# GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF ARMENIAN ORIGINS

*Posted on March 3, 2016 by Keghart*

keghart.com

**Category:** Opinions

**Z. S. Andrew Demirdjian**, Ph.D., Los Angeles, 3 March 2016

After reading Israel Finkelstein's and Neil Asher Silberman's *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Text* (2001), a question hovered in the back of my mind about Armenians. According to the Bible, Israelites descend from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Abraham was born in the Sumerian city of Ur, and he migrated with his family to Canaan (the Promised Land). Central to the theory of the authors is the contention that the story of Abraham's journey, the patriarchs, the Exodus from Egypt, the 40-year sojourn in the Sinai, the conquest of Canaan, the covenant of the Promised Land, and so on *were based on legends for archeology has failed to substantiate any of these claims*.

The conclusion: The consolidation of the Israelites into a nation was not the result of nomadic wanderings in the desert and divine revelation, but came from the need to defend themselves against the Philistines who had settled on the Canaanite coastal plain more or less at the same time the Israelites had settled in the hills as farmers. Thus, the founders of Israel were not Abraham and Moses, but Saul and David. It was Saul who consolidated the Jewish hill farmers under his rule and created fighting units capable of confronting the Philistines. It was David who defeated the Philistines and united the hill farmers with the people of the Canaanite plains, thus establishing the Kingdom of Israel.

**Z. S. Andrew Demirdjian**, Ph.D., Los Angeles, 3 March 2016

After reading Israel Finkelstein's and Neil Asher Silberman's *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Text* (2001), a question hovered in the back of my mind about Armenians. According to the Bible, Israelites descend from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Abraham was born in the Sumerian city of Ur, and he migrated with his family to Canaan (the Promised Land). Central to the theory of the authors is the contention that the story of Abraham's journey, the patriarchs, the Exodus from Egypt, the 40-year sojourn in the Sinai, the conquest of Canaan, the covenant of the Promised Land, and so on *were based on legends for archeology has failed to substantiate any of these claims*.

The conclusion: The consolidation of the Israelites into a nation was not the result of nomadic wanderings in the desert and divine revelation, but came from the need to defend themselves against the Philistines who had settled on the Canaanite coastal plain more or less at the same time the Israelites had settled in the hills as farmers. Thus, the founders of Israel were not Abraham and Moses, but Saul and David. It was Saul who consolidated the Jewish hill farmers under his rule and created fighting units capable of confronting the Philistines. It was David who defeated the Philistines and united the hill farmers with the people of the Canaanite plains, thus establishing the

Kingdom of Israel.

The provocative book made me ponder the fundamental question about our people: Is the elusiveness of the Armenian people's European origin in the Balkans a blessing in disguise? According to Turkey's ministry of culture and tourism, "The claim that the Eastern Anatolia belongs as a country only to Armenians, is unacceptable as Armenians tribe is one of those which has come to the region from other places, and at a relatively recent time." Let us first explore the present status of knowledge about the origin of the Armenian people before we answer that fundamental question.

Ever since mankind descended from the tree 70 million years ago, he had to deal with a curiosity and fear about the environment he inhabited. His quest for ethno-genesis has been based on three main sources: archaeology, linguistics, and ancient records. Recently, a fourth method has been used through DNA testing. All have been futile in deciphering the European origin of Armenians. This pursuit of the Holy Grail stems from the fact that Armenians have lived in an area surrounded by a cauldron of cultures. The Armenians seems to have been shielded from the heterological ethnicity process by keeping their distinct characteristics through their isolation in their highlands. Different cultures came into existence in Anatolia and after creating their civilization disappeared--except for the Armenians.

Despite Armenians' tenacious existence, they have left a few clues of their early life in the Armenian Highlands. Their relics have been plundered just like the Azeris in Nakhichevan destroyed the churches, monasteries, 1,500-year-old Khachkars (stone crosses) in the 1990s.

Through logic perhaps we can formulate a working hypothesis for scholars to test. Hittites, Hurrians, Luiwans, Phrygians, Hayasa-Azzis, Mitanni's, and Urartians are considered to be the progenitors of Armenians. With the exception of the Hittites and the Phrygians none of the other so-called "relatives" of the Armenians spoke a full-fledged Indo-European language. Some historians consider Hayasa-Azzi language to be Indo-European to some extent. Hurrians were absorbed into the mainstream Hittite Empire in the second millennium. Armenians and the Hittites/Hurrians lived side by side until the Hurrians and the Hittites were overrun by the Phrygians from the west in 1400 B.C. and 1200 B.C., respectively.

As for the fall of Urartu, the Scythians and the Medes put an end to the once mighty kingdom in 585 B.C. From the fall of Urartu to the first historical reference to Armenia, a 65-year span separates the two events. Whether Armenians contributed to the demise of the Urartians is not known. One major historical clue comes from historian Xenophon (430-355). He refers to an Armenian revolt during the reign of King Cyrus who founded the Achaemenid Dynasty replacing the Medes as the rulers of Persia in 550 B.C. The incident shows that the Armenians must have been well established and strong enough to stand against the imperialist Medes and the Persians. The question of when and how the Armenians came to power in the former Urartian territories is a vexed one.

Xenophon wrote that Cyrus acted as a mediator between the Armenians and the Alarodians, the surviving people of Urartu, who were, according to Herodotus, the predecessors and neighbours of the Armenians. Cyrus convinced the valley-dwelling Armenians to allow the Alarodians to cultivate the fertile valleys in exchange for tributes and use of Alarodian hills for pasture.

Let us analyze what Xenophon wrote: Cyrus persuaded "the valley-dwelling Armenians to allow the Alarodians to cultivate the fertile valleys in exchange for tributes and use of Alarodian hills for pasture". Here is the plausible theory based on deductive reasoning by taking a sample of a historical event, analyzing it, and then arriving at certain conclusions:

1. "Valley-dwelling Armenians "could not have sprung up overnight to be in control of choice real estate in the Armenian Highlands. Therefore, either they were living in the Kingdom of Urartu or on the periphery. Logic dictates that had they lived in Urartu, they would have suffered the same fate as the Uraratians at the hands of the Scythians and the Medes, unless they had acted as the fifth column of which there is no evidence. As a result, the Scythians might have conquered the Urartians and left the Armenians alone.

2. Had the Armenians lived within the Urartu, Urartians would have mentioned them on their cuneiforms. But there is not a single Urartian cuneiform in which the Armenians are mentioned. Therefore, Armenians may have lived outside Urartu.

3. That leaves us the possibility of Armenians living in the periphery of the Urartu. The Scythians had to move through the north of Urartu, which was inhabited by the Hayassa-Azzi tribes. If Armenians were among these tribes, they must have given safe passage to the Scythians. After Urartu was overthrown, Armenians must have moved in as an ally of the Scythians and the Medes. And since they helped the Scythians and the Medes conquer the Uraratians, they may have moved into the Uraratian territories and occupied the valleys by pushing the surviving Urartians (the Alarodians) to the non-arable hill sides.

4. Since Cyrus asked the Armenians "to let the Alarodians cultivate the fertile valleys in exchange for tributes and use of Alarodian hills for pasture," it means that Armenians had become the rulers of the Urartian territories. Giving tribute to Armenians means the Armenians owned the land after the fall of Urartu.
Now, we can ask what's the origin of Armenians. Logic dedicates that it is most likely found in the Hayassa-Azzi league. Hayasa-Azzi or Azzi-Hayasa was a late Bronze Age confederation formed by two kingdoms of the Armenian Highlands. Hayasa was south of Trabzon and Azzi occupied the land north of the Euphrates and the south of Hayasa. This dual kingdom was in conflict with the Hittite Empire in the 14th century, leading to the eventual collapse of the far-flung empire around 1190 by the Indo-European Phrygians.

The idea that Armenians were a tribe does not make sense, though. Had Armenians been a mere tribe, the Assyrians would not have hesitated to overcome them.

Here is a plausible theory based on deductive reasoning. Armenians occupying Urartu must have had their own kingdom and formidable army with equal strength to that of the Scythians and the Medes. Otherwise, they would have been plundered by the Scythians. Armenians' strong defensive position could not have been mustered by a tribe.

Considering the Armenians' quick takeover of the Urartian Empire, it would be safe to assume that Armenians were within or in close proximity to that region. Although some historians mention Hayasa-Azzi as a confederation of tribes, they must have been more than tribes since they had formed kingdoms. They presented a challenge to the mighty Hittites who had chosen not to pick up a fight with them. That the Hittites had decided not to confront them indicates that Hayasa-Azzi or the Armenians presented a viable rival. Armenians must have been one of the most powerful constituents of the confederation, since for centuries Greater Armenia mainly consisted of the northern territories of the two kingdoms of Hayasa-Azzi and major parts of former Urartian territories.

Whether Armenians came from the Balkans cannot be ascertained for lack of archeological, historical, and linguistic evidence. Buried in the Armenian Highlands lie answers about the origin of Armenians. After a few decades of investigation, scientists have transformed our understanding about the beginnings of Armenian life as the birthplace of civilization. Nevertheless, vital clues still remain hidden.

Let's go back to the question of as to why Finkelstein is rewriting the history of the origin of the Jews. When in *The Thirteenth Tribe: The Khazar Empire and Its Heritage* (1976) Arthur Koestler said that over 90 percent of  Jews are are descendants of Khazars of Turkish origin, he was criticized and his life threatened. Why isn't Finkelstien being attacked? He and Silberman have debunked the Bible as a reliable source of historical facts. Stripping the Jews of their Ur pedegree, the cradle of civilization, is a serious revision. Why are they not being condemned as anti-Jewish? Maybe the reason is that they attemp to establish the Jews as indigenous farmers and herders  who stood up against the invading Philistines. In short, they are natives of Israel. This to silence pro-Palestine critics who say the Jews are historically occupiers and not native to Israel.

The Jews have created a historical background with Abraham coming from Ur to inhabit the Promised Land. Now, they have to tear down that tale in order to establish their being native to Palestine for geopolitical expediency.

Armenians do not have to erase Biblical stories about their origins: Noah landed on the Mountains of Ararat in Armenia and began to populate the world. Armenians are the direct descendants of Noah living continuously around Mount Ararat, the heartland of their nation. That account could be based on legend, but Armenians being part and parcel of Hayasa-Azzi or a member of the Hurian and Hattian people makes them a native of the Armenian Highlands.

The Bible does not claim the Armenians came from somewhere else. They have continuously inhabited their highlands since paleolithic times. The Turks/Azeris, who invaded from Central Asia,

are the outlanders. Being an occupier or a native has "profound implications" to diplomats' perception of the geopolitical origins of a people and their rights to a land. Even in modern times, the concept of "origin of a people" is used overtly or covertly to justify political polices, such as indigeous vs. foreign and other opinions based on prejudice. Thus, in political struggles, the geographic origin of a people becomes crucial.

The European elusiveness of the origin of Armenia is perhaps a blessing in disguise. No one can claim that Armenians are outsiders to their highlands. Besides, the idea of an insider sounds politically correct posture. Until proven otherwise, Armenians are natives of their highlands. The growing scholarship consensus is that the Armenian people are ethnos belonging to the Caucasian racial group. Moreover, Armenia with its several dialects is isolate among Indo-European languages because of living sequestered on the Armenian plateau. Thus, Armenians are indigenous rather than descended from migrants or colonists.

The technology called "lidar" is revolutionizing archaeology by measuring the distance light travels to the ground and back. Through lidar researchers can digitally strip away the canopy from forested areas revealing ancient settlements buried under heavy detritus. Armenians must have had settlements in the forested areas of Erzingan and Erzurum. The new technology can perhaps unearth relics to shed more light on the origin of the Armenians.