

## THE POSSIBILITY OF CLARIFICATION OF THE PERIOD OF SOME PHONETICAL CHANGES IN THE ARMENIAN LANGUAGE BY MEANS OF THE VAN (ARARAT-URARTU) CUNEIFORM INSCRIPTIONS

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The language of the cuneiform inscriptions of Van (Biainian/Urartian) was the official written language of the Van Kingdom (Urartu). According to our opinion, the Armenian language is the basis of it<sup>1</sup> and it contains a great number of Armenian word roots, morphemes (either native or of unknown origin) and Armenian names. The cuneiform inscriptions of Van date back to the 9-7<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.; namely, they are older by 1000-1300 years compared with the first written texts of the Old Armenian language (*Grabar*). Needless to say, they may contain properties, inherent to the Armenian phonetic system of the time in question. Consequently, the comparison of the sounds of the Old Armenian language (further: OArm.) with those of the Urartian (further Ur.) becomes important, making possible to clarify the period of some historical phonetic changes of Armenian and to explain the status of the Armenian's appropriate sounds more than 1000 years earlier of those evidenced in *Grabar*.

Unfortunately, the polyvalence typical to the cuneiform system, especially the alternation of consonants of the same set (*d/t/t*, *g/k/q*, *p/b*, *š/s* etc.) and the limited ability of the sounds' representation [the Urartian cuneiform system differentiates just 24 phonemes (signs) - 4 vowels, 18 consonants, and 2 semi vowels] makes difficult the general picture of the phonetic comparison of OArm. and Ur. For instance, if we take the correspondence: the cuneiform *abeli-* (syllabically: a-bi/é-li/e-) "to add, to join" - OArm. *awel-* (*աւել-*) "id", it doesn't follow that OArm. *awel-* would sound exactly in the period of the Van Kingdom, as it had been written in Ur. inscriptions (*\*abel*). In fact, the cuneiform *b* might be pronounced as /b/ (or /b<sup>h</sup>/) and /v/w/. If we take into consideration the fact that *b* in cuneiform inscriptions almost always alternates with *p*, it could be pronounced as /p/ and /p<sup>h</sup>/. Moreover, characters *b* and *p* may also represent another phoneme, having none of the respective symbols and having close sounding - /f/, for instance. Hence, it's unclear how the *abel-* must be transcribed phonetically - /*abel-*/, /*awel-*/ or otherwise. Therefore, the fixing of many possible phonetic changes of Armenian or their absence in the Urartian texts oftentimes becomes impossible with the direct methods in practice.

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<sup>1</sup> See in detail Ayvazyan S., *Urartian-Armenian: Lexicon and Comparative-Historical Grammar*, Yerevan, 2011: About this also see Զահուկյան Գ., Ուրարտական արձանագրությունների ներածական բանաձևերի հնարավոր հայկական բնույթի մասին, ՊԲՀ, 2000, 1, էջ 124-129: Սարգսյան Վ., Ուրարտական քաղաքակրթությունը և բասկերի նախահայրենիքի հարցը, Երևան, 1998 etc.

Nevertheless, the comparison of indigenous words and morphemes of OArm. and their Proto-Indo-European prototypes with the parallel forms in the Urartian texts gives an opportunity to get the correspondences of PIE **restored (hypothetical) phoneme** → **Urartian symbol** → **OArm. (letter) phoneme**. Their juxtaposing with the material from the collation of the Armenian's loanwords and the words of unknown origin evidenced in the Urartian texts, makes possible to get all the necessary essentials for some clarifications in the matter we are interested in<sup>2</sup>.

Let's examine some of the instances, where the phonetic differences in both OArm. and Ur. texts are clearly seen.

1. Word comparisons where we have the symbols *u/w* in Ur. vs *g* in OArm, deriving from the PIE *\*u* in the word-initial position, which shows that the sound change *\*u > q* of Armenian either was not implemented still in the period of the Van kingdom or was in a transitional state, when the PIE *\*u* in the mentioned position is rendered with the symbols *u/w* in the Urartian inscriptions. Let's consider the following examples: a) the Ur. *wal=d-* "to overcome, to win, to surpass, to overthrow (the enemy's chariots) etc." [translates Akkadian *le'u* "to overcome; to win (also in the legal dispute); to surpass; to have advantage" in the bilingual inscription of Topuzava] - OArm. *gəl-t-or-em* (*qł-un-np-lul*), *gəl-em* (*qł-lul*), *gəl-ec'-owc'-an-em* (*qł-łg-nıg-wıl-lul*), "to roll; to bend, to incline", "to win over (also - in dispute), to surpass, to excel, etc." < PIE *\*uēl-*, *\*uəl-*<sup>3</sup>, 2) Ur. *Uelekuni* (syllabically: *Ú-e-li/e-ku-ni*) "the name of a region on the coast of Lake Sevan", corresponds apparently to the OArm. toponym *Gela(r)k'uni* (*Գեղա(ր)քունի*)<sup>4</sup>; Ur. *Waša* (syllabically: *Wa-š/za-*) "the toponym which corresponds to the historical district of Aragacotn"<sup>5</sup> - OArm. *\*Ara-gaca > Aragac-ay* (*\*Արա-գաձա > Արագաձ, -այ*)<sup>6</sup> and so on.

2. Word comparisons where there are the symbols *p/b* in Ur. vs OArm *h/ø*. deriving from the PIE *\*p* in word-initial position; hence, one has to suppose that the sound change of Armenian *\*p > h/ø* either was not implemented still in the period of the Van Kingdom or was in a transitional state, when PIE *\*p* in the mentioned position is reflected in the symbols of *p/b* in Ur. inscriptions. Let us see the following examples: a) the Ur. (preposition) *pare* "till, to, toward(s)", *par-* "to take/lead away, to drive away/off" - OArm. (preposition) *ar* (*ար*) "at; with regard to; towards; next to; etc.", *heř-ac'-ow'-an-em*, *heř-an-am* (*հեռ-աց-ուց-ան-եմ, հեռ-ան-ամ*) "to remove; to keep off", "to go away/far, to depart, etc." < PIE *\*pors* (*\*per-*) "to pass"; b) *bedi* "the side, the rear (behind), together",

<sup>2</sup> See Այվազյան Ս., Ուրարտերեն-հայերեն բառապաշար և պատմահամեմատական քերականություն, Երևան, 2008 (hereinafter: ՈՒՀ), էջ 26-37, 354-365; Ibid, Ուրարտերեն, Երևան, 2013, էջ 24-27, 118 etc.

<sup>3</sup> See Այվազյան Ս., ՈՒՀ, էջ 52, 105-107 etc.

<sup>4</sup> See Ղափանցյան Գ., Նոր Բայազետի սեպագիր արձանագրությունը, Երևան, 1930, էջ 1-34; Арутюнян Н., Корпус урартских клинообразных надписей (hereinafter: КУКН), Ереван, 2001, стр. 527 etc.

<sup>5</sup> About the stationing of this province see Арутюнян Н., Топономика Урарту, Ереван, 1985, стр. 13-14; КУКН, стр. 499-500 of the same author.

<sup>6</sup> See Այվազյան Ս., Վանի թագավորության սեպագիր արձանագրությունները, I, Երևան, 2004, էջ 75; ՈՒՀ, էջ 36 of the same author etc.

*bed-* “to turn back, to give back, to return”, *bedu=iaše* “on the way back/on coming back” or “then/hereafter” - OArm. *het*, *-oy* (*hētun*, *-n̄j*), “a footstep, a trace”, *heti* (*hētunh̄*) (preposition), “behind, backward”, “together, along with”; (*y*)*et* (*(j)ētun*), “back, backward, after”, (adverb) *yetoy* (*jētun̄j*) “then, afterwards, hereafter” and so on (the primary meaning is “foot, trace”) < \**ped* “foot”, and also probably c) Ur. *pīle* “canal, brook” - OArm. *het* (*hēt̄n̄*) “flood, running water” < \**pel-* (\**pēl-*) “to pour, fill”<sup>7</sup>. It is also possible the comparison of the latter with the Armenian word *peł* (*պեղ*) “hole, cave”<sup>8</sup>.

Some researchers sometimes are making incorrect and contradictory conclusions, confusing the writing (graphic renderings) with the phonemes. For instance, touching in the context of the mentioned Armenian-Urartian correspondences: Ur. *paḫi/a=ne* “cattle” - OArm. *pakhrē* (*պախրէ*) “id”, Ur. *par-*, “to drive (cattle), to take (captives)” - OArm. *heř-ac’-owc’-an-em* (*հեռ-աց-ուց-ան-եւ*) < PIE. \**per-*, Ur. *pīle* (canal), (Hurrian *pala* “canal”) - OArm. *peł* (*պեղ*) < \**bel* or *het-em* (*հեղ-եւ*) < \**pel* (\**pēl*) and so forth), they remark that the word-initial character *p* testified in the Urartian texts could neither disappear nor become *h* on one occasion and to be kept on the other<sup>9</sup>. Whereas, as it has been mentioned, under the Ur. sign *p*, on one hand, the voiceless stop /p/ might be disguised, and aspirate /pʰ/ or the fricative /f/ on the other. It’s not by chance that the word-initial *p* is marked (in our works) with the conventional symbol  $\varphi$ <sup>10</sup> in one case, and with the /p/ or /pʰ/ in another. As concerns the PIE \**p* > OArm. *h/ø* development, then it is obvious that it did not take place instantly, but it was a long-lasting process with interjacent stages<sup>11</sup>. Consequently, PIE \**p* could be just in similar interim position during the Urartian period, e.g. having been sounded as /f/<sup>12</sup>, and naturally being subjected to further change (f > h/ø) in contrast to /p/, either originated of PIE \**b* or passed to OArm. from the foreign loans. Accordingly, it is possible to restore the following order for the abovementioned development – PIE \**p* > Ancient Arm. /f/ (it is rendered with the symbols *p/b* in the Urartian cuneiform writing) > OArm. *h/ø*.

Concerning the reflection of the intervocalic or pre-consonant *w/v* (*u/v*) (< PIE \**p*) OArm. phoneme in the Urartian inscriptions, it is marked with the symbols *u/w* on the one hand as is Ur. *eue/ewe* “and” - OArm. *ew* (*եւ*) “id” < PIE \**epi*, Ur. *Ṭuarašinei ḫubi* “the lowland/valley of Ṭuarašine” - OArm. *tuar-ac’a-tap* (*տուար-ածա-տապ*), “id” (it is

<sup>7</sup> See in detail Այվազյան Ս., ՈՒՀ, էջ 50-51, 95-96; Ուրարտերեն, Երևան, 2013, էջ 84-85, 99-100 of the same author etc.

<sup>8</sup> See Ղափանցյան Գ., Ուրարտուի պատմություն, Երևան, 1940, էջ 39; Джаукян Г., Урартский и индоевропейские языки, Ереван, 1963, стр. 101 etc.

<sup>9</sup> See Աղաբեկյան Մ., Հայ-ուրարտական ստուգաբանական դիտարկումներ, ՊԲՀ, 2013, 1, էջ 170-171.

<sup>10</sup> See Այվազյան Ս., ՈՒՀ, էջ 36, 50-51, 95-96 etc.

<sup>11</sup> See Զահուկյան Գ., Հայոց լեզվի պատմություն. նախագրային շրջան, Երևան, 1987, էջ 227, 346 etc.

<sup>12</sup> G. Jahukyan proposes such an interim state; *Ibid.*

composed of OArm. word root *towar* (*տոար*) “cattle” < \*d̥r̥b̥go) and with the *b* on the other, as is Ur. *aršibi* - OArm. *arcowi*, *-ciw* (*արծուի*, *-ծի*) “eagle” < PIE \*ǵg̥ʷipi-ǵo. If the etymology of the mentioned Armenian words is correct then it is necessary to presume that the given development of OArm. either was over already or was in the phase of completion; anyhow, the PIE \*p was sounding close to /w/ in the Urartian period. And the presence of the Urartian writing *aršibi* instead of the expected \**aršiw* or \**aršui* is explained easily by the possibility of reflecting the sound /w/ with the signs *b/p* in the Urartian texts, which is typical of other cuneiform languages, as well.

The picture is different in the case of PIE \*b<sup>h</sup> in the same position for which we have only Ur. *b* in two available evidence, but not *u/w* such as Ur. *abeli*- “to add” – OArm. *y-awel-em* (*յ-աւել-էմ*) “id”, *aweli* (*աւելի*) “more” < \*obhel; Ur. *qaburza* “bridge” – OArm. *kamowrj*, *i-a* < \*kawurja (*կաւուրջ*, *ի-ա* < \*կաւուրջա) “id” < \*g<sup>u</sup>obhur-ǵā (compare the Greek γέφυρα, an Armenian-Greek correspondence).

The picture is mixed both in toponyms and the words of unknown origin; for instance, Ur. *Abuni* - OArm. *Hawuni-k'* (*Հաւունի-ք*), Ur. *Zabaḥae* - OArm. *ḵawakh-k'* (*Ջաւախ-ք*), Gen. *ḵawakha-c'* (*Ջաւախա-ց*), Ur. *Er(e)bune* - OArm. *Erewan* (*Երեւան*), Ur. *Abeliane* - OArm. *Abelean-k'* (*Աբելեան-ք*), Ur. *babane* “mountain” - OArm. *babay* (*բաբայ*) “hill” and so on. Such a state of affairs is conditioned apparently by the aforementioned peculiarities of cuneiforms, being typical almost to every cuneiform language. Even if are known the borrowing language and the parallel evidence there, no precision is observed in that matter. For example, the parallel form of the mentioned Ur. word *babane*, “mountain”, is evidenced both as either *pabni* or *wawan* in the Hurrian texts (syllabically: *pa-ab-ni*, *wa-wa-n-*), and [pbn] in the Ugaritic quasi-alphabetic cuneiform.

We have the symbol *b* in the Urartian inscriptions in a regular manner against PIE \*bh such as: a) PIE \*bher- “to bring, to bear” - Ur. (-)ber, “to bring, to come” - OArm. *ber-em* (*բեր-էմ*) “to bring”, b) PIE \*bhag-to, “a portion” - Ur. *baqtu* «destiny» - OArm. *bakht-oy* (*բախտ-ոյ*) “id” (through Iranian intermediation; the indigenous form is \**puḵu*, *-ny* (*bakt-oy*) < \*bhag-to, which is testified in the Urartian texts), c) PIE \*bhā “to speak” - Ur. *ba-u-* “a word, an order, a thing” - OArm. *ba-n*, *ba-y* (*բա-ն*, *բա-յ*) “word, thing”; d) PIE \*bh̥g̥ʷh, “high, top”- Ur. *barzu/i=dibidu(ne)* “a name of a certain worship building” - OArm. *barj*, *-ow/i* (*բարձ*, *-ու/ի*) “high, top; great”, *barjunk'* (*բարձունք*) “altars, sanctuary, shrines” («բարձիւնք, տաճարք, սէղանք») <sup>13</sup>.

Also, let's consider briefly the matter of Urartian as an ergative language since this fact is being accented frequently in the special literature to exclude the Armenian nature of Urartian <sup>14</sup>. Nevertheless, such an argument is obsolete apparently. First, let us say that one-fourth (a quarter) of the world's languages has an ergative structure according

<sup>13</sup> For such a meaning of the OArm. word *barjunk'* (*բարձունք*), see Ամալյան Հ., Բարձիրք Հայոց, Երևան, 1975, էջ 52.

<sup>14</sup> See Աղաբեկյան Մ., op. cit., pp. 176-177.

to the contemporary studies, including the Indo-European languages, too (Hittite, Luwian, many Iranian languages, Hindi and so forth)<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, the facts prove that numerous languages of our region had an ergative characteristic regardless of their origin<sup>16</sup>. And the transition from the ergative structure to the nominative one and vice versa is not just an exceptional phenomenon, but another way round exactly<sup>17</sup>. As regards Ur. specifically (and the Hurrian, as well), their ergative structure is an outcome of the active construction of the early Proto-Indo-European language, according to some researchers<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, the fact of Ur, having an ergative structure, can't be a circumstantial factor in the claim of denying its Armenian nature.

***Translated from Armenian  
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<sup>15</sup> See in detail R.Dixon, *Ergativity*, 1998 (first published 1994), Cambridge, pp. 2-5, 14. Also see B.Comrie. *The languages of the Soviet Union*, 1981, Cambridge, pp. 173-4, 177, 181; J.Payne. *The decay of ergativity in Pamir languages*, *Lingua*, 51/2-3, 1980, pp. 147-186; V.Miltner. *Ergative Constructions in Indo-Aryan*, *Archiv Orientalni*, 59, 1991, pp. 225-33; Y.Kachru. *Ergativity, subjecthood and topicality in Hindi-Urdu*, *Lingua*, 71, 1987, pp. 223-38; A.Garrett. *The origin of NP split ergativity*, *Language*, 66, 1990, pp. 261-96; A.Korn. *The Ergative System in Balochi from a Typological Perspective*, *Iranian Journal of Applied Language Studies*, 1/1, 2009, pp. 43-75 etc.

<sup>16</sup> See R.Dixon, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3: He writes barely, "...It seems that in this part of the world (he means Asia Minor, Armenian Highland, Caucasus, Mesopotamia and the adjacent territories), at that time, there was a 'linguistic area', consisting of a number of language isolates and small subgroups, not known to be genetically related, all of which showed some ergative characteristics".

<sup>17</sup> See of the matter in question in detail R. Dixon, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-206.

<sup>18</sup> See A.Fournet, A.Bomhard. *The Indo-European Elements in Hurrian*, *La Garenne Colombes/Charleston*, 2010 (e-publication), pp. 154-155.