



AYRARAT

AYRARAT, region of central Armenia in the broad plain of the upper Araxes (q.v.); the name is undoubtedly connected with the Assyrian Urautri, later Urartu, the biblical Ararat (Genesis 12:20, Jeremiah 15:13), and with the people called Alarodioi by Herodotus (3.94) in the fifth century B.C. The name Ayrarat is unknown to classical authors who were well acquainted with Armenia, and it appears to have been in purely local usage to describe the central lands of Armenia which formed the royal domains of the Arsacid kings and probably those of their Orontid and Artaxiad predecessors. In this case it may well represent the Araxenōn Pediōn (Araxena plain) of Strabo (11.14.3), which in its Armenian form Erasxajor was otherwise restricted to one district within Aurarat.

Geography. Although the anonymous seventh-century *Armenian Geography* depicts Ayrarat as a vast province containing twenty-two districts, this account appears to reflect the situation only after the Byzantine reorganization at the time of the Byzantine-Persian partition of Armenia in A.D. 591. The original domains of the Armenian kings appear to have consisted of only the following fourteen districts (for details see also Eremyan, *Hayastanā*):

1. Erasxajor (Araxes valley), i.e., Greater Aršarunik', the plain along both banks of the upper course of the Araxes which subsequently broke into the four separate principalities Abeleank', Gabeleank', Hawnunik', and (lesser) Aršarunik'.
2. Bagrewand or Bagrəvand (Greek Bagravandēnē, on which see Markwart, *Südarmerien*, p. 11) in the valley of the upper Aracani river (Greek Arsanias, Turkish Murad-su) in the modern plain of Alaškert (Turkish



Eleškirt). 3. Całkotn (lit., foot of Całke, Urartian Luša, Georgian Kalkoitni) located at the northern foot of the Całke mountains (Turkish Ala Dağ). 4. Kogovit (Kog valley), the district west of Mount Ararat centered at the castle of Daroynk' (also Dariwnk' or Darewnc'berd, Turkish Bayazid, now Doğu Bayazit), where in Arsacid times a part of the royal treasure was kept. 5. Čakatk' in the valleys of the streams Vardamarg and Agarak, right-bank tributaries of the Araxes, and centered at the town of Kołb. 6. Aragacotn (lit., foot of Aragac), the plain along the left bank of the Araxes between Maseac'otn and the slopes of Mount Aragac. 7. Nig or Nigatun (land of Nig, Greek Nigē) corresponds to the modern raion of Abaran in the valley of the K'asał river north of Aragacotn. 8. Mazaz, the upper course of the Hrazdan river (Turkish Zanga) which flows from Lake Sevan to the Araxes. Originally this district probably included Varažnunik', which later became a separate entity under the princely house of that name (see below). 9. Kotayk' (Greek Kotaia), the left bank of the valley of the lower course of the Hrazdan river. Here was located the fortress of Erevan (Urartian Ereboni), now capital of Soviet Armenia. 10. Ostan Hayo' (capital/court of Armenia), the municipal territory of the city of Artasat (Greek Artaxata), which for most of the Hellenistic and Roman periods was the capital of the Armenian kingdom. Located in the valley of the Azat river (Garnichay), it included the city of Dvin (Byzantine Doubios or Tibiōn, Arabic Dabīl), capital of Armenia from the fifth to the ninth centuries, and the fortress of Garni, summer capital of the Arsacid kings. 11. Urc or Urcajor, the valley of the Urcajor river (modern Vedi), left tributary of the Araxes, southeast of Ostan Hayoc' and centered around the castle of Sagerberd and the locality of Urcajor. 12. Arac or Aracoy *kołmn* (district of Arac') in the foothills of the Siwnik' mountains southeast of Urc along the right bank of the Arp'aneal river. 13. Šarur or Šarur Dašt (Šarūr plain), along the lower course of the Arp'aneal river, centered in the locality of Marawan (lit., Mede town) near modern Norašen. 14. Maseac'otn (lit., foot of Masis, i.e., Mount Ararat), a broad area along the right bank of the Araxes river northeast of Mount Ararat. This was the region called Erikuahi or Irkua by the Urartians, and here were found the town of C'olakert or Jołakert (Greek Zogokara, Latin Coloceia or Zotozeta) and the village of Anhatakan Ałbiwr (Anahit's spring).

History. The chief characteristic of the history of Ayrarat is its gradual partitioning among various princely houses related to the Armenian kings. The [Bagratids](#), for example, were almost certainly a branch of the Orontid dynasty of Armenia; it appears likely that the emergence of their principality took place under the Artaxiads (ca. 189 B.C.-A.D. 14) or, if the Artaxiads were



an Orontid offshoot, as now seems likely, then under their successors, the Arsacids. The new dynasty, unable to oust the Bagratids, probably gave them as an appanage the land of Bagrewand which may previously have been a part of Erasxajor. In some way unknown to us the Bagratids lost Bagrewand to the pagan religious establishment, possibly being recompensed with the large district of Sper where later we find them ruling. After the conversion of Armenia to Christianity ca. 314, however, Bagrewand passed to the house of St. Gregory the Illuminator and, upon the death of the his last male descendant, St. Isaac, in 438, to his son-in-law of the house of [Mamikonean](#), from whom the Bagratids regained the district in 855/862.

Similarly, under the Arsacid Tiridates II (216-17 to 252) the district of Nig was granted to the house of Gnṭ'uni, while Całkotn at some time was held by the house of Gnuni. Again, at a date unknown to us but prior to 555, a portion of the royal domains formerly probably a part of Mazaz was granted to the house of Varažnunik', from whom it took its name (not to be confused with their earlier land, also called Varažnunik', in south central Armenia). By the fourth century A.D. all of Erasxajor appears in the possession of the house of Kamsarakan, itself an Arsacid branch which had probably received the territory as an appanage from the senior line of the family. Besides these three houses, there were others which owned lands within the royal domains, but whose holdings were not territorial units and probably consisted of large estates. It seems likely that such houses were generally offshoots of the royal dynasty.

After the fall of the Arsacid monarchy in A.D. 428, Ayrarat rapidly broke up into separate principalities, Erasxajor alone dividing into four units (see above), each under a homonymous branch of the Kamsarakan house, while in the southwest the princes of Urc emerge with a separate state which probably included the adjacent but princeless lands of Arac and Šarur. By the seventh century we find Kogovit in the possession of the Bagratids, who probably also held Całkotn, which by then appears to have been part of Bagrewand (Adontz, *Armenia*, p. 241). The eastern lands of the old royal domains (with the possible exceptions of Varažnunik', and Nig, each of which had its own princely house) apparently remained under the direct jurisdiction of the *marzpan*s (Persian governors-general) of Armenia after the fall of the monarchy.

After the Byzantine-Persian partition of Armenia in A.D. 591, the emperor Maurice organized his newly acquired territories in east central Armenia into a Byzantine province, which, probably from its elevation relative to the rest of



Armenia, was designated Lower Armenia (Armenia Inferior). This province appears to have included the four Kamsarakan principalities, the Bagratid principality (Bagrewand-Calkotn-Kogovit), the principality of Varažnunik' (without Mazaz), the principality of Nig, and most of the lands formerly lying under the jurisdiction of the *marzpan* (Maseac'otn, Aragacotn, Čakatk'; and Kotayk'); however, Mazaz, Ostan Hayoc', and the principality of Urc (with Arac and Šarur) remained across the new frontier in Persarmenia. To these eleven lands were added at this time the following principalities: (1) Basean (with Daroynk' and Salk'ora); (2) Vanand with the fortress city of Kars, and the town of Zarišat); (3) Širak (with Širakavan or Erazgawors, Širakašat—Byzantine Maurikopolis; Tk. Mevrek—and the fortified cities of Kumayri and later Ani); (4) Ašoc'k (with Ašoc'k' castle); and (5) the land of Upper Tašir (Eremyan, *Hayastana*, p. 85), which, like Ašoc'k', was formerly a part of the viceroyalty of Gugark' (Gk. Gogarenē), which had passed to Iberian, i.e., East Georgian, suzerainty at the earlier Roman-Persian partition of Armenia in A.D. 387. It is this much larger entity of sixteen units (Byzantine Lower Armenia) which the *Armenian Geography* calls Ayrarat in the seventh century; its author fails to mention Upper Tašir but does include Mazaz, Ostan Hayoc', Urc, Arac, and Šarur, probably because the latter five lands, while still in Persian hands, had always been held to be part of the royal demesne and ipso facto a part of Ayrarat whatever the current political division.

During the almost 250 years of Arab rule in Armenia (7th-9th cents.), the Bagratids gradually assumed the paramount position among the surviving Armenian princes and ca. 884 were able to establish a new monarchy in central Armenia which included all of Lower Armenia and considerably more territory in eastern Armenia as well. Originally centered at Bagaran, the capital was moved to Kars and then to Ani in 961. In 962 an independent Bagratid kingdom emerged in Vanand with its capital at Kars, and in 982 yet another in Tašir centered at Lorī. The remaining territory of the original Bagratid kingdom was annexed by the Byzantines in 1045 and then conquered by the Saljuk Turks in 1064-71; thereafter the term Ayrarat gradually fell out of use. In the *Geography of Vardan* (13th cent.; ed. Berberean, p. 13) it is used solely for the region of Kalzuan (i.e., Erasxajor and Aršarunik'), Basean, Gabeleank', Abeleank', and Apahunik' and does not include any of the other lands of the old royal domains. The territory of Ayrarat was under Georgian domination in the later 12th-early 13th centuries, but was then conquered by the Mongols (ca. 1240), after which it passed under Turkman rule in the 14th-15th centuries. The former Ayrarat was then partitioned between



Ottoman Turkey and Safavid Iran in 1512 and again in 1639. In 1827 Persian Armenia was conquered by Russia, and in 1829 and again in 1878 certain portions of Ayrarat lying in Turkey also were taken by Russia. In 1921 the acquisitions of 1878 were returned to Turkey and the Turkish-Soviet frontier dividing Ayrarat in half follows largely the line of 1639.

See also [ARARAT](#).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anonymous, *Armenian Geography (Ašxarhac'oyc')*, French tr. of the short recension in J. Saint-Martin, *Mémoires historiques et géographiques sur l'Arménie* II, Paris, 1819, pp. 301-94; ed. and tr. of the long recension in A. Soukry, *Géographie de Moïse de Chorène d'après Ptolémée*, Venice, 1881, cf.

Adontz and Garsoïan below for relevant passages. Vardan Vartabed, *Ašxarhac'oyc' (Geography)*, ed. H. Berberean, Paris, 1960.

L. Ališan, *Širak*, Venice, 1881.

Idem, *Ayrarat bnašxarh Hayastangeayc' (Ayrarat, homeland of the Armenians)*, Venice, 1890.

H. Hübschmann, *Die altarmenischen Ortsnamen*, Strasburg, 1904, repr. Amsterdam, 1969, pp. 278-83, 361-66.

N. Adontz, *Armeniya v epokhu Yustiniana*, St. Petersburg, 1908; tr. N. G. Garsoïan, *Armenia in the Period of Justinian*, Lisbon, 1970, pp. 179-80, 236-41 passim.

J. Markwart, *Südarmenien und die Tigrisquellen*, Vienna, 1930.

E. Honigmann, *Die Ostgrenze des byzantinischen Reiches von 363 bis 1071*, Brussels, 1935.

H. Manandyan, *O torgovle i gorodakh Armenii v svyazi s mirovoï torgovleï*



drevnikh vremyon, Erevan, 1945; tr. N. G. Garsoïan, *Trade and Cities of Armenia in Relation to World Trade in Ancient Times*, Lisbon, 1965.

S. T. Eremyan, *Hayastanə əst “Ašxorhac’oyc”-i* (Armenia according to the “Geography”), Erevan, 1963, pp. 35, 118.

C. Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*, Washington, D.C., 1963, passim.

S. T. Eremyan, “Ayrarat,” in *Haykakan sovetakan hanragitaran* (Soviet Armenian Encyclopedia) I, Erevan, 1974, pp. 110-11.

T. X. Hakobyan, *Hayastani patmakan ašxarhagrut’yun* (Historical geography of Armenia), 2nd ed., Erevan, 1968, pp. 121-58.

Toumanoff, *Généologie*, pp. 266-70.

Search terms:

□□□□□