

ARMENIAN HISTORY AS EXOTIC FANTASY

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✘ Keghart.com Team Editorial, 15 November 2011

It's an ancient and almost world-wide tradition to claim descent from bygone aristocracy, nobility, or even royalty. Meanwhile, noble families and royalty have themselves often claimed origins in ancient super heroes—legendary or real—and sometimes in pagan gods. Pharaohs considered themselves gods, so did Alexander the Great and most Roman emperors. A large group of ancient Armenian nakharar princely families (Apahuni, Arran and Cartozian) maintained that they had descended from Haig Nahabed, the first patriarch of the Armenian people. The Vahevuni and Mehnuni nakharar clans boasted that they were the offspring of the god of fire Vahakn or god of war Mihr.

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The widespread conceit is understandable. Over the course of our long history we have had anywhere from 300 to 800 big and small noble families. It's not uncommon that some/many would try to enhance their temporal stature by attaching themselves, through imaginary links, to exalted beings.

Since Armenia was often occupied by near (Persian, Greek, Arab, Byzantine) and far (Roman, Turkish from Central Asia, Russian) empires, it's natural that some of our nakharars and noble families would have non-Armenian roots—especially from nearby Persia. We know that the Pahlavounis, Ardashesians and Arshagounis were of Persian origin while the Robseans were probably Roman and the Lusignans French.

Armenians have no problem acknowledging the valuable role played by foreign nobility in the preservation of Armenia and the Armenian people. However, we object when people—with mysterious motives--try to impose false history and false foreign origins to some of our most prominent nakharar or noble families.

Case in point is the “true” origins of the Pakradounis, the Mamigonians and the Ardzrunis.

The main culprit in the Pakradouni family pseudo-history is Movses Khorenatsi, known as the “father

of Armenian history." There is no doubt about the priceless contributions of Khorenatsi to Armenian history, culture and religion, but there is also no doubt that Khorenatsi, writing in the late 5th century, sometimes mixed legend with history and occasionally tended to be creative with our history. For example, he claimed that the Pakradounis descended from a Jewish immigrant called Pakarad.

In a country recently converted to Christianity, building links with Palestine and the Holy Book were propaganda devices to enhance the stature of Armenia and its paramount prince-- Sahag Pakraduni--who just happened to be the sponsor of Khorenatsi. But the historian's attempt to please his master was not appreciated: Sahag Pakraduni rejected the link, although some Armenians to this day believe the Khorenatsi's claim. There are a number of non-Armenian kings who also claim to be descended from King David or King Solomon, although there's no shred of historic evidence that these two legendary Jewish kings existed.

Another nail in the Jewish Pakraduni fable is that Pakarad means 'Pak's Gift'... Pak being the name of the main Persian god long ago. How likely is that a Jew would bear the name of the main pagan god and be that god's gift to his family or people?

The yearning of some early Christian Armenians to be related to the Bible and to the "Chosen People" is not remarkable. Over the centuries people from many nations have believed they were related to the Jews. The royal family of Ethiopia claimed the "Lion of Judah" title. According to Ethiopian history/legend, on the return journey from the Holy Land to her homeland in modern Yemen, a pregnant Queen of Sheba stopped in Ethiopia to rest. While there she gave birth to son Menelek. She had been impregnated by King Solomon during her visit to the Holy Land. Menelek thus became the founder of the Ethiopian royal family.

Over the past two millennia many books have been written "proving" that the British, the Americans, the Afghans, the Japanese, the American Indians are the Lost Tribe of Israel. Some of these delusional people claim the Lost Tribe was that of Dan. And how do they "prove" their claim? Simple... European topography is replete with names which include the letters "DN"...Danube, Don, Dniester, Dnieper, Denmark, Dundas, Dunkirk, Dunedin...what further evidence one could possibly require to prove that the tribe of Dan settled/travelled in all these locations? This kind of "evidence" can be used to prove that because certain letters recur in their names Albania, Romania, America, Argentina, Arabia and Armenia are related. Perhaps Almeria (Spain) was settled by Armenians centuries ago.

Another prominent Armenian noble family whose origins have been distorted is the famous Mamigonian family. In an attempt to provide the Mamigonians with a false exotic descent and perhaps allure, some fabulists claim the family originates in China! Supposedly, two Chinese brothers (who were princes) fled their homeland after their failed revolt against the emperor. The two rebels—Mamik and Konak—escaped to Persia. Concerned that he would damage relations with China if he sheltered the escapees, the Persian king, it is said, sent them to Armenia. The two

brothers soon became prominent in their new country and founded the Mamigonian noble family. Perhaps they also introduced noodles to the Armenian pilaf.

To "prove" that Mamigonians came from China in the 3rd or 4th centuries, some studious researcher displays, as exhibit "A" ... in Cantonese "Man-Gun" means people's army. What further proof does one need to give credence to this Sinbad the Sailor tale?

Mamigonians were formerly known as Aravelians, an Indo-European word of noble origin. The frequency of "Ar" in Armenian is all too visible in Ararat, Arakadz, Arax, Ardahan, Ardvin, Arek, Arpineh, Arshalouys and a hundred other Armenian names, not to mention Ararich.

Yet another Armenian princely family whose Armenian roots are questioned by pseudo-historians is the Ardzrunis. And where did they come from? Assyria, fantasists say. How do you prove that? Ardzruni and Assyria sound similar, say the fabricators. What about another Armenian nakharar family—the Sureans? Shouldn't they also be considered Assyrian before the Ardzrunis head the list? Perhaps the Amadunis and Rshdunis are of Arab origin (Imad and Roushdi?), the Khorkhorounis are from the Khorasan region of eastern Persia, the Muratsans were Moors...

Ardzrunis believed they were descended from the Sanansar, son of Mher of Sasna Dzerer fame. It's, of course, a legend and not mytho-history like their supposed origins in Assyria.

Armenian history has sufficient home-grown legends (Haig Nahabed, Ara and Shamiramis, etc.) acts of incredible bravery and strength (Sassoontsi Tavit, etc.), descent from gods (Vahakn, Mihr, etc.). We don't need imported fabrications a la "Chariots of the Gods" or the "Da Vinci Code." Armenians who believe the exotic Pakraduni, Mamigonian, Ardzruni, et al fables should desist from spreading nonsense and falsehood. On second thoughts, perhaps the Chinese city of Xian, famous for its Terra Cotta warriors, was founded three-thousand years ago by... Armenians.

