

Universe in Armenian Rock Art and Mythology

G. Vardumyan^{1,2} and K. Tokhatyan^{*1,2}

¹NAS RA Institute of History

²Yerevan Brusov State University, Armenia

Abstract

The Universe, celestial bodies and luminaries, and the sky have been reflected in Armenian petroglyphic art and mythological conceptions since the earliest times. Throughout millennia, representations of the Universe, embodied in depictions of the Milky Way, the Sun, stars, and other celestial luminaries and bodies, have found vivid expressions in Armenian petroglyphs. Numerous rock carvings dating from the VII-III mill. BC, discovered on the slopes of the Aragats, Geghama, Vardenis, Syunik, and Vayots Dzor Mountain ranges, as well as at other sites throughout Armenia, depict solar, lunar, and astral motifs. The Universe found expression in Armenian rock carvings not only through depictions of celestial bodies but also through ritual scenes reflecting the veneration of higher supernatural powers.

Cults of gods and goddesses personifying the Sun and the Moon, planets of the solar system, and constellations, myths about the Milky Way, and many archeological artifacts, prove the high level of interpretation of the Universe in Ancient Armenian culture. Mythological representations of the Universe were further embodied in images of Patriarch Gods and in cosmogonic narratives connected with the Sun, the Moon, the Milky Way, and the stars. Over the millennia, a rich corpus of solar, lunar, and astral deities emerged within Armenian mythological thought, traces of which have been preserved in the Armenian epic “Sasna Tsrer”. Certain cosmological beliefs and mythological motifs have also survived in transformed forms within Armenian ethnographic traditions, remaining part of popular culture and folk belief up to the present day.

Keywords: *Armenia, Aratta, Ara, Aram, eponyms, Hayk, Moses Khorenatsi, mythology, rock art, patriarch, Urartu*

1. Introduction

Human interest in the celestial sphere evolved in response to the practical and symbolic significance of astronomical observations and developed through the perception of an interconnected relationship between cosmic phenomena and terrestrial life. From the earliest times, the people inhabiting the Armenian Highlands engraved images of the Sun, the Moon, stars, and constellations on rocks, as well as representations of the Milky Way, thereby expressing their cosmological perceptions and conceptions of the Universe. Solar disks with radiating rays, crescent moons, stars, and constellations, as well as stylized solar symbols and eternity signs, constitute a significant part of Armenian rock carvings.

Over time, these depictions came to include scenes reflecting cultic practices and rituals, attesting to the development of the mythological beliefs and cosmological concepts of our ancestors. Alongside the development of mythological thought, images of gods and goddesses embodying the Sun, the Moon, and the stars began to emerge, accompanied by beliefs and narratives concerning their origins and place within the cosmic order. Later, these cosmological and mythological conceptions were reflected in diverse spheres of Armenian culture, including the historical tradition of ethnogenesis, divine pantheons, cultic practices and rituals, ethnographic realities, temple architecture, and other manifestations of cultural heritage.

2. The Sun and celestial phenomena in rock art

The conceptual basis of Sun worship among the Armenians, as among many other ancient peoples, were rooted in the recognition of the indispensable role of solar light and heat in sustaining life. Such

*karen.tokhatyan@gmail.com, Corresponding author

perceptions emerged during the earliest stages of human civilization and reflected an awareness of humanity's dependence on the Sun as the primary source of vital energy on Earth. Occupying a central place in Armenian spirituality and cultural consciousness, the Sun has found vivid expression in the symbolic language of rock art. Numerous carvings from the Geghama Mountains feature solar and luminous imagery, including representations of the solar disk with radiating rays and stylized depictions of the Sun in the form of the swastika (Fig. 1). In Armenian tradition, the swastika (*kerkhach* – “whirled cross”) is perceived as an intermediary symbol linking the eternity sign and the cross.

Symbols of Eternity, rooted in the perception of the Sun as a manifestation of eternal cosmic order, are encountered on numerous monuments throughout India, Greece (including the Trojan cultural tradition), Italy, particularly on Etruscan ceramics, the Near East, the Caucasus, etc. (Khanzadyan et al., 1973). In the Armenian Highlands, the swastika functioned as a solar symbol and was associated with a supreme celestial deity identified with the Sun, the source of creation, light, and divine fire. The petrographic repertoire further includes numerous circular symbols of eternity adorned with revolving rays. Such motifs occur both independently and as constituent elements of more complex iconographic compositions.

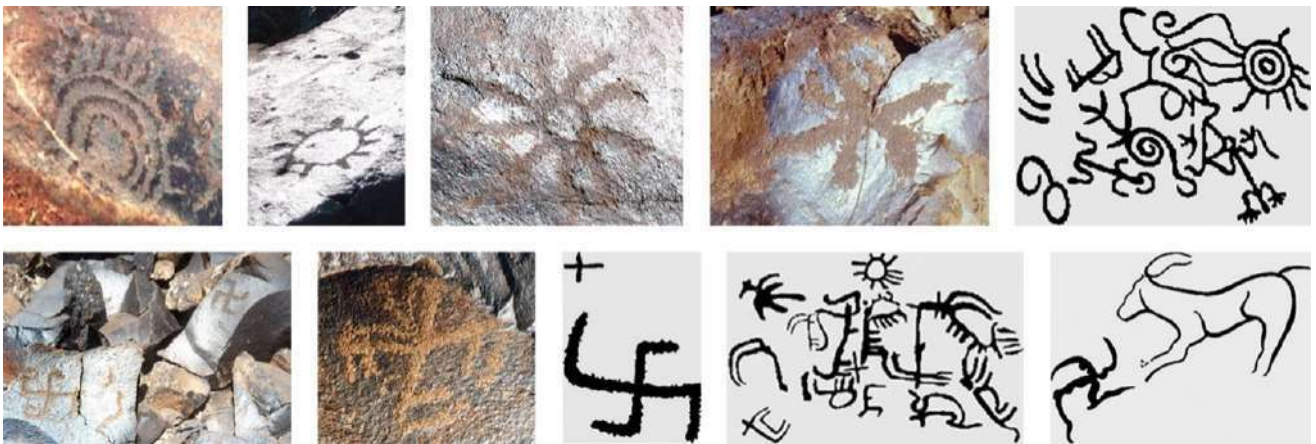


Figure 1: Petroglyphs: Sun, swastika, and stars in rock-carvings.

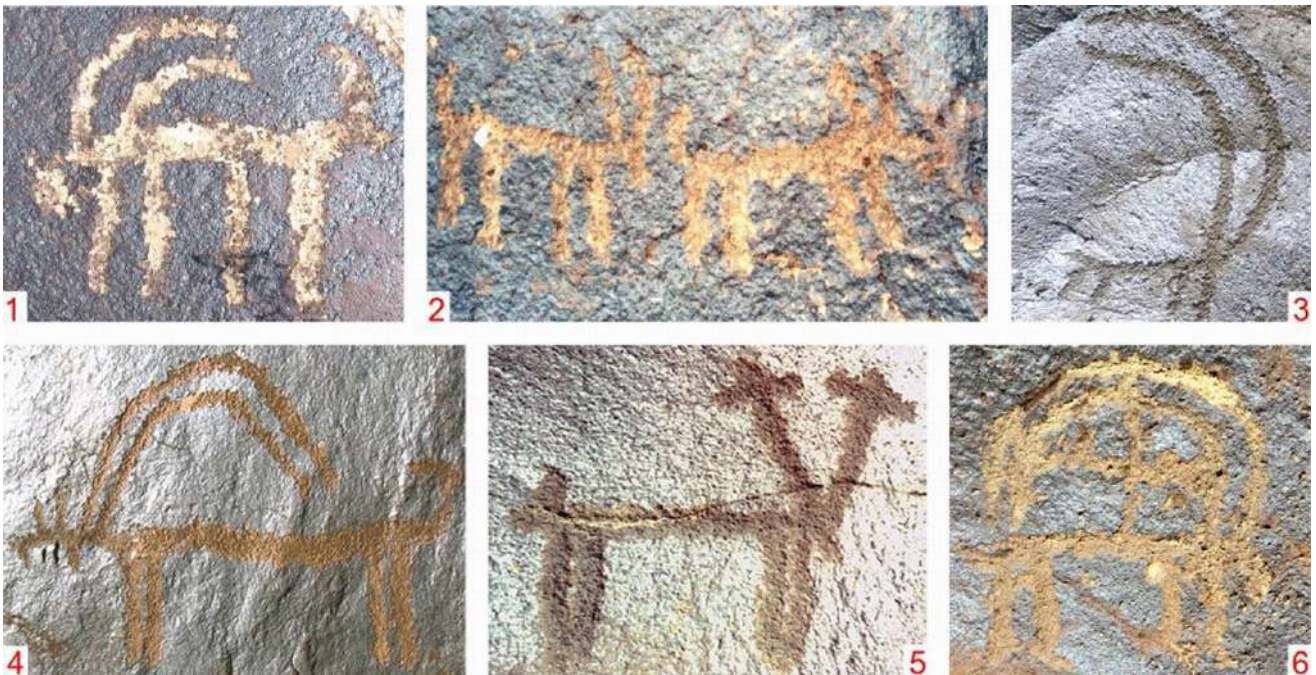


Figure 2: Petroglyphs: mountain goats (Geghama Mountains).

Among the Armenian petroglyphs, representations of mountain goats are particularly numerous and significant. These figures have often been interpreted as symbols of celestial luminous phenomena, especially lightning, which, in ancient Armenian cosmological conceptions, were associated with the dynamic power of the Sun (Fig. 2). Depictions of extraordinary goats — characterized by multiple limbs or horns — along

with other mythical beings, frequently occur alongside zoomorphic and anthropomorphic images that have been interpreted as solar deities (Martirosyan, 1981, Martirosyan & Israelyan, 1971, Tokhatyan, 2025).

The rock art corpus further includes birds shown facing a solar disc or fire symbol, dragon, winged creatures with radiating appendages, winged horses, and other fantastic animals, reflecting a rich symbolic and mythological tradition connected with celestial phenomena.

Snake- and dragon-shaped motifs constitute another significant category within the corpus of Armenian petroglyphs. These representations have commonly been interpreted as symbolic expressions of celestial phenomena, including thunder, lightning, and rain, and are closely linked to ancient notions of the heavenly waters. As such, they appear to reflect a mythological worldview in which serpentine and dragon-like beings mediated the relationship between the celestial and terrestrial realms.

Closely connected with the veneration of thunder, lightning, and water are the so-called vishaps or vishapakars (“dragon stone”), distinctive megalithic monuments of the Armenian Highland, generally dated to the III–II mill. BC (Fig 3). Found exclusively within this region, they are typically situated near springs, lakes, irrigation systems, and other water sources. These monuments are predominantly fashioned in the shape of fish or bulls and are widely regarded as material expressions of ancient religious beliefs associated with water, fertility, and atmospheric phenomena (Bobokhyan et al., 2015).



Figure 3: Vishap stele.

The petroglyphs also contain a variety of cultic and ritual scenes that provide insight into ancient religious beliefs and practices. There are numerous cultic representations that testify to the worship of celestial and cosmic powers (Fig. 4–5). Such scenes reflect a worldview in which supernatural forces associated with the heavens were regarded as fundamental determinants of both natural processes and human existence and daily life.

3. Constellations and Milky Way in rock art

A unique place among the Armenian rock engravings is held by depictions of constellations, among which the representations of Aquila and Gemini in the ancient astronomical complex of Sevsar (near Lake Sevan, at an altitude of 2,670 m) are particularly significant (Fig. 6). These images testify to a certain level of development of astronomical thought in ancient Armenia, further confirmed by the celestial observation sites of Metsamor (IV–II mill. BC, 35 km southwest of Yerevan) and Zoratsqar (IV–I mill. BC, 3 km north of



Figure 4-5: Petroglyphs: worship of Heaven (Geghama and Syunik Mountains).

Sisian, Syunik Province). The zodiac constellations were later discussed by Anania Shirakatsi (VII Ce.), an eminent Armenian philosopher and scholar whose extant works cover such fields as mathematics, astronomy, geography, calendar, and related disciplines ([Anania Shirakatsi, 1940](#)).

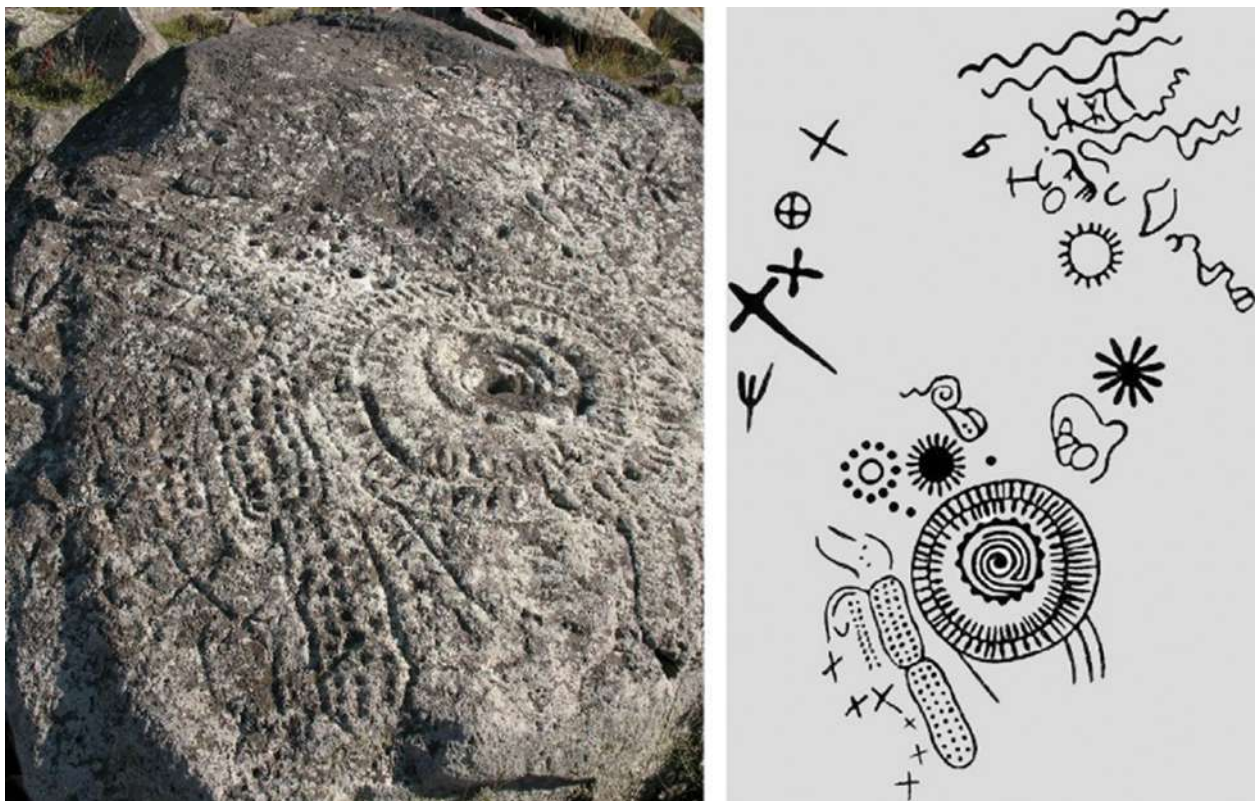


Figure 6: Petroglyphs: constellations Aquilla, Gemini (Sevsar), Milky Way.

The Milky Way also found a reflection in Armenian cosmological thought (Fig. 7-8). Anania Shirakatsi, in his “Cosmology and Calendar”, has offered a remarkably accurate scientific explanation of the phenomenon, describing the Milky Way “as a vast multitude of distant, faintly shining stars” ([Anania Shirakatsi, 1940](#)).

4. Moon in rock-carvings

The Moon is also represented in the petroglyphs, generally occupying the upper part of many compositions. Of particular interest is one example that appears to illustrate the phases of the Moon.



Figure 7-8: Petroglyph: Milky Way (Sevsar); Moon phases (Geghama Mountains).

Armenian petroglyphic art is likewise rich in depictions associated with lightning and thunder spirits. These powerful atmospheric phenomena were a frequent and awe-inspiring presence in the lives of ancient peoples, and it was therefore natural for them to become embodied in the figures of thunder-wielding deities within various religious traditions, such as Zeus, Aramazd, Indra, etc.

The symbolic repertoire of Armenian rock art further reflects a wide range of religious and mythological concepts, including the veneration of motherhood and fertility, the cult of ancestors, the worship of deities and cultural heroes, beliefs associated with divine twins and benevolent spirits, as well as conceptions of time, calendrical cycles, and the cosmic order. These themes collectively attest to the richness of the spiritual world and cosmological imagination of ancient Armenia.



Figure 9: Calendars in petroglyphs (Geghama Mountains, Sevsar).

5. Calendars in rock art

Time and its constituent units of measurement, which form the basis of calendrical reckoning, are intimately linked to ancient cosmological conceptions. Since the measurement of time was inseparable from observations of celestial phenomena, calendrical concepts occupied an important place in ancient cosmological thought. Numerous petroglyphs preserve representations of temporal cycles and their units of reckoning, attesting to the close relationship between astronomical observation, the perception of cosmic order, and the development of early calendrical systems. This relationship is reflected in numerous petroglyphic representations, where symbols associated with temporal cycles and celestial movements appear to embody early understandings of the structure and order of the Universe. There are a number of 12-month years, 31-day months, and 364-day annual calendars in petroglyphs (Fig. 9). Anania Shirakatsi has also addressed the calendar and the computation of time, distinguishing between the different dimensions of celestial and terrestrial time (Anania Shirakatsi, 1940).

6. Patriarch god Hayk – constellation Orion

Alongside the evidence of petroglyphs, ancient Armenian conceptions of the celestial and cosmic order and their relationship to human existence were reflected in mythological traditions and embodied in the images and attributes of the deities (Vardumyan, 2020).

The earliest significant connection between the Universe and Armenian mythology can be traced to the formative stages of Armenian ethnogenesis. This tradition exhibits features of the so-called *historization* of myth and *mythologization* of history, whereby historical memory is preserved and transmitted through mythic narratives.

Movses Khorenatsi, the Father of Armenian historiography (V Ce.), writes about Haykids and their heroic deeds in his “History of Armenia”. These narratives are associated with the **Haykazuni** dynasty, regarded in Armenian tradition as the legendary founders of Armenia and the prefathers of the Armenian people. The earliest and most prominent among them was Hayk, the legendary archer and patriarch of the Armenian nation, depicted as a mighty and invincible hunter armed with a broad bow and long arrows. According to tradition, Patriarch Hayk led a struggle against the tyrannical Babylonian ruler Bel, defeated him in battle, and, following this celebrated victory, established the land of Hayk – **Hayq**, the ancestral homeland of the Armenians. Armenian historical tradition further links the ethnonym **Hay** and the country name **Hayastan** – the self-designations by which Armenians and their homeland are known to this day, to the patriarch Hayk, who was revered as both an epic hero and a deified ancestral figure – progenitor god. And from that time on “*our country is called Hayk’ after the name of our ancestor Hayk*” (Movses Khorenatsi, 1978).

The archer motif and the swastika symbol may have been perceived as identical or functionally equivalent representations of a celestial shooter. In Armenian astral tradition, the constellation of Hayk, identified with Orion, is situated in relation to the constellation of Taurus in a manner corresponding to the mythological narrative. This alignment may be interpreted as iconographic evidence of the cult of Patriarch Hayk and the veneration of the celestial constellation bearing his name (Fig. 10).

7. Patriarch solar gods: Aram and Ara

The Armenian words for the Sun – Arev, Aregak – are traditionally considered to derive from the root *Ar* (*Areg* or *Aregnazan* is the name of the solar hero in Armenian fairy tales, preserving ancient motifs within the corpus of Armenian folk tradition).

Numerous Armenian names and terms have likewise been associated with this root, foremost among them the name of Aram, the second patriarch and eponymous ancestor of the Armenians. In his History of Armenia, Movses Khorenatsi recounts the legend of Aram, who, like Hayk, wages successful campaigns against foreign enemies. He expands the borders of the country in all directions and becomes so powerful and renowned that “*by his name all races call our land: like the Greeks, Armenia, and the Persians and Syrians, Armenik’*” (Movses Khorenatsi, 1978). According to this historical tradition, it was after Aram that neighboring peoples came to designate the land as Armenia and its inhabitants as Armenians.

In Armenian tradition, the root *Ar* is also linked to the name of the sacred mountain Ararat. The highest peak of the Armenian Highlands – Mount Ararat (5165 m) – revered by Armenians and all Christians alike,



Figure 10: Patriarch Hayk: sculpture in Yerevan; photo of Orion constellation.

is identified in biblical tradition as the mountain upon which Noah's Ark came to rest after the Deluge: *"On the seventeenth day of the seventh month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat"* (Bible, Genesis, 84).

Earlier Mesopotamian flood traditions likewise associate the salvation of humankind with the Armenian Highlands. In Sumerian epic literature of the early III mill. BC, the land of Armenia is identified as Aratta, a distant and prosperous country whose inhabitants are portrayed as valiant warriors. According to these traditions, they are described as inhabitants of the Land of Sacred Rites *"Those who stood in the midst of the flood, when the waters swept away everything"* - a passage that has been interpreted as preserving memories of an ancient deluge and the survival of humanity upon the mountains of Ararat (Kramer, 1952).



Figure 11: Mountains Hatis, Araler, Aragats.

The names of the mountains Aragats and Araler (Fig. 11) are traditionally associated with the name

of the dying and resurrecting god Ara. Movses Khorenatsi also writes about one of Aram's descendants, Ara the Handsome, King of Armenia, who rejected the love of "dissolute and lascivious" Shamiram, queen of Assyria, and declined her offer to ascend the Assyrian throne. She became "exceedingly angry" and attacked Armenia with war, during which Ara was killed. In the original version of the legend, Ara was reborn (as Egyptian Osiris, Phrygian Attis, Greek Adonis, etc.) Ara's legend indicates the importance of the worship of dying and rising deities as mythic personifications of sunrise and sunset, as well as the hibernation of nature in winter and awakening in spring. Ara does not accept Shamiram's passionate love and remains faithful to his country and queen Nuard (Movses Khorenatsi, 1978), with whom they constitute the male (solar) and female (lunar) beginnings in Armenian mythology. Mount Aragats, the highest peak in present-day Armenia, is regarded in Armenian folklore as the throne of Ara, where he was believed to reside following his resurrection. Mount Araler, whose silhouette resembles that of a reclining human figure, has been interpreted in popular belief as the body of the slain King Ara. In the Armenian linguistic tradition, the word Ararich signifies Creator, reflecting the semantic association of the root Ara- with concepts of creation and generative power. The figure of Ara was likewise associated with the planet Mars (Hrat), reflecting a parallel with the identification of the Greek god Ares and the Roman god Mars with the red planet.

Summarizing all the above-mentioned evidence concerning the Haykazuns, it should be emphasized that they symbolize Hayk'-Armenia as the ancestral cradle of the Armenian nation and have endured in historical tradition as deified forefathers.

8. Cosmogonic myth – Vahagn vishapaqagh

The Sun energy and the four elements of the Universe – Air, Fire, Water, and Soil – generate, sustain, and transform the forms of life and their creatures on Earth. An original weave of all these natural elements demonstrates the environment that gives rise to the ancient Armenian Sun-god **Vahagn**. In the song of "Vahagn's Birth," preserved in Movses Khorenatsi's "History of Armenia", who had the pleasure of listening to the bards in one of the Armenian provinces reported that they were singing:

*Heaven was in travail, earth was in travail, / The purple sea was also in travail,
In the sea, travail also gripped the red reed. / From the tube of the reed came forth smoke,
From the tube of the reed came forth flame. / From the flame, a blond young boy ran out.
He had fire hair, and had flame beard, / And his eyes were suns (Movses Khorenatsi, 1978).*

The song describes the birth of Vahagn through a powerful convergence of cosmic and elemental forces. Solar energy and the four primordial elements of the Universe – Air, Fire, Water, and Earth – are traditionally regarded as the fundamental forces that generate, sustain, and transform life on Earth. The intricate interaction of these natural elements is vividly reflected in the mythological environment from which the ancient Armenian solar god Vahagn emerged (Toporov, 1977).

Vahagn's image combines several layers of mythology: solar divinity, warrior god, thunder hero, and cosmic protector. Solar aspect is complemented by his epithet **Vishapaqagh** ("Dragon-Slayer"), by which he was revered, as he defeated the dragon symbolizing darkness. The title reflects his role as the divine hero who defeats the forces of chaos and darkness represented by the dragon (Fig. 12). The solar aspect is also reflected in this function: he does not merely fight dragons; he restores cosmic order, bringing light against darkness (Vardumyan, 1991).

In Armenian mythology, the Milky Way occupies a distinctive place in the celestial imagination. Anania Shirakatsi records an ancient tradition concerning the ancestral hero Vahagn. According to the myth, Vahagn stole straw from Barsham, the legendary progenitor of the Assyrians, in order to provide warmth for his people during a harsh winter. As he fled, strands of straw scattered across the sky, leaving a luminous trail that came to be known as the **Straw-Thief's Path** (*Hardagoghi chanaparh*), the traditional Armenian name for the Milky Way. This etiological myth explains the celestial phenomenon by linking it to the cultural hero's beneficent act on behalf of his people (Anania Shirakatsi, 1940).



Figure 12: Sculpture of Vahagn in Yerevan.



Figure 13: Van Lake, sunset.

9. Solar myths

The region of Van in ancient Armenia constituted one of the principal centers of solar veneration. According to legend, the Sun was envisioned as a golden-haired youth who traversed the heavens in a golden chariot during the day. At sunset, he was believed to descend into Lake Van, where he bathed and rested throughout the night, renewing his strength for his daily celestial journey (Fig. 13). Another major center of solar worship was the region of Ayrarat, the largest province of historical Armenia, situated around Mount Ararat. In Armenian folk tradition, the summit of Ararat is portrayed as the place where the Sun pauses to rest during its passage across the sky, further underscoring the mountain's sacred association with solar mythology and cosmological beliefs.



Figure 14–15: Haldi on fresco (Erebuni) and on bronze votive plaque; statuette of Theisheba.

10. Lunar myth

Armenian folklore also preserves a number of myths concerning the Moon. One such legend recounts that, when the Moon was still a little girl, her mother was preparing dough to bake bread. Impatient to eat the freshly baked bread, the child repeatedly urged her mother to hurry. Exasperated by her daughter's persistent demands, the mother finally slapped her cheek with a dough-covered hand. According to the legend, the marks left by this doughy slap remained forever visible on the Moon's face, providing a mythical explanation for the dark patterns observed on the lunar surface.

11. Planet and sky deities

In the Kingdom of Ararat, commonly known as Urartu (also referred to as Biainili or the Van Kingdom, IX–VI Ce. BC), celestial bodies and natural phenomena were closely integrated into the religious worldview and represented through divine personifications. The deities of the supreme triad and their consorts were associated with major celestial powers: **Haldi (aldi)** was linked to the planet Jupiter, **Theisheba (Teišeba, Theispas)** to thunder and lightning, and **Shivini (Šiuine)** to the Sun (Badalyan, 2015, Hmayakyan, 1990).

The concept of the Tree of Life occupied a prominent place in cosmological thought, symbolizing the connection between the celestial realm of Heaven (Eden) and the terrestrial and subterranean worlds. As a cosmic axis, it embodied the unity of the Universe and the dynamic relationship between its divine, earthly, and underworld domains (Fig. 14–15).

Within the Urartian pantheon, other celestial bodies of the Solar System were likewise identified with specific deities. **Ardi (^Dardi)** was associated with Mercury, **Sardi (^Dsardi)** with Venus, **Melardi (^Dmelardi)** with the Moon, and **Tzinuardi (^Dšinuiardi)** with Saturn. The element ardi, meaning “star,” appearing in all of these divine names, reflects the astral character of their cults (Hmayakyan, 1990).

Urartian religious thought also developed the concept of the Tree of Life, a powerful cosmological symbol representing the connection between the celestial and terrestrial realms (Fig. 17). It reflected an advanced cosmological understanding in which the Universe was perceived as a unified system of divine, celestial, and earthly forces. Associated with Haldi, the supreme deity, the sacred tree functioned as a symbolic bridge between Heaven and Earth, expressing the idea of cosmic balance, divine protection, and the eternal renewal of life. In iconography, the Tree of Life often appears together with winged divine symbols, sacred animals, and royal figures, suggesting that it was not simply a botanical image but a representation of cosmic

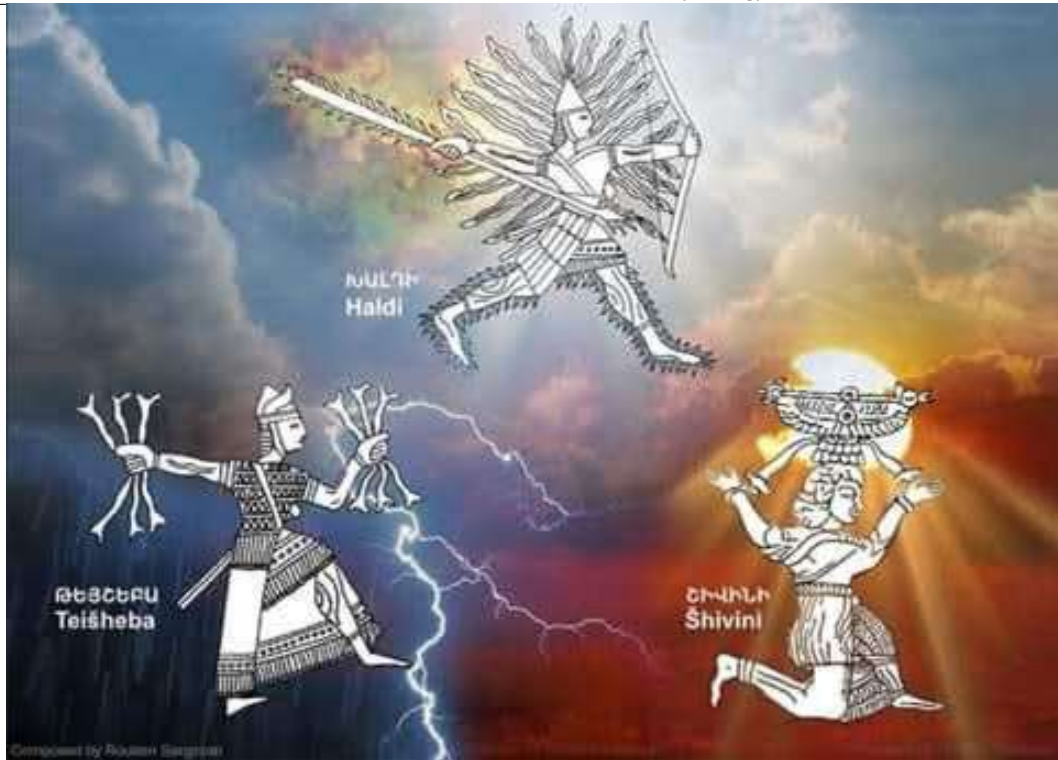


Figure 16: The supreme triad: Haldi, Theysheba, Shivini.

structure and divine presence.



Figure 17: Fresco: Tree of Life (Voskeblur, in Eriza).

In Ervandid-Artashesid-Arshakid (Orontid–Artaxiad–Arsacid) periods of Armenian history (VI Ce. BC – 301 AD), the supreme deity of the Armenian pantheon, Aramazd, was associated with the planet Jupiter. **Aramazd** and his consort **Anahit** were regarded as the patron deities of all creation, governing both the celestial and terrestrial realms (Fig. 18–19, left panel). The most revered Armenian Mother Goddess, Anahit, was described as Gold-haired and Gold-fingered, with the symbolism of gold reflecting solar radiance and the divine power of the Sun. Their daughter **Astghik**, whose name means ‘star’ in Armenian, was identified with Venus – the brightest and most beautiful celestial body visible in the morning and evening skies – and was worshiped as the goddess of love and beauty (Fig. 18–19, right panel). Aramazd’s divine messenger, **Tir**, the patron of wisdom, knowledge, writing, and sciences, was associated with the planet Mercury (Alishan, 1895, Melik-Pashayan, 1963, Vardumyan, 2010).

A prominent solar deity was **Mihr**, whose cult had ancient origins rooted in the worship of fire and



Figure 18–19: Goddesses: Bronze head of Anahit; statuette of Astghik.



Figure 20: Mher's Door (Van).

the sacred household hearth. He represented the Armenian counterpart of the Indo-Iranian divine figures – Vedic Mitra, Zoroastrian Mithra, and Roman Mithras. However, unlike these traditions, the cult of Armenian Mihr continued to survive for a much longer period, and its echoes are preserved in the images of the epic heroes **Great Mher** and **Little Mher** of the medieval Armenian epic tradition (VII–IX Ce.). Great (Senior) Mher was described as possessing extraordinary strength: he tore apart the lion that had deprived his kin of life and, for this heroic feat, received the epithet **Aryutsadzev**, meaning “lion-shaped” or “lion-like”. Later, he was transformed into the figure of Lion Mher, a symbolic embodiment of solar power. Great Mher was associated with the rising Sun and the dawn, while his grandson Little (Junior) Mher, was connected with the setting Sun and twilight. At the end of the epic, Junior Mher withdrew into the **Raven-Rock**, also known as **Mher's Door** (identified by some traditions with the Haldian Gates near the fortress of Van), because he was outraged by the injustice prevailing in the world (Fig. 20). He remains there with his fiery horse, awaiting the time when justice, peace, and prosperity will be restored on Earth

(Daredevils of Sassoun, 1966). According to legend, within Mher's stone sanctuary there is a rotating Wheel of Fate suspended from the Heavens, symbolically preserving the connection between the Cosmos and the Earth, and, in a broader sense, between the celestial realm and the epic heroes (Vardumyan, 2014).



Figure 21: Trndez.

12. Luminaries in ethnography

The Sun occupied a central place in the complex of beliefs and concepts associated with the celestial sphere. Certain ethnographic traditions have preserved elements of solar worship into the present day. One such example is the Christian feast of the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple, which is believed to have absorbed certain elements of the pre-Christian festival of Trndez – the ritual celebration of the Sun's symbolic rebirth, associated with the birthday of Mihr on the 14th of Mehekan (February). The feast continues to be observed today by the Armenian people and the Armenian Apostolic Church. Its central ritual involves newlyweds dancing around the fire and jumping over the flames, symbolizing the wish for a prosperous family life, fertility, and the blessing of children (Fig. 21).

13. Luminaries in iconography

The Greek historian and military commander Xenophon, in his work *Anabasis*, records that during the festivals dedicated to Mihr in Armenia, a great number of stallions were sacrificed, as the horse was regarded as one of the principal symbols of the Sun (Fig. 22–23). Xenophon himself is said to have offered his own horse to the chief of an Armenian village so that it could be sacrificed to the Solar Deity (Xenophon, *Anabasis*, IV).

14. Luminaries in architecture

One of the sanctuaries dedicated to Mihr, the only surviving pre-Christian temple in Armenia, is located in Garni – the summer residence of the Armenian kings – and represents a remarkable monument of I Ce. pre-Christian architecture¹. The Garni temple embodies the ancient concept of the sacred connection

¹After Armenia adopted Christianity as the state religion in 301 AD, numerous pagan temples were destroyed as part of the religious transformation of the country. The temple of Garni, however, survived, most likely due to its function as a royal sanctuary and architectural monument. During the medieval period, the structure suffered damage from earthquakes and eventually collapsed in 1679. It was later reconstructed in 1969–1975 based on the surviving architectural elements and archeological evidence.



Figure 22–23: Solar symbols: Lion on relief in Commagene; Horse – fresco in Erebuni.



Figure 24: Garni temple.

between the celestial and terrestrial worlds (Fig. 24).

A magnificent archaeological monument is the Commagene pantheon, constructed in 62 BC by the Armenian king Antiochus I of the Ervanduni (Orontid) dynasty on the slopes of Mount Nemrut in the Armenian Taurus (Fig. 25). The monumental stone sculptures of deities – Aramazd, Mihr, Vahagn, Anahit – and Antiochus himself, together with the colossal heads of the Lion and the Eagle, symbols of royal authority, are situated on the eastern and western terraces of an artificial tumulus approximately 50 m high. The entire sculptural ensemble, including the deities, the king, and the symbolic animals, was arranged in harmony with the movement of the Sun: facing the celestial luminary at dawn and witnessing its departure at sunset, thus reflecting the ancient veneration of the rising and setting Sun.

15. Summary

The Universe, with its celestial bodies and phenomena, has left a profound imprint on Armenian culture throughout the millennia. The earliest manifestations of cosmic perceptions can be traced to rock art, where numerous representations of the Sun, Moon, planets, constellations, and the Milky Way have been preserved. Over time, these ideas found expression in mythology through the cults of solar, lunar, astral, and



Figure 25: Commagene pantheon.

other deities, reflecting the advanced level of cosmological understanding and interpretation of the Universe in ancient Armenian culture. The image and concept of the Universe were also manifested in various cultural spheres, including the calendar system, folklore, divine pantheons, iconography, architecture, and ethnographic traditions. Concepts of the Universe and its celestial manifestations continued to be reflected in the Armenian worldview, mentality, and cultural heritage throughout different historical periods, from antiquity to the present day.

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