

ARAM TOPCHYAN
(Erevan)

THE EPONYM “MŠAK” OF MAZACA IN MOVSĒS XORENAC’I’S
HISTORY OF ARMENIA

Abstract. In Chapters I, 13 and 14 of his *History of Armenia*, Movsēs Xorenac’i (fifth century AD), the “father of Armenian historiography,” narrates about a legendary Armenian hero, Mšak, who built the city of Mazaca (later Caesarea) in Cappadocia. Scholars have paid no due attention to this very interesting passage additionally testifying that: 1) The Phrygians (called Muški in the Assyrian records), as witnessed by Greek sources (Herodotus, Josephus Flavius, Eudoxus and Stephen of Byzantium), were among the ancestors of the Armenians and Cappadocians. 2) They were newcomers in the territory of the future Cappadocia and conquered the people living there (this, according to the Assyrian records, happened in the 12th c. BC). 3) The Muški were the founders of Mazaca. 4) The Armenians and the Cappadocians were so closely associated with one another that the country of which Mazaca was the capital was still called “Protē Armenia” by the Greeks.

The *History of Armenia* by Movsēs Xorenac’i is perhaps the most disputed work in medieval Armenian literature. Since the latter half of the nineteenth century, its traditional date (Movsēs claims to have lived in the fifth century AD), sources and reliability have been seriously doubted, becoming a subject of spirited, sometimes furious, debates, which at times continue in our days. Alfred von Gutschmid (1831-1887) was the first to reduce the value of Movsēs’ work as historical source almost to zero.¹ Later on Auguste Carrière (1838-1902), attempted to prove that Xorenac’i was not a fifth century author but a later falsifier.²

In fact these two scholars, simultaneously with initiating the analytic study of Movsēs’ *History*, became the inciters of a mighty wave of hypercriticism, which subsequently involved other distinguished specialists too, both Armenian and Western (such as Cyril Toumanoff³ and Robert

¹ A. VON GUTSCHMID, “Über die Glaubwürdigkeit der armenischen Geschichte des Moses von Khoren”, *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der königlichen sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Phil.-Hist. Klasse* 28 (1876), S. 1-43. The same study was also published in the following book: A. VON GUTSCHMID, *Kleine Schriften*, III, Leipzig, 1892, S. 282-338.

² See especially A. CARRIÈRE, *Nouvelles sources de Moïse de Khoren*, Vienne, 1893 (*Supplément*, Vienne, 1894).

³ C. TOUMANOFF, “On the Date of Pseudo-Moses of Chorene”, *Handēs amsōreay* 75 (1961), pp. 467-475.

Thomson⁴). Among those who argued for the traditional date and reliability of Xorenac'i's book was Frederick Conybeare (1857-1924).⁵

The Armenian script was created circa 405 AD, and Xorenac'i, if we accept his traditional date, was presumably writing in the early eighties of the same century. His unprecedented undertaking was to embrace in his book the comprehensive history of Armenia, beginning with the genealogy of the nation. In the context of total absence of earlier written Armenian sources, he had to solve almost unsolvable problems, when "searching for the evidence" in his "fight against oblivion."⁶

This circumstance is also decisive for another, very intriguing, topic of research on Xorenac'i, that is, the proper names in his *History*. The book is full of personal and geographic names, and the author has made many, quite interesting, attempts of eponymy and etymology.⁷ Dozens of such attempts by Movsēs may be traced, on many of which one could write a separate study. Although those numerous examples of eponymy and etymology should mostly be characterized as "fabulous," "folk" or "popular" (lacking written records, Xorenac'i often had to rely upon mythology, oral traditions and his own inventiveness), sometimes they provide pieces of noteworthy information, interesting both from the onomastic and historical aspects. Our paper discusses one of such instances of eponymy.

In Chapters I, 13 and 14 of the *History*, citing, as he says, from an old literary source brought to Armenia by the Syrian scholar Mar Abas Catina, Xorenac'i narrates about the exploits of Aram, according to him, the eponymous ancestor of the Armenians. Aram wins one of his victories in Cappadocia, defeating the so-called "Titanids." Then, Movsēs writes, "he left over the country a certain Mshak of his own family with a thousand of his troops and returned to Armenia... He ordered the inhabitants of the country to learn the Armenian speech and language. Therefore to this day the Greeks call that area Protē Armenia, which translated means 'First Armenia.' And the town that Mshak, Aram's governor, built in his own name

⁴ Moses Khorenats'i, *History of the Armenians*, translation and commentary on the literary sources by R.W. Thomson, Cambridge (Mass.), London, 1978.

⁵ See, for example, F.C. CONYBEARE, "The Date of Moses of Khoren", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 10 (1901), pp. 489-504.

⁶ Phrases applying to Greco-Roman historiographers in the brilliant discussion of the differences between them and Hebrew writers of history by Arnaldo Momigliano: A. MOMIGLIANO, "Time in Ancient Historiography", *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography*, Middletown, Connecticut, 1982, p. 191 (the article was first published in 1966).

⁷ For a general outline of Movsēs' etymology of proper names, see G. SARGSYAN, « Հատուկ անունների ստուգաբանությունը Մովսես Խորենացու *Հայոց պատմության* մեջ » (The Etymology of Proper Names in Movsēs Xorenac'i's *History of Armenia*), 147-148 (1998, 1-2), pp. 113-128 and 149-150; (1998, 3), pp. 85-98.

and fortified with low walls was called Mazhak by the old inhabitants of the country, as if they were unable to pronounce it properly, until it was later enlarged by some people and called Caesarea.”⁸ Commenting on this passage in his English translation of Xorenac’s *History*, Robert Thomson writes: “*Msbak*: literally, ‘cultivator.’ Otherwise unattested, he is Moses’ fanciful eponymous figure for Mazaca.”⁹ What Xorenac tells is mingled with myth, but, as we shall see below, one need not regard Mšak as merely Movsēs’ “fanciful figure,” and, furthermore, the story he narrates may even, in a certain sense, have some historical background.

Three other references to the eponymous ancestor of the Mazaceni and founder of Mazaca (the old name of Caesarea in Cappadocia) are known to us from Greek sources, namely from the *Antiquities of the Jews* by Josephus Flavius (37/38-100 AD), from the *Ecclesiastical History* by Philostorgius (c. 364-after 425), surviving only in an epitome compiled by Photius (c. 810-895), and from the *De thematibus* by Constantine Porphyrogenitus (905-959).

“...The Mosocheni¹⁰ were founded by Mosoch”,¹¹ Josephus writes, “now they are Cappadocians. There is also a mark of their ancient denomination still to be shown; for there is even now among them a city called Mazaca, which may inform those that are able to understand, that so was the entire nation once called...” (I, 125). Then Josephus mentions Japhet’s descendents, one of which is Thrugamma¹² who founded “the Thrugrammeans who, as the Greeks resolved, were named Phrygians” (I, 126-127).¹³

Philostorgius states (IX, 12) that “Caesarea was originally called Mozoca, from Mosoch, a prince of Cappadocia; but, in process of time, the name was corrupted into Mazaca.”¹⁴

The Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, in his work on the military districts of the Byzantine Empire, speaks of the one called Ἄρμενιακόν, which includes Cappadocia.¹⁵ He divides that country into three

⁸ The citation is from Thomson’s translation (p. 95): see note 4.

⁹ Moses Khorenats’i, *History of the Armenians*, p. 95, note 6.

¹⁰ Μεσχηνοι in the Greek original.

¹¹ Μέσχης in the Greek original.

¹² Θυγράμης in the Greek original.

¹³ The citations are from Whiston’s translation: Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, translated by William Whiston, Auburn and Buffalo, 1895.

¹⁴ The citation is from Walford’s translation: *Epitome of the Ecclesiastical History of Philostorgius Compiled by Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople*, translated by Edward Walford, London, 1855.

¹⁵ Ἄρμενιακόν originally did not include Cappadocia: see *The Cambridge Medieval History: IV. The Byzantine Empire (Part I: Byzantium and Its Neighbours)*, ed. J.M. Hussey, Cambridge, 1966, p. 69: the map of the Byzantine themes in the 7th-9th centuries.

parts: First, Second and Third Cappadocias. One of the four celebrated cities in the First Cappadocia, according to Constantine, is Caesarea so named after the great Julius Caesar, but formerly it was called Mazaca from Mousoch (Μουσόχ), the ancestor of the Cappadocians (Asia, 2.58-2.61).¹⁶

Let us summarize what the four authors say. According to Xorenac'i, Aram conquered Cappadocia, left there a family member of his, Mšak, and withdrew. Mšak built a city there, becoming the eponymous founder of Mazaca; the Greeks call the region "Protē Armenia." Josephus refers to Μέσχης or Mosoch (instead of Xorenac'i's Mšak) as the ancestor of the Cappadocians and the eponym of Mazaca. Subsequently, he refers to Θυγράμης as the ancestor of the "Thugrammeans" (or "Thrugrammeans"), which, as he witnesses, were called "Phrygians" by Greeks. The Armenian equivalent of the name Θυγράμης in Josephus ("Togarmah" or "Thogorma" in the Bible: Ezekiel 27:14) is T'orgom. He is traditionally regarded as the ancestor of the Armenians not only in Armenian sources but also in the *Chronicle* (68.1) by Hippolytus of Rome (170-235);¹⁷ his country is called "house of Togarmah" (or T'orgom), which scholars have identified with the Kingdom of Til-Garimmu¹⁸ (in the south of later Armenia Minor) of the Assyrian sources. Thus, Josephus states that the Armenians were called "Phrygians" by Greeks. Philostorgius says that Mosoch was a prince of Cappadocia, and that "Mazaca" is a corrupted form of "Mozoca." Two details in this passage are in agreement with Xorenac'i: 1) Mosoch was not a sovereign but just "a prince," like Mšak, who was a member of Aram's family; 2) The name "Mazaca" of the city is a corrupted form. These similarities may indicate that the same version of the tradition is reflected in the two authors' works, and that Xorenac'i has presented it in an "Armenized" form. As to Constantine Porphyrogenitus, he describes an administrative division of the Byzantine Empire, referring, like the others, to the same Mosoch (Μουσόχ), the ancestor of the Cappadocians. It is notable that in Constantine's testimony the military district including Cappadocia is named Ἀρμενιανικόν. From ancient times and throughout the Byzantine period, Cappadocia was closely associated with Armenia, always being adjacent to Armenia Minor situated west of the Euphrates and at times (dependent on the reshaping of the borders) nei-

¹⁶ Costantino Porfirogenito, *De thematibus*, ed. A. Pertusi (*Studi e Testi* 160), Città del Vaticano, 1952.

¹⁷ Θωγράμα, ἀφ' οὗ Ἀρμένιοι: *Hippolytus Werke*, ed. R. Helm (post A. Bauer), Bd. 4 (*Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller*, 46), zweite Edition, Berlin 1955.

¹⁸ C. TOUMANOFF, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*, Georgetown, 1963, p. 53.

ghbouring with Armenia Major as well. Western Armenia and Cappadocia were often included together into the same Roman or Byzantine administrative units, and sometimes the Armenians were even confused with the Cappadocians in Byzantine sources. The best example of such confusion is found in the same passage by Constantine concerning the military district Ἀρμενιᾶκόν. He cites an epigram (Asia, 2.71-2.74) characterizing the Cappadocians as a “mean” people (Καππαδόκαι φαῦλοι), but the same epigram, in a slightly different form, is found before Constantine, in a writing by the Byzantine female author Casia (9th century), where “Armenians” instead of “Cappadocians” are mentioned.¹⁹ The reasons for this confusion between the two peoples and the close association of one country with the other were not only geographical but also ethnical. In order to clarify this statement, we should make an excursus into the remote past.

Herodotus is the first known Greek author to associate the Armenians with the Phrygians. Describing the multinational army of Xerxes, king of Persia, during his campaign against Greece, he says the following (7, 73): “The Phrygian equipment was very similar to the Paphlagonian, with only a small difference. As the Macedonians say, these Phrygians were called Briges as long as they dwelt in Europe, where they were neighbors of the Macedonians; but when they changed their home to Asia, they changed their name also and were called Phrygians. The Armenians, who are settlers from Phrygia, were armed like the Phrygians. Both these together had as their commander Artochmes...”²⁰ Thus, about five centuries after Herodotus, Josephus refers to this same tradition about the Armenians being identified with the Phrygians. It is repeated by other Greek authors as well, for example, Eudoxus (4th c. BC) cited by Stephen of Byzantium (6th c. AD), who states that the Armenians were from Phrygia by origin and that they “phrygized” (Ἀρμένιοι πολλὰ φρυγίζουσι) in their language (*Ethnica*, 123, 6).²¹

In scholarly literature, the opinions on the supposed Phrygian origin of the Armenians differ and are often contradictory,²² but many eminent

¹⁹ See N. ADONC’, “K. Krumbacher, *Kasia*, Sitzungsberichte der könig. bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1897: Ասիայի միասնականին նւ Հայերը: Ամփոփոյթ (The Nun Casia and the Armenians: Summary)”, *Handēs amšoreay*, 15 (1901), p. 129-132.

²⁰ The citation is from Godley’s translation: Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, with an English translation by A.D. Godley (*Loeb Classical Library*). Cambridge (Mass.), 1920.

²¹ Stephan von Byzanz, *Ethnika*, ed. A. Meineke, Berlin, 1849 (reprinted Graz, 1958).

²² Discussion of the various views on the origins of the Armenians, with references to the numerous studies on the subject, lies beyond our immediate concern. The most recent work is A. PETROSYAN Հայոց ազգածագման հարցեր (*Problems of the Origins of the Armenians*), Erevan, 2006.

scholars, among them, Markwart,²³ Adontz,²⁴ Manandyan,²⁵ and Diakonoff,²⁶ agree that the Phrygians, an Indo-European people, were at least one of the important ethnic elements in the process of the formation of the Armenian nation (together with the Hurrians, Urartians and other proto-Caucasian peoples).²⁷ Herodotus says that, before migrating to Asia, the Phrygians were living side by side with the Macedonians. Supposedly, at that time their homeland was Thrace, and they were kindred with the Thracians. They are believed to have crossed the Hellespont and moved to Asia Minor from the northern coast of the Aegean Sea and the Balkan Peninsula already before the Trojan War, that is to say, before the late 13th century BC. As witnessed by Assyrian records, in the early 12th century BC, after the collapse of the Hittite Kingdom, the Phrygians dominated the central parts of Asia Minor.²⁸ By about 1165 BC, they had advanced eastwards as far as the territory of the future Cappadocia (to which also witness the Phrygian inscriptions found in the west of that country) and further southeastwards, to the valley of the Upper Euphrates, i.e. the territory of the future Armenia Minor.²⁹ In the course of time, especially after the fall of the Urartian Kingdom in the 6th century BC, the Phrygians penetrated further east into the Armenian Plateau, blending with other peoples.

Joseph Markwart has expressed an interesting opinion about the Phrygian origin of the Armenians.³⁰ According to him, the Armenians are first mentioned in Homer's *Iliad*. He means the Ἄρρυμοι, as he thinks, a Phrygian people referred to in II, 783. Homer describes the attack of the

²³ J. MARKWART, *Die Entstehung und Wiederherstellung der armenischen Nation*, Berlin, 1919, S. 66-68; ID., "Le berceau des Arméniens," *Revue des études arméniennes* VIII/2 (1928), pp. 215-225.

²⁴ N. ADONTZ, *Histoire d'Arménie. Les origines, du Xe siècle au VIe (av. J.C.)*, Paris, 1946, pp. 320-327.

²⁵ H. MANANDYAN, *Քննական տնտեսություն հայ ժողովրդի պատմության (A Critical Survey of the History of the Armenian People)*, in 3 volumes, Erevan, 1944-1960: vol. 1, reprinted in vol. 1 of H. MANANDYAN, *Երկեր (Works)*, in 8 volumes, Erevan, 1977-. Our reference is to the 1977 edition: pp. 25-29.

²⁶ I. DIAKONOFF, *Предыстория армянского народа (The Pre-history of the Armenian People)*, Erevan, 1968 (also published in Lori Jennings' English translation: Delmar, 1985, second edition 1995: our references are to the Russian original), pp. 117-119, 123-124, 237.

²⁷ For a general overview of the issue, see C. TOUMANOFF, *Studies*, pp. 52-56, B. SERGENT, *Les Indo-Européens. Histoire, langues, mythes*, Paris, 1995, pp. 121-125, and A. PETROSYAN, *Problems of the Origins*.

²⁸ A. GOETZE, *Kleinasien (Kulturgeschichte des alten Orients, 3)*, zweite Edition, München, 1957, S. 201-206.

²⁹ I. DIAKONOFF, *The Pre-history*, pp. 117-119.

³⁰ J. MARKWART, *Die Entstehung*, S. 66-68; "Le berceau", pp. 215-225.

Greeks as follows (II, 780-783): “So marched they then as though all the land were swept with fire; and the earth groaned beneath them, as beneath Zeus that hurleth the thunderbolt in his wrath, when he scourgeth the land about Typhoeus in the country of the Arimoι, where men say is the couch of Typhoeus.”³¹ Markwart associates Zeus with Aram and Typhoeus (Typhon) with the Titanid Payapis K‘aateay defeated by Aram. Furthermore, he localizes the “couch of Typhoeus” in Cappadocia and identifies it with the volcanic Mount Argaeus, below the foothills of which Mazaca was situated. Thus, in Markwart’s opinion, the Phrygian ancestors of the Armenians were in Cappadocia already at the time of the Trojan War. Markwart disagrees with those scholars who identified the Ἄριμοι with the Aramaeans, stating that in ancient times the latter did not live in Cappadocia but northwards of the Black Sea. He etymologizes the stem “Armen” of “Armenian” as consisting of the root “arm” or “ar(i)m” or “ar(u)m” and the Urartian ending “-ini” (like Chaldini, Muškini etc.). Scholars have either accepted or refuted Markwart’s view. However, his remarks deserve attention and support the conjecture, based on certain evidence in Assyrian sources, that by Homer’s time the Phrygian migrants were dominant and had their own country in Cappadocia.

Finally, we should add the following. In the Assyrian records, the Phrygians and their land are referred to as “Muški” or “Mušku.”³² In Greek texts, they are mentioned by different names, among which, Μόσχοι or Μεσχηῖνοι. Their ancestor Μοσόχ also figures in the Bible (for example, in Genesis 10:2), among Japheth’s sons and together with Θοργάμα, the biblical forefather of the Armenians. Noteworthy, the Muški are referred to as Assyria’s enemies and rivals in the famous annals of King Tiglath-pileser I of Assyria (reigned in 1115-1077 BC), where in an extremely exaggerated manner he narrates about his exploits and victories over disobedient peoples.³³ One of the testimonies allowing scholars to identify the Muški with the Phrygians is the reference to their king Mita in Assyrian sources. According to the generally accepted view, Mita is the Phrygian king Midas of the 8th century BC mentioned by Herodotus (I, 14, 36, 45; VIII, 138).³⁴ The fables about his wealth witness to the power of the country ruled by him.

³¹ The citation is from Murray’s translation: Homer, *The Iliad*, with an English translation by A.T. Murray, in 2 volumes (*Loeb Classical Library*), Cambridge (Mass.), London, 1924.

³² I. DIAKONOFF, *The Pre-history*, pp. 123, 216-224.

³³ A.K. GRAYSON, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, vol. 2, Wiesbaden, 1976, pp. 12, 18, 66-67, 92-93.

³⁴ Rawlinson was the first to identify Mita with Midas: G. RAWLINSON, *The Five Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World*, in 4 volumes, New-York, 1862-1867, vol. 2, p. 151, note. 7.

Concluding our brief presentation, let us recall the Armenian eponym of Mazaca figuring in Movsēs Xorenac‘i’s *History of Armenia*: the Armenized form of his name, “Mšak” can obviously be associated with the “Muški,” i.e. the Phrygians (its meaning “cultivator,” both in classical and modern Armenian, is of no significance in Xorenac‘i’s story). Thus, we deal with Μοσόχ (Μοσώχ) in the Bible and in Philostorgius, Μέσχης in Josephus, Μουσώχ in Constantine Porphyrogenitus, and “Mšak” in Movsēs Xorenac‘i, all of them naming the same legendary personage, the founder of Mazaca and the forefather of the Cappadocians. In reality, however, we more likely have the opposite derivation: the Phrygian ancestor’s name Mšak, Μοσόχ or Μέσχης is derived from the ethnonym Muški, Μόσχοι or Μεσχηῖνοι.

There have also been attempts to find a purely linguistic etymology for “Mazaca.” We mean the three possible explanations of the name referred to by Ladislav Zgusta.³⁵ The first explanation attributes Iranian origin to the word, etymologizing it as the Avestan “maz-” (“great, significant”) plus the suffix “-aka” and trying to understand the presence of the suffix “k-” with the help of the word μαζάκις interpreted as δόρυ Παρθικόν (“Parthian spear”) in the early medieval dictionary by Hesychius the Lexicographer (5th c. AD) and re-interpreted as “der große [Speer]” by Zgusta. Thus, according to this etymology, “Mazaca” means “great” plus the suffix “-aka.” The second, “less probable” explanation connects “Mazaca” with the name of the Iranian god Mazda, and the third explanation connects it with the cuneiform stem “Mazza-” occurring in the name of the mountain “Mazza-wanda.” None of these interpretations seems totally plausible, and Zgusta’s statement regarding the evidence in Josephus, Philostorgius and Constantine Porphyrogenitus as simply “invalid” (“wertlos”) is perhaps too categorical. The three authors mention a tradition, which may be rooted in reality, and “Mazaca” may well be a derivative (with phonetic changes in the course of time) from the ethnonym “Muški” or Μόσχοι naming the ancient settlers of Cappadocia.

The passage in Movsēs Xorenac‘i’s *History of Armenia* certainly contains an element of truth and is an additional corroboration of the events of the remote past. It testifies that: 1) The Muški (Phrygians) were among the ancestors of the Armenians and Cappadocians; 2) They were newcomers in the territory of the future Cappadocia and conquered the people living there (this, according to the Assyrian records, happened in the 12th c. BC); 3) The Muški were the founders of Mazaca; and 4) The Armenians

³⁵ L. ZGUSTA, *Kleinasiatische Ortsnamen*, Heidelberg, 1984, S. 357. We would like to thank Prof. Alessandro Orenco for having drawn our attention to this study.

and Cappadocians were so closely associated with one another that the country of which Mazaca was the capital was still called “Protē Armenia” by the Greeks as late as in Movsēs Xorenac’i’s days.³⁶

³⁶ For the reference to Mšak in Xorenac’i, see also the following recent study: A. PETROSYAN, *Армянский эпос и мифология: истоки, миф и история (The Armenian Epos and Mythology: Sources, Myth and History)*, Erevan, 2002, pp. 47-48, 56, 80, 115, 151, 153-154, 158, 167, 177, 179, 182.