history of the Germans and their epic. Wagner's self-important operas, his own racial anti-Semitism, the proto-fascist pageantry of the Wagnerfests at Bayreuth, and Hitler's espousal of the "Nordic" ideology of the Ring cycle, form a straight line to the crematorium.

⁵ See my discussion of it, and of the uses of epic in religious proselytization in ancient Armenia, in the art. "The Epic of the Pearl", *Revue des Études Arméniennes* 28, 2002, reprinted in *AIS*.

⁶ When Tolkien was recovering in an English hospital from a case of trench fever he caught during the frightful battle of the Somme, he was treated by a doctor named Gamgee who was related to the inventor of a kind of surgical bandage which bore his name. So the role of the sidekick who takes care of the hero could not be more literal.

⁷ The oral and written versions of this Kurmanci epic romance reciprocally influenced each other over time. On this case, and on an analogous Armenian text, with some discussion of the politics of epic, see James R. Russell, intro. and tr., Karapet Sital, *An Armenian Epic: The Heroes of Kasht (Kašti k' ajer)*, Ann Arbor, MI: Caravan Books, 2000, p. 28 and n. 34.

⁸ The literature on the Scythians, especially in the area of art and archaeology, is vast. The best recent survey is Renate Rolle, *The World of the Scythians*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989. On art, see Esther Jacobson, *The Art of the Scythians: The Interpenetration of Cultures at the Edge of the Hellenistic World*, Handbuch der Orientalistik S.2, Leiden: Brill, 1995.

⁹ The Scythian shamans were initiated by being tied down on horses and run bareback till their testicles were crushed and they were either killed or left alive but unmanned. These no longer natural men were thus called *enarees* or *anarieis*, in Greek transcription; and this is the same Iranian word as Armenian *anari*, meaning "monstrous", and probably comes from **a-narya-*, "un-manly" or, literally, "unmanned." Sexual reversal or ambiguity is a salient feature of the shaman's identity in a number of cultures, notably the case of the "berdaches" of Native American culture, who served as seers and sometimes had relationships with the super-masculine warriors (see Walter L. Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture*, Boston: Beacon, 1986). The Alan martial epic heroes are **nar-thrya-*, "manly", men *par excellence*, the *Narts*. (Another praiseworthy quality was what is called in Pahlavi *ērīh*, "Iranian-ness," a concept combining the virtues of moral and physical strength. It derives from the much-abused adjective *arya-*, "noble", and is reflected in the character in the Narts, prince Aleg, whose name Colarusso derives from **arya-ka-*.

¹⁰ In the summer of 2000 I visited the mausoleum of the Persian epic poet Ferdowsī at Tus near Mashhad. The short-lived, neo-Achaemenian Pahlavi dynasty of the twentieth century built the wonderful edifice, decorating the interior with bas-reliefs reminiscent of the friezes of the Parthenon. There is also an ethnographic museum there, with the gifts of various visitors on display, notably a plaque dedicated by Polish airmen in World War II – who describe themselves as Sarmatians paying homage to their Iranian brethren!

¹¹ Russian and Ukrainian scholars have also been at the forefront of research: one might mention, amongst the earlier writers, such titans as Mikhail Rostovtzeff (*Iranians and Greeks in*

South Russia, 1922, repr. New York: Russell & Russell, 1969) and Yulian Andreevich Kulakovskii (see most recently S.M. Perevalov, ed., Yu. A. Kulakovskii, *Izbrannye trudy po istorii Alanov i Sarmatii*, Series *Vizantiiskaya Biblioteka*, St. Petersburg: Aleteiya, 2000).

¹² See J. R. Russell, “The *Šāh-nāmē* in Armenian Oral Epic”, reprinted in *AIS*, pp. 1063–1072.

¹³ Two Achaemenian bullae of the 5th–4th cent. B.C. were excavated in 1979 at the site of the Armenian Artaxiad and early Arsacid capital, Artašat (Gk. Artaxata), which depict six captives with their hands tied behind them, standing one behind the other and facing right (see Jacques Santrot et al., eds, *Arménie: Tresors de l’Arménie ancienne*, Paris: Somogy/ Editions de l’Art, 1996, pp. 222–223, pis. 210 a-b). The composition of the scene is that of the triumphal relief of Darius I at Behistun, except that in the latter only one captive is a Scythian (added on later, it seems, with tall, pointed *tigraxauda*-hat and all). On the bullae from Artašat, though, all six captives are Scythians: perhaps this reflects the actual political concerns of the time, when that northern neighbor of the satrapy of Armenia loomed so large.

¹⁴ Upon entering a host’s premises, Ossetes politely wish *Farn acy khadzary*, “Happiness upon this house!” The expression is common in various Caucasian cultures, notably Georgia. *Farn* is Old Iranian *farnah*-, Avestan *khvarenah*-, Sogdian *farn*, and Armenian loan *p’arġk’* “glory”.

¹⁵ A Latin inscription found at Artašat – where also the bullae with Scythian captives come from! – was dedicated to Marcus Aurelius by the Legion XV Apollinaris.

¹⁶ See J. R. Russell, “Scythians and Avesta in a Mediaeval Armenian Vernacular Paternoster, and a Zok Paternoster”, *Le Museon* 110.1-2, 1997, pp. 91–114, repr. in *AIS*. Tork’ Dalalyan’s brilliant doctoral thesis, *Hay-Osakan lezvamšakut’ ayin ar nĉ’ ut’ yunner* (“Armeno-Ossetic linguistic and cultural relations”), Institute of Linguistics, Erevan State university, 2002, supervised by Professor Garnik Asatryan, analyzes the numerous features of interaction between the two peoples.

¹⁷ See R. W. Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History: The Medieval Armenian Adaptation of the Georgian Chronicles*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, pp. 53–54. In this text, Artašēs I, early second century B.C., has been conflated with his Armenian Arsacid namesake of the late first century A.D.

¹⁸ There is a French translation by Georges Dumézil in the UNESCO series (*Le livre des héros: Légendes sur les Nartes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1965); and his *Romans de Scythie et d’alentour* (Paris: Editions Payot, 1978) is still the best overall study of the epic and its ancient sources. The authoritative scholar of Ossetic, V. I. Abaev, chaired the editorial committee that published the Russian translation of the epic: *Narty: Epos osetinskogo naroda*, Moscow: Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 1957.

¹⁹ See K. K. Kochiev, “Syrdonova arfa,” in G. Gnoli, ed., *Studia Iranica et Alanica* (Festschrift Vasilii Ivanovich Abaev), Rome: Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, 1998, pp. 221–240; and J.R. Russell, “Kartīr and Māni: a Shamanistic Model of Their Conflict,” in *Iranica Varia: Papers in Honor of Professor Ehsan Yarshater*, Acta Iranica 30, Leiden: Brill, 1990,

pp. 180–193, repr. *AIS*. I have argued that the *ēwēn mahr* “*ritual mantra” Kartir used was the Avestan formula *humata huxta hvaršta*, “good thoughts, good words, good deeds” (J. R. Russell, “A Parthian *Bhagavad Gita* and its Echoes”, in J.-P. Mahe, R. W. Thomson, eds., *From Byzantium to Iran: In Honour of Nina Garsoian*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996, pp. 24–25, repr. in *AIS*). H.S. Nyberg in his *Die Religionen des Alien Iran*, 1938, used the ethnographic data on shamanism to explain aspects of the activity of Zarathustra. The Nazis considered shamanism a religious complex of “primitive” peoples and derided such treatment of an “Aryan” prophet. Some of this attitude shadows the later writings of W.B. Henning and others; but there is no *a priori* reason to consign shamanism to pre-literate peoples and to reject it in complex societies. The Jewish mystics who composed the pre-Kabbalistic Hekhalot texts, for instance, who emerged within the most intellectually sophisticated religious tradition in human history, can best be studied as shamans: see James R. Davila, *Descenders to the Chariot: The People behind the Hekhalot Literature*, Leiden: Brill, 2001, esp. chs. 2–7.

²⁰ The Armenian epic of Sasun mentions rock-birth, magic sword, and so on, but does not relate the subsequent of the fate of the sword, so important to the Arthurian and Nart cycles. This writer discovered them in other folk texts and in one oral narrative: on Armenian legends of the hero’s sword cast back into the lake, or of its protrusion from a stone – both having undergone heavy secondary Christianization – see J. R. Russell, “The Scepter of Tiridates”, *Le Muséon* 114.1-2, 2001, pp. 187–215, repr. in *AIS*.

²¹ The Caucasus, a turbulent region throughout history, is wracked by unprecedented conflict today. The Ossetes, many of whom are Orthodox Christians (see Kulakovskii, *supra*, on the conversion of the Alans to Christianity), are overtly sympathetic to Russia, and have suffered for their loyalty: the terrorist massacre of schoolchildren in Beslan, North Ossetia, in September 2004 was aimed as much at the Ossetes as at the Russians. Prof. Colarusso’s political sympathies seem to lean away from the Russians. This writer’s point of view is rather different. For the Christian Armenians, and even for most Georgians, the Russians were welcomed as liberators. But to the Muslims of the Caucasus, the Tsarist Russian takeover in the 19th century was seen as an imperialist conquest: many Circassians fled to Turkey, Syria, and Jordan; whilst numerous Ottoman Armenians migrated to the Russian-ruled Transcaucasus. The mass deportations of Chechens and others during World War II by the Soviet government was a savage policy one cannot justify. But the post-Soviet government of Russia signed a peace treaty with an autonomous Chechen authority that the latter immediately violated by invading neighboring Daghestan and by sponsoring terrorist attacks against Russian civilians. The sad history of the past cannot be invoked to justify the actions of a Chechen resistance that is not nationalist, but jihadist in its ideology and aggressive aims. In the Fall of 2003 a Chechen physician named Khassan Baiev came to Harvard Book Store to promote his memoir of the war. It began with a slide presentation of the Caucasian range, which “divides the Christian north from the Muslim south” – as though Armenia and Georgia simply did not exist! But this was merely the prelude to an excursion into the realm of malign fantasy. He informed his polite audience of Cantabrigian liberals that there are no Wahhabites, no foreign terrorists, and no fundamentalist repressions in Chechnya. So the

veiled women and other suicide bombers in a Russian theater or hospital or commuter train, the slave-traders, the hostage-takers, the lawless mutilations and murders carried out under the draconian interpretations of the *šarī'a* law are all figments of one's imagination. It was appalling that a respected journalist, Nicholas Daniloff, participated in this farce, which the audience greeted with murmurs of sympathy.

²² See Ilya Gershevitch, "Old Iranian Literature," in *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, 1.4.2.1 (*Iranistik-Literatur*), Leiden: Brill, 1968, pp. 3–5.

²³ See N. V. Arutyunyan, *Korpus urartskikh klinoobraznykh nadpisei*, Erevan: Izdatel'stvo "Gitutyun" NAN RA, 2001, p. 45 (text 38.1, line 19) & pp. 49 n. 22, p. 52 n. 75.

²⁴ See Yulia Ustinova, *The Supreme Gods of the Bosphoran Kingdom: Celestial Aphrodite and the Most High God*, Series Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 135, Leiden: Brill, 1999, and esp. pl. 6.

²⁵ The appropriate offering at a *džuar* is an **empty** vodka bottle. My friend, the great St. Petersburg scholar of ancient Mesopotamia, Prof. Mukhammad Abdelkadyrovich Dandamayev (his Ossetic surname, with the Russian -ev ending, means "subduer of rivers"), is a native speaker of Lak, a language of Dagestan. When he first visited me in America, he accepted a glass of vodka, which, unlike wine, is not mentioned – and, therefore, not prohibited – in the *Qur'ān*. This is the traditional and flexible Muslim society of the Caucasus that the imported Saudi preachers of Wahhabite extremism are undermining and destroying in Chechnya and elsewhere.

²⁶ Arm. *naxarar* (<Olr. **naxwa-dāra*-, "holder of primacy") is the title of a landed hereditary dynast: most nakharardoms occupied hereditary positions at the Arsacid court. The Mamikoneans held the office of *spara-petut' iwn*-, "commanders-in-chief" (<OIr. **spadha-pati*-, cf. Phi. and Pers. *spāhbad*), under the Arsacids: St. Vardan Mamikonean commanded the Armenian armies on the field at Avarayr, in Persarmenia, in the spring of 451. Though he and many of his men suffered martyrdom, the desperate Armenian resistance put an end to the campaign of Yazdagerd II to return Armenia to the Zoroastrian fold. Vardan is still celebrated as a hero of the Church and nation. The father of St. Mešrop Mastoc', inventor of the Armenian, Georgian, and Caucasian Albanian (Ałuan) alphabets, was named Vardan also. Few names could be more famous or common in the country.

²⁷ Movsēs wrote for a noble patron, Sahak Bagratuni. The Bagratids, whose Iranian name comes from *baga-dāta*-, "God-given/made," held the hereditary office of coronant under the Arsacids; and the god from whom they initially had claimed descent was the ancient Anatolian divinity Tork'-Tarkhundas-, equated with Heraklēs-Nergal. But in Christian Armenia they invented a Davidic genealogy through a Jew named Šambat' ("Sabbath": the form is good Aramaic, for the name Shabbetai) supposedly martyred in "pagan" Armenia – and this Šambat' was equated with the Iranian name Smbat. So Movsēs introduces shadowy proto-Bagratids into his narrative wherever feasible.

²⁸ In "Two Notes on Biblical Tradition and Native Epic in the 'Book of Lamentation' of St. Grigor Narekac'i," *Revue des Études Arméniennes* 22, 1990–1991, pp. 135–145, repr. in *AIS*,

I have called attention to the expressive and archaic epithet *selananeng*, “deceiving at table,” which the tenth-century Christian saint employs in his mystical meditations, echoing perhaps the epic tale.

²⁹ Such an abbreviated form might be compared to Arm. Aršēz=Artašēz; or Argam may derive from a voc. sg. form of *argāwan-*, **argāum*.

³⁰ What she wants is an *artaxoyr xawarci*. The first word clearly contains *xoyr*, a NWMIr. l-w, deriving ultimately from OIr. **xauda-*, “tiara.” The prefix could mean “outer”; or it might also be a MIr. l-w, as suggested by Perikhanian, cf. Sgd. *rēt*, “face,” which would then mean a veil.

³¹ The Arm. *sug* “mourning (rite)” (<MIr., Pers. *sūg*) involved self-mutilation and the deliberate destruction of furniture and so on, as elsewhere in greater Iran.

³² His page is called *šawa*, which if it is Iranian (Avestan *syāva*, Ossetic *sau*, Arm. loanword *seaw* and modern *sev*) means black, too. The Black Youth (on whom see J. R. Russell, “The Armenian Shrines of the Black Youth (*t’ux manuk*)” *Le Muséon* 111.3-4, 1998, pp. 319–343, repr. in *AIS*), is an Indo-European type of the powerful lover on the boundaries of society, associated with the watercourses. Cf. the Ossetic *sawy dzuar*, lit. “Black Cross” – a Black Youth spirit with a traditional sanctuary. Colarusso does not recognize the figure and consequently finds blackness in the text perplexing.

³³ The name is Ossetic in origin and may contain the base *varz*, “miraculous,” which is found in Armenian in various contexts of myth and epic legend also: see my articles on Narekats‘i’s term *šaržvarženi* and P‘awstos’ *varženak*: “A Poem of Grigor Narekac‘i,” *REArm* 19, 1985, pp. 435–439, and “Problematic Snake Children of Armenia,” *REArm* 25, 1994–1995, pp. 77–96, both repr. in *AIS*.

³⁴ Cf. the honorary surname of the conqueror/liberator of the Caucasus, General Ermolov!

³⁵ See J. R. Russell, “The Mother of All Heresies: A Late Mediaeval Armenian Text on the *Yuškparik*,” *REArm* 24, 1993, pp. 273-293, repr. in *AIS*. Xorenac‘i, in turn, inspired another great creative writer, the Armenian Romantic poet Bedros Tourian (1851–1872), to revise a poem of dull despair, changing it into what was for him a most unusual celebration of requited love. He composed and produced a play about king Ar-taxias, also. Perhaps the most modern echo of the banquet-fight in the *Alexander Romance* is Kafka’s: *Heute – das kann niemand leugnen – gibt es keinen grossen Alexander. Zu morden verstehen zwar manche; auch an der Geschicklichkeit, mil der Lanze iiber den Bankettisch hinweg den Freund zutreffen, fehlt es nicht...* (“Today – nobody can deny it – there is no Alexander the Great. Many, to be sure, know how to murder; also there is no lack of skill in hitting your friend with a lance from across the banquet table...”) (Franz Kafka, “Der neue Advokat,” *Parables*, New York: Schocken, 1947, p. 28.) Kafka elsewhere reduces the god Poseidon to a bookkeeper who may get a chance to see the seven seas just before the world’s end – apocalypse becomes a long work week. And in this case the modernist of Prague declares the heroic type of Alexander extinct – deeds rendered base by being shorn of their epic context remain, though, base and absurd. Alexander has, like Mher and Artawazd, apocalyptic overtones: Greek fishermen when they see a mermaid are supposed to say *O Meghaleksandhros zi ke vasilevi!* (“Alexander the Great lives and reigns!”)

³⁶ See her pathbreaking study “Penelope and the Pigs: Indie Perspectives on the *Odyssey*”, *Classical Antiquity*, Los Angeles: UCLA, 18.2, Oct. 1999, pp. 227–272.

³⁷ See my articles “The Armenians, the Holy Cross, and Dionysius Barsalibi” (*St. Nersess Theological Review* 8, 2003, pp. 1–12) and “The Scepter of Tiridates” (cited above), both repr. in *AIS*. The virulence of the hatred and the foulness of the language of Dionysius towards the Armenians – his fellow Christians – may astonish one; but as Wilken notes in his study of John Chrysostom (see n. *infra*), such rhetoric in antiquity was considered to be within the bounds of propriety.

³⁸ See N. G. Garsoian, “The Iranian Substratum of the ‘Agat’angelos’ Cycle,” in N.G. Garsoian et al., eds., *Ease of Byzantium*, Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982, pp. 151–174, repr. in *Armenia between Byzantium and the Sasanians*, London: Variorum, 1985, art. no. XII.

³⁹ I do not mean only that pigs often act as humans do. I mean that we have lived from earliest times in closer proximity to pigs than to most other creatures. Pig bones are those most often found in the excavation of ancient Armenian houses. Sogdian borrowed as *x*’ from Chinese the word *kia*, “family,” which is represented by the character depicting a pig beneath a roof (see N. Sims-Williams and J. Hamilton, *Documente turco-sogdiens du IXe-Xe siecle de Touen-houang, Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum* 2.3.3, London: SOAS, 1990, p. 27).

⁴⁰ See Michael Camille, *Mirror in Parchment: The Luttrell Psalter and the Making of Medieval England*, Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 336–338 and pl. 151. In mediaeval Christian Europe, Jews – who, it has often been observed, occupied the difficult position of the closest foreigner, the domestic alien – were explicitly associated with pigs and were killed in the same manner as homicidal pigs, by being hanged upside-down (see Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*, Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999, pp. 188–190 and pl. 80). The *locus classicus* for this demonization is the Gospel according to John, followed by the latter’s namesake St. John Chrysostom, who in his invectives compared Jews to pigs, gluttonous dogs, vicious hyenas, and demons, and claimed that synagogues attracted “effeminate men” (see Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century*, Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983, esp. pp. 121–122). So the imputation of abnormal sexuality adheres to the complex, porcine image: a particularly absurd charge, given the Levitical strictures against sodomy that separated the Jews of antiquity so decisively from their Hellenistic neighbors! John was equally scathing about Manichaeans and other enemies.

⁴¹ See his article, “Little Satana’s Wedding Breakfast,” in D. Kouymjian, ed., *In Memoriam Haig Berbérian*, Lisbon, 1986, p. 248.

⁴² If Shebatin is a form of the Iranian name Smbat, Hebraized by Movsēs to Šambat’ (from Shabbetai or a similar name) to justify the claim of his Bagratid patrons Davidic ancestry, then we have here the name of Artašēs’ *dayeak* (tutor, surrogate father, nurse) in Movsēs’ narrative.

⁴³ Colarusso mentions modestly in his Preface that he “looked at” Armenian when he was a graduate student at Harvard.

⁴⁴ If Argawan was indeed a “Grabber”, then one might suggest an etymology, with metathesis of the consonantal cluster, from the Iranian base *grab-* “seize,” as in Ossetic Digoron dialect *aryäunä*, Iron *ärghäč’k’*, meaning “pincers”. But this is just unnecessary.

⁴⁵ Review of M. Back, *Die sassanidischen Staatsinschriften, in Indogermanische Forschungen* 87, 1982, p. 283, repr. in C. Cereti and L. Paul, eds., *Iranica Diversa*, I, Roma: IsIAO, 1999, p. 162. From an OP. form may be derived the Akkadian l-w *argamannu*, “purple” (scil., royal purple, cf. *porphyrogenitus*, etc.), and Heb. *argawan/argaman*, “purple”.

⁴⁶ See A. Meillet, *Études de linguistique et de philologie arméniennes, I: Recherches sur la syntaxe comparée de l’arménien*, ser. Bibl. Arm. de la Fond. C. Gulbenkian, Lisbon: Impresa Nacional, 1962, p. 119.

⁴⁷ In the First World War, both England and Russia used the icon of St. George fighting the dragon as a symbol of their resistance to German aggression.

⁴⁸ William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, I.ii.20-22: Edmund, *solus*, with a letter.

⁴⁹ Arm. *diwc’azn* “hero” literally “noble progeny” (Arm. *azn* < NWMIr., cf. Av. *āsna-*; cf. Arm. *azn-iw* “noble” with inst., *aznawor* “idem”) of the gods, *di(w)c’*, nom. *di-k’*. This reflects the common idea that kings and heroes were of divine origin, cf. the MPers. formula used of the Sasanian kings, *ke čīhr az yazdān* “whose seed is from the gods”.

⁵⁰ Arm. *banak* “camp”, from MIr.: the Iranian and Armenian kings of old preferred the martial and outdoor life, so the proper locus for Artasēs’ wedding is the *banak ark’uni*, the “royal encampment”.

⁵¹ Arm. *barj* “pillow” cf. Av. *barəziš*, etc. The Pers. for “feast” is preserved in Arm. *bazmem*, “sit down (to dinner)”. In Armenia and Iran one reclined on a couch at a feast, resting on a stack of pillows.

⁵² Arm. *tačar* “palace” (only later, “cathedral” or “temple,” thus rendered anachronistically by Thomson in his tr. of Movsēs), from OP. *tačāra-*, cf. MP. *tāzār*. The Arm. *tačar mayri* of P’awstos is the palace hunting preserve.

⁵³ *Nawasard* “New Year”, from OP. *nava-sarda-* “idem” (cf. NP. *sāl*): the name of the first month of the ancient Armenian calendar, corresponding by accepted reckoning to late August, though in antiquity the Zoroastrian vernal New Year’s feast, Nō Rōz, celebrated in late March, could have been called also *Nawasard* in Armenia.

⁵⁴ *Azat Masik’* “Greater Ararat,” the larger of the twin peaks of Armenia’s national mountain. The epithet means literally “free, noble” (< Av. *āzāta-*); *masi-k’* may derive from OIr. **masyah-* “largest,” in the sense of a very big mountain, since Mt. Sip’an, N of L. Van, was anciently called *Nex Masik’*, “First(? cf. *nax*, from OIr. *naxva-*) Big Mountain”.

⁵⁵ *K’aj’*: “hero, titan.” The word may be of Ir. origin, cf. Sgd. *krz*; in Arm. it is used both as an epithet of kings and heroes, and as the designation of a race of supernatural titanic beings, the *k’ajk’* (cf. Geor. *k’ajī*, a loan from Arm.) who dwell in the mountains and lead a regal and otiose life, riding, hunting, and feasting.

⁵⁶ Arm. *paṛaw* “old woman”, as in ancient Greece the keeper of old tales. The word can in some dialects mean also an old man; and I derive it from Av. *pəṛənayū-*, “adult,” lit. “full of

years". In old Mod. Arm. journals folkloric columns were called *parawašunč*‘, “old women’s breath” (cf. the designation of the Bible, *Astuacašunč*‘, “breath of God”!).

⁵⁷ Warzameg: the Nart hero of Ossetic epic who corresponds in the Circassian narrative to Artasēs. His name is of uncertain etymology: one notes Abaev’s suggestion of a relation to Arm. Varazman (the name of a Mihranid noble, grandson of St. Vardan Mamikonean). The name may contain the element Av. *varəčah-*, Mlr. *warz-* “magic, wonder,” Arm. l-w *varž-*, cf. the apocalyptic hero Bahrām ī Warzāwand; one Varž son of Dat figures as the tutor in the arts of war of Tigran, son of Artasēs. His descendants are the Varažnuni *naxarars*.

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