



ARA THE BEAUTIFUL

ARA THE BEAUTIFUL (Arm. *gelec'ik*), son of Aram, mythical king of Armenia. According to Movsēs Xorenac'i (5th-8th century A.D.), Šamiram (Semiramis), the queen of Assyria and widow of the king Ninus, desired Ara and invaded Armenia in order to kidnap him. He was killed in a battle, and Šamiram ordered that the corpse be placed in an upper room of her palace, for her gods, the (y)ar(a)lez-k' (see [Arlez](#)), to come and lick him to life (Moses Khorenats'i, *History of the Armenians*, tr. R. W. Thomson, Cambridge, Mass., 1978, pp. 96-98 = 1.15). According to Xorenac'i, a Christian writer, these efforts were fruitless, but in an earlier version, the story of Er Armenios the Pamphylian related by Plato in Book X of the *Republic*, the slain man visits the next world and returns to life. The purpose of the latter version is to describe the justice of the afterlife, not to emphasize the resurrection of Er. Classical writers identify the supernatural traveler as Zoroaster (see W. Kroll, *Oracula Chaldaica*, Breslau, 1898, p. 28, where Zoroaster Armenius is called *familiaris Pamphylus Cyri*), and the focus of the Greek version indeed resembles the death-like trance, journey to heaven and hell, and return of Wīrāz in the Pahlavi *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* (see [Ardā Wīrāz](#)). Xorenac'i's version is probably a variant of the passion of Cybele and the beautiful youth Attis, who is both her lover and son, and who is killed, only to rise from the dead with the coming of spring (see G. Łap'anc'yan, *Ara gelec'iki a landa*, Erevan, 1944, and A. Matikean, *Aray gelec'ik*, Vienna, 1930). The legend of Ara thus appears to come from ancient Asianic religious beliefs, adapted in Armenia to Zoroastrian theological purposes in the Achaemenian period. Down to the 4th century A.D. the belief persisted in Armenia that the gods would descend to revive the corpses of heroes killed in battle and placed



in a tower; this was done with the body of the Christian general Mušet Mamikonean by his grieving relatives, but the corpse decayed, so they buried it (P'awstos Buzandac'i, *Patmuč'wn Hayoc'*, Erevan, 1968, v. 36).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text.

(J. R. Russell)