

**Élisée Reclus**

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## **CHAPTER VII - RUSSIAN ARMENIA.**

### **ARARAT, ALAGOZ, PLATEAU OF LAKE GOK-CHAJ, AND ARAXIS BASIN.**

THE Araxis basin presents on the whole a marked geographical unity, forming, north of the Iranian tableland, a broad semicircular zone, with its convex side facing southwards, and everywhere enclosed by lofty mountains, except near the Caspian, where the hills fall towards the alluvial plains of the Kura and Araxis. Neither of these rivers forms a uniform ethnological domain, for Armenians, Georgians, and Tatars dwell on the banks of the former, while the Araxis valley is occupied by Armenians, Kurds, and other Tatar peoples. Still the Armenians everywhere preponderate not only in culture and influence, but also in numbers. Politically also the Araxis basin is divided between the three converging states, the region of all the head-streams belonging to Turkey, and most of the right bank of the main stream to Persia, while more than half of the whole basin, including the best strategical points for a descent on the Euphrates valley, are now Russian territory. Russia is thus mistress of the famous Mount Ararat, and of the convent of Echmiadzin, the religious capital of the Armenians, and centre of their nationality.

### **OROGRAPHY – ARARAT - ALA-GÖZ.**

North of the sources of the Araxis the mountains sloping northwards towards the Euxine are cut up by ravines and glens into irregular chains and spurs, such as the Kirechli, Soghanli, and Childir-dagh, which, north of the Kars basin, merge in the lacustrine plateau bordered eastwards by the Abul and Samsar volcanoes. Although presenting serious obstacles to intercommunication, none of these ranges attain the altitude of the Caucasus and Anti-Caucasus, the highest summit being the Kizil-dagh, or "Red Mountain," between the Kars basin and Lake Childir, which is only 10,460 feet, and consequently below the normal snow-line. South of the region of the Araxis head-streams the highlands become narrower, but more elevated, here forming a single parting range running east and west between the Araxis and Euphrates or Murad valleys, with several extinct craters over 10,000 feet high, and culminating with the Perli-dagh in the centre, and the Chingil, near the eastern pass leading from Erivan to Bayazid, both about 10,830 feet above the sea.

Several streamlets flowing to the Araxis indicate, by their name of Tuzla-su, the nature of their waters, which spring from extensive salt beds. North of the Perli-dagh

stands Mount Kulpi, one of the largest masses of rock-salt in the world, rising on a tertiary plain near the point where the Araxis passes through a narrow basalt gorge above its junction with the Arpa-chai. The surrounding hills, destitute of vegetation, and composed of red, blue, green, or grey marls, impart to the landscape a most motley appearance. The Kulpi salt mines, which are confined to a central layer from 100 to 210 feet thick, have probably been longer worked than any other out of China. The Armenians tell us how Noah drew his supplies from this source, and even show the very spot where he began his mining operations. In the abandoned parts of the works hammers and other implements are frequently picked up, dating from the stone age. These objects are all made of diorite, a rock found nowhere in the district, and which must have procured from distant countries. The mining operations are still carried on in a rude manner, and owing to the absence of roads, the produce is limited to the Tiflis and Erivan markets. Between 1836 and 1876 the average yield has risen from 4,000 to 16,300 tons.

Ararat, "historical centre of the Armenian plateau," and central point of the line of tablelands stretching across the eastern hemisphere from the Cape of Good Hope to Bering Strait, rises above the eastern continuation of the volcanic chain running between the Araxis and the Euphrates. But its snowy crest towers to such a height above the surrounding mountains that they become dwarfed to mere hills, while the hilly plateau seem to stretch like plains at its base. Its very name of Ararat, probably of Aramean origin, is synonymous with supereminence, while its Armenian designation, Masis, is also said to mean "grand," or "sublime."

The Turks call it Agri-dagh, or "Steep Mountain," and the Persians Koh-i-Nuh, or "Noah's Mount." This superb mass, grander than the Hellenic Olympuses, naturally became a sacred object to the peoples of the plains, the mysterious summit whence men and animals descended to people the world. The Armenians show the very spot where Noah's ark grounded, and where it is still guarded by genii armed with flaming swords<sup>1</sup>.

Viewed from Nakhichevan, Ararat looks like a compact conic mass rising on the north-west horizon; but from Bayazid on the south, and Erivan on the north, it is seen to consist of two distinct mountains disposed in the direction of the Caucasus-Great Ararat, with a double peak in the north-west; Little Ararat, with a rounded crest in the south-east, and with a deep intervening depression. Both masses, with their counterforts, occupy an area of about 380 square miles between the plains of Bayazid

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<sup>1</sup> Elevations of the Araxis and neighbouring plains: -

Great Ararat ..... 16,760 Feet.

Little Ararat ..... 11,680 Feet.

Intermediate Col. .... 8,785 Feet.

Bayazid (citadel)..... 6,634 Feet.

Echmiadzin ..... 2,810 Feet.

Erivan ..... 3,200 Feet.

and Erivan. Like those of Etna, their slopes are almost everywhere gently inclined, although the ascent is rendered very difficult lower down by occasional lava streams, and higher up by the snows, nearly always softened under the solar rays in summer. The Armenians speak of the prodigies by which too daring shepherds have ever been prevented from scaling the "Mother of the World," and the failures of Tournefort and Morier lent a colour to their statements. When Parrot at last scaled the highest crest in 1829, they unanimously denied the truth of his account, and for a long time succeeded in casting a doubt on his veracity, until the exploit was repeated by other adventurers. In 1850 Khodzko passed five whole days on the summit in order to prosecute his work of triangulation in Caucasia. He passed thence south-east to Mount Salivan, 204 miles off, and north-west to Mount Elbruz, distant 264 miles, corresponding by means of heliotropic signals with the astronomers stationed on Mount Akh-dagh, in the centre of the Gok-chai plateau.

At an elevation of 11,600 feet, Ararat is still everywhere clothed with vegetation; but herbage ceases at 12,500 feet, while nothing occurs except an Alpine flora between 13,200 and 14,300, which marks the line of perpetual snow. The species of the Upper Ararat are all either identical with, or allied to, those of the Alps, but they are much less numerous, a fact doubtless due to the greater dryness of the atmosphere on the Armenian mountain. Its fauna also is comparatively very poor. The wolf, hyena, and perhaps the panther, haunt the thickets at its base about the Araxis; but higher up nothing is met except an ibex, a polecat, and a species of hare.

Although only 3° of latitude farther south than the Pyrenees, the lower slopes are free of snow much earlier, and the snow-line itself is about a mile lower down than on the Iberian range. Still the snow reaches much further down in the ravines of erosion by which its flanks are furrowed. In several gorges these snows become true glaciers, of which the chief is that of St. James, whose cirque has undoubtedly been formed by a former eruption analogous to that of the Val del Bove on Mongibello. In more remote times the glaciers reached much lower, as shown by the scored and polished surface of the trachite rocks.

Notwithstanding the vast quantity of snow lying on its slopes, Ararat is almost entirely destitute of water. Wagner failed to discover anything beyond two springs at its base, from which mere rills trickle away amongst the stones. Hence its sides remain arid and parched, while the neighbouring mountains, also of volcanic origin, discharge torrents numerous enough to form vast and deep lakes at their foot. During dry seasons Ararat becomes altogether uninhabitable, the want of shade and moisture driving away the flocks, and even the birds of the air. It is therefore probable that the water from the melting snows disappears in crevasses, or beneath the ashes and lavas, either collecting in underground lakes, or forming a network of hidden streams. These waters, transformed to steam by the subterraneous fires, may perhaps explain the terrible eruption of 1840, when an old crater above the convent of St. James suddenly reopened, ejecting a dense vapour far above the summit of Ararat, and diffusing

sulphurous exhalations round about. The mountain groaned threateningly, casting up from the fissure vast quantities of stones and rocks, some weighing as much as 5 tons. Jets of steam escaped through numerous crevasses, and springs of hot water bubbled up from the bed of the Araxis. The convent itself disappeared beneath the débris, together with the rich and populous village of Arguri, supposed by the Armenians to be the oldest in the world, and to mark the spot where Noah planted the vine on leaving the ark. There perished on this occasion, besides the 2,000 inhabitants of Arguri, several thousands at Erivan, Nakhichevan, and Bayazid, victims of the earthquake felt at those places. Four days afterwards a fresh disaster destroyed nearly all the land under cultivation about Arguri. The water and slush, collected in the crater partly from the melting snows, burst their barriers, overflowing in long streams of mud down the slopes, and converting the plain into a vast morass. The Arguri eruption is the only one mentioned in historic times, though Ararat has been the scene of frequent and violent earthquakes. The statement of Reineggs that he saw flames and smoke emitted from the summit in 1785 is more than doubtful, for the phenomenon was witnessed by none of the natives.

The Allah-ghöz, or rather Ala-göz ("Motley Mountain"), faces Ararat from the opposite side of the Erivan plain. It is a volcanic mass, with a truncated cone 13,900 feet high, but with its counterforts occupying a wider area than its haughty rival. Its lava streams descend south and east towards the Araxis valley - west and north towards Alexandrapol, in the Arpa-chai basin. It takes its name from the diverse colours of its scoriae, pumice, and obsidians, varied here and there with herbage and bright flowers. Three of the old craters now form as many small lakes, although but few streams reach the plains, the running waters generally disappearing beneath the scoriae, and feeding the Aiger-göl, a lake lying south of the mountain, and draining through the Kura-su to the Araxis.

### **LAKE GOK-CHAI - THE KARABAGH - FLORA AND FAUNA.**

Isolated like Ararat, the Ala-göz is connected only by low ridges with the northern highlands. These run parallel with the Caucasus, and connect the volcanic chain of the Akhalkalaki plateau with the mountains overlooking Lake Gok-chai, east of Erivan. These mountains - Somkhet, Pambak, and others from 8,000 to 10,000 feet high-stand on such an elevated plateau that the ridge is easily surmounted by passes approached by long and gently sloping inclines. The Eshek-Maidan Pass, on the trade route between Tiflis and Erivan, stands at an altitude of 7,230 feet at the north-west angle of a hilly plateau, where the intersection of the various axes of the Caucasus forms a labyrinth of chains radiating in all directions, although mainly running north-west and south-east, parallel with the Great Caucasus.

The ridges maintain a mean uniform elevation, rising everywhere about 3,300 feet above the plateau forming their common base, although a few extinct cones attain a

relative height of 5,000 feet, or about 13,330 above sea-level. This intersection of ridges of uniform elevation explains the formation of a vast lake filling a cavity in the plateau 6,440 feet above the Euxine, and in summer only discharging its waters through Zanga, south-west towards the Araxis. This is the Gok-chai, or "Blue Water," of the Tatars, and the Sevanga of the Armenians. Although 550 square miles in extent, or two and a half times larger than Lake Geneva, Chardin is the first European traveler who mentions it. The mean depth varies from 150 to 250 feet, but its waters, fresh in the northern section, slightly brackish in the south, harbour five species only of fish, including the trout and salmon, although those are so numerous that from 2,000 to 3,000 trout have been taken at one haul.

The lake forms an irregular triangle, contracted towards the centre by two advancing headlands, and as it is everywhere encircled by grey and snowy mountains, the landscape presents on the whole a grand and solemn, though somewhat sombre aspect. The lava and porphyry slopes are perfectly bare down to the water's edge, while of the old cities nothing now survives except crumbling masses, beneath which numerous coins have been found dating from the time of the Sassanides. The villages also lie hidden away in sheltered nooks, so that little is visible beyond a few hamlets half buried in the ground, and the so-called "Tombs of the Giants," numerous tumuli scattered over the plateau, which is under snow eight months in the year. Nearly all the cultivable land has long remained fallow, so that the country has again become a desert. Till recently no craft navigated the lake, which, notwithstanding the fierce storms sweeping down from the hills, is often ice-bound in winter. On a volcanic islet in the north-west corner stands the convent of Sevan, noted throughout Armenia since the ninth century. It would be hard to conceive a more forlorn place of exile than this bleak island of black rocks, whose inhabitants are condemned to silence except for four days in the year. But the villages of the neighbouring plateau have become convalescent retreats for the people of the unhealthy town of Erivan, where dangerous fevers are endemic.

East of the Gok-chai and its encircling volcanoes, conspicuous amongst which is the Alapolarim, the labyrinth of intersecting ranges is continued south-eastwards, under the collective name of Karabagh, the Rani of the Georgians. Although the ravines preserve their snows throughout the year, not more than three or four of the crests in this region rise above the snow-line. Such are the Gämish (12,460 feet), source of the Terter, the Kazangöl-dagh, and its southern neighbour, the Kapujish (12,380 feet), continued southwards towards the town of Ordubat by steep rugged hills crowned with peaks. South of these culminating points of Eastern Armenia, and beyond the gorge of the Araxis, rise other mountains of equal height, and similarly furrowed with snowy ravines. Between the chain commanded by Mount Kapudish and the Shusha Mountains lies the Zangezûr basin, at a mean elevation of 4,000 feet, apparently an old lacustrine depression, like the Gok-chai, whose waters have been drawn off by the Bergushet and Akera Rivers, which unite before reaching the Araxis valley. In the centre of this basin

the conic Ishikli, or Kachal-dagh, rises to a height of over 10,000 feet, and the scoriae and ashes ejected by the surrounding volcanoes have been accumulated on the bed of the old lake to a thickness of several hundred yards, since deeply furrowed by torrents.

The flora of these highlands bears a remarkable resemblance to that of the European Alpine regions. Here are the same beeches, oaks, aspens, undergrowth, and flowering plants. The upland valleys, covered with a thick layer of black loam, are very fertile, whence probably the name of Karabagh, or "Black Garden," by which this country is known. But on the arid slopes, with the thermometer at 104° Fahr. during the summer months, little grows beyond the wild sage and other aromatic plants, while the fauna is chiefly represented by reptiles, scorpions, and formidable tarantolos (*Phalangium araneoides*). The Karabagh horses, however, which climb the cliffs like goats, are said to be the finest in Transcaucasia.

### THE ARAXIS BASIN.

The Araxis, or Aras, pre-eminently the Armenian river, rises beyond Russian territory to the south of Erzerum, and receives its first tributaries from the Bingöl-dagh volcano, the "Mountain of the Thousand Streams," some of which flow southwards to the Euphrates. After entering Russian Transcaucasia its still feeble volume is doubled by the junction of the Arpa-chai, or Akhurean, descending from the volcanic plateaux of Alexandrapol and the Ala-göz. Thanks to this supply, it is enabled to contribute largely to the irrigation of the Erivan basin, which would else become a desert waste. Diverted southwards by the Gok-chai and Karabagh highlands, it escapes from the old lacustrine bed through a narrow rocky gorge with falls from 200 to 270 feet broad, where its seething waters descend between steep rugged cliffs at an average rate of 15 feet in 1,000 yards, falling at one point as much as 45 feet in the same distance. Ordubat, above the Arasbar gorge, is still 3,090 feet above the Caspian, yet within 60 miles of this place the river has already reached the lowlands. After receiving the Bergushet it sweeps round the southern base of the Diri-dagh, beyond which it is joined by several torrents from the Persian highlands, ultimately joining the Kura after a course of about 470 miles. At the Diri-dagh it is crossed by the Khudaferin Bridge, attributed traditionally to Pompey, but which is certainly of more recent date. Higher up are the ruins of another bridge, referred by the natives to Alexander the Great, but which may well be a Roman structure. Below that of Khudaferin there are no other bridges, and here the former hydraulic works and irrigation canals have been mostly abandoned, so that instead of promoting the fertility of the steppe, they combine with the swamps of the Kura to render this tract of the Caspian seaboard all but uninhabitable. The Araxis is said to be showing a tendency to trend more to the right, and again separate itself from the Kura, and flow independently to the sea, as in the time of Strabo.

The Araxis basin is exposed to greater extremes of temperature than most regions in Western Asia. The climate of Erivan is even more severe than that of Tiflis, the

temperature falling in winter to - 20° Fahr., and rising in summer to 104° and even 110° Fahr. Hence the frequency of malignant fevers and other epidemics in Erivan. "In Tiflis," says the Armenian, "the young are not to be distinguished from the old; in Erivan the living are no better than the dead." Fortunately during the summer heats the Erivan plain is swept at nightfall by a cool north or north-west wind, blowing fiercely from the Ala-göz highlands. It generally begins to blow about five P.M. and lasts the greater part of the night, but is accompanied by such clouds of dust, and even sand, that the inhabitants are confined to their houses during its prevalence. All the poplars in the neighbourhood of Erivan are slightly inclined toward the south-east.

These pyramidal poplars are a conspicuous feature of the landscape in the Araxis basin. But a more remarkable plant is the *nölbönd*, a species of elm, whose leafy branches form a vast canopy of foliage absolutely impenetrable to the solar rays. Although one of the finest ornamental trees in the world, it is found nowhere beyond the limits of Russian Armenia. The apricot grows in all the gardens, and rice, cotton, and sesame are also cultivated, besides a vine producing a strong wine of a brown colour, somewhat like sherry or madeira. But this vine has to be buried underground in winter, and regularly watered in summer. In this climate everything perishes, and the ground becomes baked like burnt clay, except where the irrigating channels convert the desert to a green oasis. The former irrigation works were all developed by the Persians, and an English engineer now proposes to distribute the waters of the Arpa-chai over the desert plains of Sardarabad. Meantime field operations are carried on in the most primitive fashion. Although skilful traders, the Armenians are bad agriculturists, but scarcely worse than their Tatar neighbours. In several districts the land is also exposed to the ravages of wild boars, which haunt the brushwood and sedgy banks of the Lower Araxis. Yet the zealous Tatars hold these unclean beasts in such horror that they will neither soil their hands by pursuing them themselves, nor allow others to interfere with them.

### **INHABITANTS - THE ARMENIANS.**

The chief nation in the Araxis basin, numerically the fourth in Caucasia, and second to the Russians alone in influence, are the Armenians, or Haï, Haïk, or Haikan, as they call themselves. The term Armenia, of Aramaean origin and probably meaning "highlands," is extremely vague, and applied in a general way to all the region of plateaux overlooked by Ararat. Armenia proper, or Hayasdan - that is, land of the Haïk - has shifted its borders from century to century with the political vicissitudes and migrations of the race. At present it comprises most of the Araxis basin, a large portion of the Kura valley, all the Upper Euphrates basin as far as the junction of the two main bend-streams, the shores of Lake Van, and a few isolated tracts in Persia about Lake Urumiyah. The centre of gravity of the nation has been gradually removed northwards from the neighbourhood of Lake Van and the Eastern Euphrates valley, where a village

still bears the national name of Haïk. But from all parts of the globe the scattered fragments of the people turn their eyes towards Ararat and the plains of the Araxis as their true fatherland. Here they are still found in the most compact and homogeneous masses, and here the Armenian tongue is spoken in the greatest purity, approaching nearest to the old language still employed in the churches, but which has ceased to be current since the close of the fourteenth century.

At the time of the Russian conquest in 1828-30, about 130,000 Armenians of Persia and Turkey migrated to the Araxis and Kura valleys, here replacing the Kurds and Tatars, who in their turn took refuge in the lands that had remained in the power of the Mohammedans. During the war of 1877-8 a similar cross migration took place. The districts of Ardahan in the Upper Kura valley, and of Kars in the Araxis basin, lost the greater part of their Mussulman inhabitants, receiving in their stead a multitude of Armenians from the Upper Euphrates, the Chorukh, and especially from the tract ceded to Russia by the treaty of St. Stefano, but restored to Turkey by the Congress of Berlin. These national movements were doubtless attended by a frightful loss of life, and even now religious and racial hatred gives rise to terrible tragedies. But the populations have, on the whole, been grouped more in conformity with their natural affinities.

Hitherto no reliable estimate has been formed of the number of Armenians in Asia Minor under Moslem rule, but they are probably less numerous than those subject to Russia.<sup>2</sup> The whole nation, usually estimated at three and even four millions, would seem scarcely to exceed two millions, of whom no less than 200,000 reside in Constantinople. Tifiis, the second Armenian city in numerical importance, lies also beyond the limits of Armenia proper, and the same is true of several other Transcaucasian towns in which the Armenian element preponderates.

Deprived for centuries of all political unity and national independence, the Armenians have been scattered over the Eastern world since the days of Herodotus, who met them in Babylon. When their country fell a prey to foreign conquerors they preferred to become "strangers amongst strangers than remain slaves in their native land." They migrated in multitudes, and since the eleventh century have been settled in Russia, Poland, Bukovina, and Galicia. At present they are found in all the large emporiums of trade from London to Singapore and Shanghai, everywhere distinguished by their commercial enterprise. They have often been compared with the Jews, whom they certainly equal in religious tenacity, spirit of fellowship, mercantile instincts, and commercial skill. But they are less adventurous, and whereas individual

<sup>2</sup> Probable number of Armenians in the world: -

Caucasia and European Russia .....	840,000
Asiatic Turkey .....	760,000
Persia .....	150,000
European Turkey .....	250,000
Elsewhere .....	60,000
Total .....	2,060,000



Jews have penetrated to the ends of the earth, sustaining alone the struggle for existence, the Armenians seldom advance except in compact groups. The majority of the nation have also remained in their original homes, where they are far from showing the same aversion as do the Jews to agricultural pursuits. In several districts of Transcaucasia all the peasantry are of Armenian stock, and in some of their villages in the Karabagh district they are occupied temporarily as masons or carpenters, pursuits which the Jews are never found engaged in.

Nevertheless the Semitic element probably entered largely into the formation of the Haïk race, for numerous migrations and even transportations in mass have taken place from Palestine to Armenia. The Haïks may in a general way be regarded as Aryans closely allied to the Persians; but during the incessant wars, conquests, and migrations of the last four thousand years they have become mingled with all the neighbouring peoples, and especially with the Jews, multitudes of whom were removed by the Assyrian kings to the Armenian highlands. The Bagratides, the most famous royal race that has ruled over Hayasdan and Georgia, even claim to be descended from David of Israel. Amongst the other foreign elements said to have exercised a considerable influence on the nation, mention is made of the Mamigonian tribe, introduced in the third century of the new era into Somkhet, in Armenia, by a prince of Jenasdan - that is, of China. But the chroniclers show clearly that most of these foreigners, arriving, like the Normans and Varangians, as warriors and mercenaries, were in fact Iranians, probably allied to the Tajiks of the Oxus basin.

The Armenian language is included by all philologists in the Aryan family. Its affinities are chiefly with the Bactrian ("Zend"), its syntax is completely Iranian, and its vocabulary greatly resembles the Greek and Slavonic. Although very harsh and abounding in consonants, it rivals the Hellenic in its wealth of words and grammatical forms, as well as in its flexible structure and unlimited power of word-building. Still the numerous modern varieties have borrowed largely from Turkish and Georgian, and the speech current in the Lower Araxis basin is a veritable jargon, in which the Tatar element at times prevails over the Haïkan, while in Shirvan numerous Armenian communities have forgotten their mother tongue as completely as have the more distant settlements in Bukovina and Transylvania. In the convent of Echmiadzin, where it is spoken in its purest form, it still remains a purely Iranian dialect, whose origin and development are well illustrated in a local literature, continued uninterruptedly over a period of two thousand years. Rock inscriptions in the cuneiform character occur in the Van district. Other Haïkan documents are extant in Persian and Greek letters, and in the flourishing literary period (fifth century A.D.), when three hundred schools were open in the country, the peculiar alphabet now in use was introduced. The people still show a great love of instruction; schools are supported in all the communes; and the villagers have often to contend either with the Russian Government, or with the clergy, jealous of the influence exercised by their teachers. The scientific and literary movement has become very active, and in proportion to their numbers the Armenians probably print

more books than any other people in the empire. To the former theological, historical, metaphysical, and grammatical works are now added translations of foreign masterpieces, and even in Anatolia are found close students of French literature. In 1854 about twenty-two Armenian presses were at work in Europe and Asia, issuing periodicals in Tiflis, Constantinople, and other towns, and publishing the old monuments of the language, especially in Moscow, Vienna, Paris, and Venice. The most famous establishment of this sort abroad is the convent founded in 1717 by the monk Mekhitar, or the "Consoler," in the island of San Lazzaro, near Venice. Here are published many valuable documents, and in the library are preserved some rare Oriental manuscripts.

The Mekhitarists, like most of the communities residing beyond the limits of Transcaucasia and Turkey, belong to the United Armenian rite, in union with the Roman Church, while preserving some of their traditional practices. But the bulk of the nation in the Euphrates and Araxis valleys have remained faithful to the old Orthodox cult. The dogmatic differences dividing the nation into two hostile religious sects turn chiefly on the nature of Christ, hell, and purgatory, the authority of the councils, the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and sundry rites. But beneath the outward teaching of both forms are preserved numerous symbols dating from still older religions. The Armenian was the first nation converted in mass by Gregory the "Illuminator," about the beginning of the fourth century. But while changing its deities, it lost few of its traditions, and modified its worship very gradually. The sacred fire is even still commemorated, as in the days of Zoroaster. On the annual feast a recently married couple consume in a copper basin the richest fruits of the earth, dowers of all sorts, ears of corn, the vine and laurel branches. On all important occasions the people turn towards the sun as if to seek for aid from that source. During the great feasts bulls or rams crowned with wreaths and decorated with lighted candles are led into the churches or under the sacred trees, and afterwards sacrificed with songs and prayers - evidently the sacrifice of Mithra bequeathed by the old to the new religion.

The "Katholicos," or spiritual head of the nation, derives his power from the possession of a precious relic, the right hand of the martyred Gregory. Chosen by the dignitaries of Echmiadzin when not designated by his predecessor, he is obeyed by all his co-religionists of the Gregorian rite; he names the bishops, who are nearly always selected from the monkish communities; and he addresses the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Jerusalem as a superior. Hence the extreme importance attached by the Russian Government to the possession of Ararat and the sacred convent of Echmiadzin. By seizing this strip of territory, so renowned throughout the East, the Muscovites have at the same time secured the spiritual ruler of over 2,000,000 human beings. The St. Petersburg authorities, who usually view with scant favour all religions antagonistic to the Orthodox Greek, have accordingly been careful to treat the Catholicos with the greatest respect, thus acquiring a sort of protective right over all the Armenians settled in Turkey. On several occasions excessive zeal for the "Russification" of all the inhabitants of the empire has doubtless led to acts of violence and oppression

even in Armenia. But the caprice of governors and political dreams do not prevent the Armenians from, on the whole, exercising a considerable influence in the empire - an influence due to their knowledge of languages, to their tact, often even to their intriguing spirit and adroitness in gaining access to the bureaucratic circle. They have long enjoyed a large share in the government at Constantinople, and they have already begun to play a part in St. Petersburg analogous to that often exercised by wily Italians at the French courts. Even in Transcaucasia they are gradually taking possession of the soil and constantly encroaching on their Tatar neighbours.

The Armenians of Russian Transcaucasia differ little in their physique from the Georgians, except that their features are generally rounder, their neck shorter and thicker. Many are inclined to obesity, probably from their sedentary habits. With fine heads of brown hair, large, black, and languid eyes, they seem to be of a gentle and almost melancholy temperament. Yet they do not lack valour in resisting attacks, as shown by the Seven Years' War of Independence, which they sustained in the beginning of the eighteenth century against the Persians in the Karabagh highlands, and since then in many local revolts against the Turks. Though they do not go about armed with an assortment of pistols and daggers, like the Georgians of the Rion basin, they have contrived far better to preserve their liberties, and have never fallen under the hard yoke of serfdom, which has been the lot of most of their neighbours. Notwithstanding the prevailing ignorance, they betray a remarkable degree of intelligence and aptitude, especially in the acquisition of languages. It has been said that "the intelligence of the Georgians is only in their looks, whereas that of the Armenians is in their head." But on the whole they seem to take life too seriously, and are somewhat indifferent to the charms of poetry, although they have produced some good poets even in recent times. Their favourite studies are theology, metaphysics, and philology, and their influence has been chiefly felt in the more solid walks of literature. Fragments of Eusebius, Philo, Chrysostomus, and other Greek fathers, which were supposed to have been irrevocably lost, have been found in old Armenian translations by the Mekhitarists of Venice and Vienna.

In most places the Armenians keep themselves aloof from the surrounding populations, generally forming distinct trading communities, and in the Tatar and Georgian towns rendering themselves no less indispensable, hated, and despised than the Jews in East Europe and Germany. But popular feeling is of little consequence to men living quite apart in the seclusion of the family circle, where they still practise patriarchal habits. The grandfather commands - children, sons-in-law, and grandchildren obey. The wife, condemned to silence till the birth of her first child, wears round her neck and the lower part of her face a thick bandage concealing the mouth, and obliging her to converse in signs like a dumb creature. Even after childbirth she speaks only in a low voice till advanced in years, but undertakes all the household duties till the marriage of a sister-in-law. Strangers are rarely welcomed into the domestic circle, and many villages might be traversed without suspecting them to be inhabited, so completely are dwellings and gardens walled off from the outer world.

The Tatars of the Lower Araxis valley differ in no respects from the Turki tribes of the Kura basin. Here also are found a few Gipsies, besides some Kurdish herdsmen, mostly temporary immigrants from Persian and Turkish Kurdistan. Amongst them are several hundred Yezides, regarded by all their neighbours with a sort of horror as devil-worshippers. The sedentary Kurds are numerous only in the Zangezour district, south-east of the Gok-chai, where they number about 13,000, mostly assimilated in dress, and often even in speech, to the Tatars.

### TOPOGRAPHY.

The chief town of the Upper Araxis valley is Kaghizman, pleasantly situated in the midst of trailing vines, cherry, apricot, peach, and other fruit trees. In the same district, but on a tributary of the main stream, lies the capital of Upper Russian Armenia, the celebrated city and fortress of *Kars*, thrice conquered from the Turks in 1828, 1855, and 1877, and definitely ceded to Russia in 1878. Even before the Russo-Turkish wars it had often been exposed to attack. Capital of an Armenian kingdom during the ninth and tenth centuries, it was sacked by Tamerlane, by Amurat III., and again by the Persians, its strategical importance constantly attracting the attention of invaders. For it occupies a central position between the upper basins of the Kura, Araxis, Chorukh, and Euphrates, commanding all the mountain passes between those valleys. At this point the Kars-chai, confined in a narrow rocky bed, makes a double bend, first partly encircling the town, and then sweeping round the citadel. Built of lava blocks, and standing on a black basalt eminence, Kars could formerly defy the attacks of its assailants. But since the invention of artillery it was found necessary to fortify the surrounding heights, and during the late war the eleven detached forts enclosing an entrenched camp formed a line of defence 11 miles in circumference. These forts, with their basalt and obsidian rocks, are the only attractions of a town which, although 6,150 feet above sea-level, enjoys a considerable trade.

A carriage road descending eastwards from the Kars-chai to the Arpa-chai valley connects Kars with *Alexandrapol*, a Russian stronghold whose fortifications have been continued almost uninterruptedly since 1837. At that time nothing existed here except the village of Gumri, peopled by Armenian refugees. Situated near the east bank of the Arpa-chai, in a basin commanded on the south by the Ala-göz, and 1,330 feet lower down than Kars, Alexandrapol lies in a better-cultivated district, abundantly watered by the Arpa-chai. It succeeded to *Ani*, former residence of the Armenian Bagratides, which was destroyed by an earthquake in 1319, and whose extensive ruins still cover a triangular headland overlooking the right bank of the Arpa-chai. According to probably exaggerated accounts of the native chroniclers, Ani had at one time a population of 100,000, with 1,000 churches and other public buildings.

South-east of Ani is *Talish*, which also seems to have been an Armenian capital, the ruins of whose high walls and towers now afford shelter to a wretched hamlet. The

whole of the Lower Arpa-chai valley is a land of ruins. To the west are the remains of *Pakaran*, or "Assembly of the Gods," and a little farther south those of two other capitals, *Erovantashad* and *Erovantagerd*, built successively by Erovan II. north of the Araxis and Arpa-chai confluence, and said to have formerly contained 30,000 Jewish and 20,000 Armenian houses. *Armavir*, also founded by the same king, has left but few remains on a hill overlooking the plain skirted by the Kara-su Canal, near the Araxis. Lastly, south of this river stands *Kara-Kaleh*, the "Black Castle," wrongly supposed by some to have been the ancient Tigranocertes, but still a most picturesque object perched on a frowning precipice, with towers built of alternate rows of red porphyry and black lava, at whose feet rush the foaming waters of a mountain torrent.

*Echmiadzin*, the present religious capital of the Haïkans, lies to the west of Erivan, nearly in the middle of the plain. In the neighbourhood is the small town of *Vagarshabad*, but Echmiadzin itself is little more than a vast convent surrounded by a cob-wall, and commanded by a church with pyramidal belfry and side turrets. The lower story of the buildings is concealed by a plain quadrangular enclosure of dull grey walls, so that there is nothing to relieve the monotony of these heavy masses except the surrounding thicket of poplars and fruit trees, a few flower beds, and limpid streams. Yet this monastery, whose name means "the only son has descended," is the capital of the Armenian world. Here, according to the legend, the "Son of God" appeared to Gregory the Illuminator, and at one thunder-stroke hurled the pagan divinities beneath the earth. For here formerly stood Ardimet-Kaghat, the "City of Artemis," the "Armenian Venus," to whose shrine worshippers flocked from all quarters. The deities have changed, but for at least five-and-twenty centuries this has remained a hallowed spot. The library contains six hundred and thirty-five old manuscripts, and its printing-press, the oldest in Armenia proper, publishes a periodical and some popular works. One of the bells bears a Tibetan inscription with the famous mystic words, *om mani padmi hum*, showing that at some unknown epoch Armenia must have had relations with the Buddhist world.

*Erivan*, capital of the chief government in Russian Armenia, and the second city of the Araxis valley, stands at the north-east angle of the old lacustrine basin traversed by the river, and on the banks of the Zanga, here diverted into a thousand irrigating rills. It is chiefly inhabited by Armenians, who have succeeded to the Tatars occupying it under the Persian rule. It holds an important commercial and strategical position at the entrance of the upper valley leading to Tiflis and the Kura basin over the Gok-chai plateau, and its fortress, perched on a columnar basalt cliff, has been the scene of many stirring events. Built mostly in the Persian style, it boasts of some picturesque structures, including a handsome mosque decorated with arabesques, and shaded with magnificent elms. The district, commanding a superb view of Ararat, is very fertile and well watered. But the wretched climate, with its violent changes of temperature, dust, and fevers, would soon depopulate the place, but for its extreme strategical importance on the Turko-Persian frontier and the rich rock-salt mines in the neighbourhood. In

summer the Russian officials retire to Semonovka, Delijan, and other sanatoria among the surrounding hills. The copper mines of this region are no longer worked.

East of Erivan are the ruins of *Bash-Karni*, or Garni, another old capital, which the natives pretend was founded four thousand years ago, and which contains the remains of a Greek temple, probably dedicated to the Armenian Venus. But more remarkable than its ruins are its basalt columns, blue, green, red, and other igneous rocks, the scene of former eruptions, through which now foams a mountain stream. In the same wild and rugged region lies *Kegart*, Kergash, or Aïrivank, the "Convent of Hell," half of which is hollowed out of the tufa and lavas. In the centre of the plain, watered by the Karni-chai, stood *Artaxates*, built by Artaxias, General of Antiochus, on the plains of Hannibal, and which remained the capital of Armenia till destroyed by Corbulo in the reign of Nero. It was succeeded by Neronia, which yielded later on to Vagarshabad, and was finally overthrown by Sapor II. in 370, when its 200,000 Armenian and Jewish inhabitants were put to the sword or carried captive into Persia.

*Nakhichevan*, or Nakhijevan, capital of the district stretching south-east of Ararat, is said to be even an older place than Echmiadzin, having been traditionally founded by Noah after planting the first vine on the slopes of Ararat. Its very name means the "First Dwelling," and a mound is shown in the neighbourhood in which Noah is supposed to be buried. The town, already mentioned by Pompey under the name of Naxuana, has been repeatedly rebuilt, and all the present houses are constructed of stones from previous ruins. The gateway of an old palace flanked by two brick minarets bears a Persian inscription surrounded by rich arabesques, and near it stands the "Tower of the Khans," a twelve-sided building bearing a long inscription with letters in relief. Nakhichevan is now inhabited chiefly by Tatars occupied with gardening and vine growing, and has been much reduced since the time of the Persian rule, when it had a population of 40,000. The district is well watered, and in the neighbouring hills are rich salt mines, worked since prehistoric times. The millstones, cut from a variegated sandstone, are highly esteemed throughout Armenia.

South-west of Nakhichevan is the frontier station of *Jufa*, on the banks of the Araxis, and facing an old Persian caravanserai, which is commanded by a stronghold perched on a red sandstone escarpment. At the beginning of the seventeenth century Jufa was the richest and most industrious place in Armenia, with a population of 40,000. But Shah Abbas the "Great" commanded the inhabitants to emigrate in mass to New Jufa, near Ispahan, those who lagged behind being thrown into the river, and the town burnt to the ground. Its most noteworthy remains are its ruined bridge and the tombs of its vast necropolis. In 1854 the population had dwindled to ten families living in a ruined caravanserai.

*Ordubat* stands on the Araxis, below Jufa, near the Migri Gorge, south of the Karabagh Mountains. It is the pleasantest place in Armenia, being in a fertile district watered by numerous streamlets and irrigation rills, and studded with villas scattered over the wooded heights of the neighbourhood. A few miles to the north-west is the

thriving village of *Akulisi*, inhabited by wealthy Armenians. The copper mines of the surrounding hills yielded no more than 117 tons of pure metal in 1877.

The double basin of the Bergushet and Akera, between the Ordubat and Shusha Hills, comprises the administrative district of Zangezûr, and contains no towns, but several important villages peopled by Armenians, Tatars, and Kurds. The largest is *Khinzirak*, but the administrative capital is *Girûsi*, the Koriss of the Armenians; that is, the "Village of Pillars," so called from the "needles" of tufa rising above the slope of the terrace on which the village is situated. The flat-roofed houses are disposed in the form of a flight of steps, beneath which the inhabitants move about in underground streets. Other dwellings are excavated in the igneous scoria of the terrace, but the present village is a modern place 1,000 feet lower down than the old *Girûsi*. For a few weeks in summer it becomes a busy trading-place, when 50,000 nomads of the surrounding districts drive their flocks to the rich Zangezûr pastures.