ARMENIAN HIGHLAND VS. HIGHLANDS: WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Posted on February 9, 2022 by Keghart

Category: Opinions

Prof. Z. S. Andrew Demirdjian, Los Angeles, 8 February 2022

In response to one of my recent articles ("*Hijacking the Heritage of the Armenian Highlands*, Jan. 24, 2022), Mr. Berj Chekijian wrote in Keghart.org's comments section: "I have seen in many articles by Keghart.org the use of the term 'Armenian Highlands' rather than 'Armenian Highland'. I believe the correct translation of Haykakan Lernashkhta ('Armenian Plateau') is 'Armenian Highland'". He added: "See how the editors of Encyclopedia Britannica describe the region, "...Armenian Highland mountainous region of eastern Asia".

Here are some of the reasons as to why we should call Armenian Highlands in the plural:

I. In "Cosmographia" (reprinted in 1467. See below map) the descriptive is Armenian Highlands.

II. The earliest written account of Armenian region in modern times was written by German mineralogist and geologist Otto Wilhelm Hermann von Abich (1806-1886) who described the land mass as the Armenian "Highlands" in one of his books consisting of many parts not just one geological formation. He was the first scholar in modern times to use the phrase "Armenian Highlands."

III. According to Zara Mokatsian, an accomplished philologist in Yerevan, highlands denotes an extensive area which encompasses the three lakes that equates to Armenian Highlands. Whereas Haygagan Bartzravantag (Armenian Highland) refers only to the middle section of the Armenian Highlands. Saraharts/saravands are plateaus among the high mountains. Therefore, they do not represent parts of the extensive land area of the Armenian Highlands.

IV. According to the American Heritage Student Dictionary (Houghton Mifflin, c. 1994), highland is defined as 1. Elevated land 2. Highlands. A mountainous or hilly part of a country, or region at a high elevation (singular). It should be noted that the synonyms of highland are upland, plateau, tableland, and mesa, which do not represent the whole country.

V. Many countries and regions have areas that are officially or unofficially referred to as highlands. Other than Scotland, these include parts of Afghanistan, Tibet, Ethiopia, Canada, Kenya, Eritrea, Yemen, Ghana, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Syria, Turkey, and Cantabria. It goes without saying that the "Turkish Highlands" are none but the Armenian Highlands.

VI. In addition to the German geologist von Abich, geographer- scholars have expanded the borders of the Armenian mountainous lands to include the occupied mountainous lands as well (i.e. a series of highlands) that were once part of historical Greater Armenia. Therefore, the result of the expanded borders ended up being called Armenian Highlands.

VII. The implication of stating a name in the plural is important when it comes to describing a country. For example, the Founding Fathers could have named USA as the United State of America, but United State and United States do not communicate the same information, power, and prestige.

What's in a name--highland or highlands? A lot, when it comes to describing a country. The high topography of some countries akin to Armenia, such as Scotland, Ethiopia, prefer to call their country "Highlands" rather than "Highland," as in Scottish Highlands or Ethiopian Highlands --in the plural. Seldom, if ever, would you find a country name as "Highland" in the singular referring to the whole country.

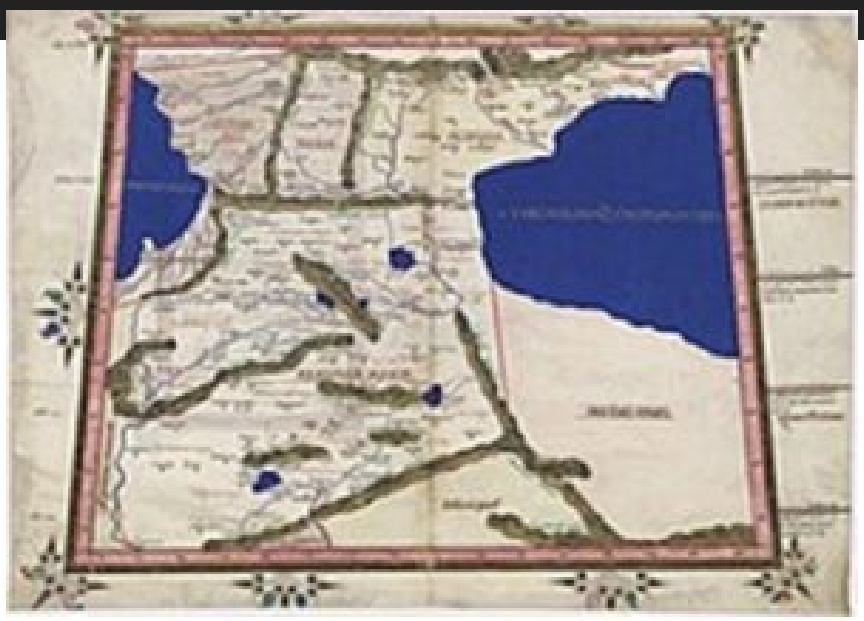
We should not restrict Armenia by calling it “Highland”. Although parts of it are occupied by Turkey, Iran, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, we should not restrict it to a small section of historical, or Greater Armenia. Why delimit a vast country when it once had three lakes (Sevan, Van, and Urmia) and covered a territory from the Cilician Taurus Mountains to Artsakh, and even some scholars include all the way to the Kura-Aras (Arax) river lowland. Its total area is a staggering over 400,000 km2, not the sliver of land on which the Eastern Armenia is located now.

Historically, the Armenian Highlands have been the scene of great volcanic activity. The result of this differential movement of the earth's crust ended up shaping the Armenian homeland into many geological formations, shapes, and elevations.

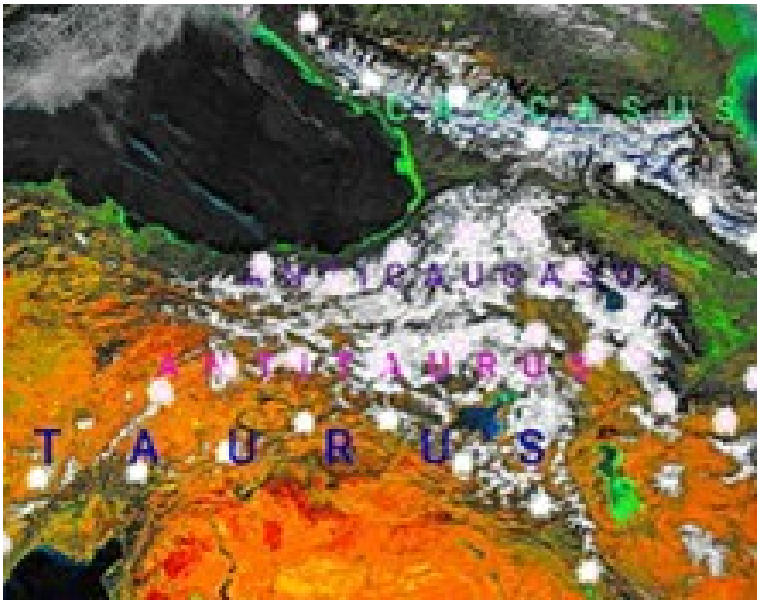
Why restrict the size of Armenian territory to its plateau, upland, or tableland as F.B. Lynch has done. See map below. Plateau refers to the flat part of the highlands; therefore, plateau does not define the whole size of the Armenian homeland. Politically, socially, and educationally we should uphold the truth rather than succumb to the propaganda or mistakes of others with or without an axe to grind.

What is more, why should we give in to the diminution or Turkification efforts of Turkey calling "Western Armenia" as so-called "Eastern Anatolia"? Why put up with Azerbaijan's attempts to claim Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) as the historical land of the Azeris?

It would only be fair to the Armenian nation to call it “Highlands” rather than truncate their vast territory into a smaller region by calling it “Highland” (the terms denote and connote rather small or limited) as the Encyclopedia Britannica erroneously has done. Just because “Encyclopedia Britannica” chose to describe the Ottoman genocide of Armenians as massacres doesn’t make it so. I prefer to call "Armenian Highlands" as the majority of writers do when describing our once vast and variegated homeland whose heartland is now occupied by Turkey. To me and to others our everlasting beautiful homeland of the indigenous Armenian people should be perceived as a vast country, where only recently the survivors of the Armenian Genocide lived for the millennia and whose new generations will never cease dreaming to return there one day to the venerable Armenian Highlands as the birthplace of Western civilization.



Map of Armenia showing the sections of the land by Ptolemy in "Cosmographia" reprinted in 1467 from the original work.



Armenian highlands and Caucasus mountains

The natural borders of the Armenian plateau and its peripheral regions according to H. F. B. Lynch (1901).

Map in teaser: ***The intentional dark colored areas of the map are to emphasize the natural shape of the Armenian homeland. The central dark area is the Armenian Highlands and to its southeastern section is the Persian Plateau. Notice how Anatolia (to the west of Armenia) is a small section of the map and yet Turkey wants to equate Anatolia to present-day Turkey encompassing the vast Armenian homeland, rendering Western Armenia nonexistent.***

Comments

Tsakoug – 2022-02-10 01:06:05
Thank you, Professor Demirdjian!