

historically spoken in areas to the north of Armenia. It is unlikely that this situation is the result of chance, but it must result from a long period of contact between the speakers of the two languages. The morphological categories and syntax of Kartvelian languages may also have influenced Armenian. However, there is little lexical interchange between Kartvelian and Armenian, although some Iranian loanwords in Old Georgian appear to have entered the language via Armenian.

The extralinguistic facts relevant to the prehistory of the Armenian people are also obscure. Speakers of Armenian appear to have replaced an earlier population of Urartian speakers (see Ch. 10) in the mountainous region of Eastern Anatolia. The name *Armenia* first occurs in the Old Persian inscriptions at Bisotūn dated to c. 520 BC (but note that the Armenians use the ethnonym *hay* [plural *hayk'*] to refer to themselves). We have no record of the Armenian language before the fifth century AD. The Old Persian, Greek, and Roman sources do mention a number of prominent Armenians by name, but unfortunately the majority of these names are Iranian in origin, for example, Dādrši- (in Darius' Bisotūn inscription), Tigranes, and Tiridates. Other names are either Urartian (Haldita- in the Bisotūn inscription) or obscure and unknown in literate times in Armenia (Araxa- in the Bisotūn inscription).

Armenia officially adopted Christianity in the early years of the fourth century AD (the traditional date is 301–304). Conversion to Christianity provided the impetus for the creation of an alphabet (see below) and the translation of the Bible into the Armenian language in the fifth century. The Bible translation and the historical and theological works of the fifth century provided the model for the classical language, which was the medium of educated written discourse for Armenians until the nineteenth century, and is still used as a liturgical language in the Armenian Church.

Modern Armenian consists of a large number of different local dialects, usually grouped into two principal branches, Eastern and Western. Sub- and nonliterary written material from the thirteenth-century Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia (often termed *Middle Armenian*) shows that the separation of the East and West dialect groups had already taken place at that date, and reveals the wide range of variation in the spoken language. However, the language of the Armenian Bible translation and early authors is strikingly uniform and may result from a deliberate attempt to create a standard. It seems a priori unlikely that the inhabitants of the different valleys and plains in the mountainous region of the Armenian Highlands should have spoken a uniform language in the fifth century, and some passages in classical authors can be interpreted as references to dialectal differences in the Armenian lexicon (cited by G. B. Djahukian at Greppin and Khachaturian 1986:9f.).

2. WRITING SYSTEM

Classical Armenian is written in an alphabet of thirty-six letters (increased to thirty-eight letters in the tenth century). The alphabet was specially created for the language and was used for no other language until recent times. The exact circumstances and date of the creation of the Armenian alphabet are not exactly known. The traditional account, given in the earliest sources, attributes the creation of writing to the saint Mesrop (also called Maštoc') in the early years of the fifth century (the dates AD 404 and 406–407 are frequently cited). Koriwn, contemporary and biographer of Mesrop, relates that the saint adapted a previous writing system invented by a Syrian bishop, Daniel, and this has led to speculation that an earlier script for Armenian existed, despite the complete absence of any attested remains. It is possible that Koriwn was referring to a different alphabet, such as Aramaic; pre-Christian inscriptions found in Armenia are written in Greek or Aramaic.

The earliest surviving specimens of the Armenian script are inscriptions in stone in the now ruined church of Tekor and on mosaic pavements excavated in Jerusalem. These are not dated, but art historians have been able to ascribe their contexts to between the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century. The earliest Armenian manuscript of the Gospels was copied in AD 887, but there are palimpsests, manuscript fragments and a papyrus which are of an earlier date. The early examples of the script show only capital letters (termed *erkat'agir* “iron-writing” in Armenian).

The relationship of the letter-forms of the Armenian script to other scripts of the Near East has been a subject of much dispute. Many scholars now concur with the view that Mesrop used the Greek alphabet as a model. This is supported by the following observations: (i) the script is written from right to left; (ii) the order of the letters for which there are Greek correspondences follows that of the Greek alphabet; (iii) some of the letter-forms correspond to those of a cursive form of Greek, for example: *բ* for *b* (compare Greek *β*); (iv) the digraph *ու* <OW> is used to represent the vowel [u] in imitation of Greek *ου* for [u]. However, it is difficult to find appropriate models for most of the letters for which there are no Greek equivalents, and Mesrop's original contribution to the formation of the alphabet should not be underestimated. The alphabet has an almost perfect one-to-one correspondence with the phonemes of Classical Armenian. Linguists working on Armenian normally use a particular transliteration system (for which see Schmitt 1972) which I will follow here.

Table 11.1 The Armenian alphabet

Character	Transcription	Character	Transcription
ա	a	ճ	č
բ	b	մ	m
գ	g	յ	y
դ	d	ն	n
ե	e	Տ	š
զ	z	օ	o
է	ê	չ	č'
բ	ə	ղ	p
թ	t'	Ջ	j
ժ	ž	ր	r
ի	i	ս	s
լ	l	վ	v
խ	x	տ	t
ծ	c	ր	r
կ	k	Յ	c'
հ	h	ւ	w
յ	j	փ	p'
ղ	ł	ք	k'

3. PHONOLOGY

3.1 Consonants

The phonemic inventory of Classical Armenian consonants is presented in Table 11.2. Where the traditional transliteration scheme is at odds with the International Phonetic Alphabet, I have indicated the IPA equivalent in square brackets.

Table 11.2 The consonantal phonemes of Classical Armenian

Manner of articulation	Place of articulation						
	Labial	Dental	Alveolar	Palato-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stops and affricates							
<i>Voiceless</i>	p	t	c [ts]	č [tʃ]		k	
<i>Voiced</i>	b	d	j [dz]	ǰ [dʒ]		g	
<i>Aspirate</i>	p' [pʰ]	t' [tʰ]	c' [tsʰ]	č' [tʃʰ]		k' [kʰ]	
Fricatives							
<i>Voiceless</i>						x	h
Sibilants							
<i>Voiceless</i>		s		š [ʃ]			
<i>Voiced</i>		z		ž [ʒ]			
Nasals	m	n					
Liquids			r, ṙ		l	ł	
Glides	w/v				y [j]		

The phonetic interpretation of several Armenian phonemes is not clear-cut, and different explanations are possible. A notorious problem has long been the identification of the manner of articulation of the different stop/affricate series. The aspirates /p', /t', etc. are unproblematic; these sounds are usually transcribed as Greek aspirates and are used to transcribe Greek aspirates. The presence of a voiceless velar fricative phoneme /x/, distinct from /k', makes it clear that these Armenian consonants cannot be ascribed a fricative pronunciation. The other two series have been variously interpreted. The series /b/, /d/, etc. has voice as a distinctive feature: they are used to transcribe voiced stops in other languages and are themselves transcribed as voiced stops. Similar evidence enables us to know that the series /p/, /t/, etc. are unvoiced. The straightforward interpretation would therefore be that the three stop series were respectively aspirated, voiced, and voiceless. However, this leads to serious problems for the explanation of diachronic phonological developments, in particular for the emergence of the Modern Armenian dialects. In Modern Western Armenian, members of the Classical Armenian series /p/, /t/, etc. have become voiced obstruents, while members of the series /b/, /d/, etc. have become voiceless. A *simultaneous* diachronic development

- (1) voiced stops > voiceless stops
voiceless stops > voiced stops

has been rightly rejected as impossible. The change would have to have been instantaneous in the dialects concerned in order for the two series not to be confused. It is therefore assumed that either one of the Classical “voiced” or “voiceless” series, or both, also had some extra feature which would allow one or both series to stand in opposition to a “plain” voiced or voiceless series. The diachronic development could therefore be as follows (taking, for the sake of illustration, the voiceless series to have an extra distinctive feature):

- | | | | |
|-----|----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| (2) | <u>Stage I</u> | <u>Stage II</u> | <u>Stage III</u> |
| | voiced | voiceless | voiceless |
| | voiceless + X | voiceless + X | voiced |

It is not difficult to find possible features which would fit the bill. Many Modern Eastern Armenian dialects show a three-way distinction between aspirates, voiceless ejectives, and voiced obstruents. Phonetic investigation has also indicated that in some Eastern Armenian

dialects the voiced series is also aspirated. It is not clear, however, that any of the three possible systems is correct for fifth-century Armenian: (i) ejective / voiceless aspirate / voiced aspirate; (ii) voiceless / voiceless aspirate / voiced aspirate; or (iii) ejective / voiceless aspirate / voiced (see Vaux 1998:238f.)

Classical Armenian, like many Modern Armenian dialects, had two phonemically distinct varieties of *r*: /r̄/ is a rolled alveolar trill, and /r/ is an unrolled approximant. The difference between /r̄/ and /r/ is neutralized before immediately following /n/, where only /r̄/ can appear. The Armenian version of the grammatical work attributed to the Greek grammarian Dionysios Thrax lists /r̄/ as a double consonant, and this, together with the Armenian use of /r̄/ for [rr] in Iranian loanwords, has led some scholars to interpret /r̄/ as a geminate. However, genuine geminate consonants are extremely rare in Armenian, and it is therefore preferable to consider /r̄/ as an independent unit phoneme.

The phonemic opposition between /l/ and /l̥/, the palatal and velar lateral approximants, may have been neutralized before a following consonant (where the velar lateral is usually written), and possibly also in word-final position after /y/ (where there is some alternation in spelling in early biblical manuscripts). In Modern Armenian /l̥/ has developed to a voiced uvular fricative.

There is some uncertainty over the phonemic status and the phonetic value of the Armenian letters transcribed as *v* and *w*. In Classical Armenian they are nearly in complementary distribution; *v* occurs in word-initial (and sometimes morpheme-initial) position and after *o*, whereas *w* is found: (i) as part of the digraph *ow* for the vowel [u]; (ii) after *a*, *e*, *i*; (iii) in the position C_V in oblique cases of polysyllables ending in *-i*, for example, *ordwoy* “of the son” (genitive singular of *ordi*). Both sounds also appear to contrast with the digraph *ow* in the position C_V; note the following pairs:

- (3) *anowan*, genitive singular of *anown* “name” : *anvan* “invincible”
anowoy, genitive singular of *aniw* “wheel” : *hanwoy*, genitive singular of *hani* “grandmother”

In the traditional pronunciation of Classical Armenian all three sounds are pronounced as [v].

3.2 Vowels

Figure 11.1 presents the phonemic inventory of Classical Armenian vowels:

	FRONT	CENTRAL	BACK
HIGH	i		ow [u]
HIGH-MID	ê	ə	
MID	e		o
LOW		a	

Figure 11.1 The vowel phonemes of Classical Armenian

The vowel system of Classical Armenian is relatively straightforward. Vowel length is not distinctive. There are six full vowels: /a/, /e/, /ê/, /i/, /o/, /ow/, as well as /ə/ (schwa), which can never occur in a stressed syllable. The vowel /ê/ derives diachronically from **ey*, and in some paradigms the rule *e* + *y* > /ê/ is still operative. There are six diphthongs /ea/, /aw/, /iw/, /ew/, /ay/, and /oy/, and two triphthongs, /eay/ and /iay/. The exact pronunciation

of these diphthongs is disputed. The diphthong /ea/ is traditionally pronounced [ya], and /oy/ is traditionally pronounced [ui] in all positions except word-final. Word-final /-oy/ and /-ay/ are traditionally rendered as [-o] and [-a] respectively; this is almost certainly a later development, but it should be noted that in some Classical Armenian paradigms [-o] and [-a] derive synchronically from /-oy/ and /-ay/: compare the pronominal forms *k'ô* “your” from /k'oy/ (genitive *k'oyoy*) and *na* “he, she, it” from /nay/ (written *nayn* with the enclitic definite article *-n*).

The vocalism of Armenian is partly dependent on the prosodic feature of stress. In Armenian the stress was always placed on the final syllable of an accented word (the few exceptions to this rule either result from recent univerbation, or are pronominal forms or interjections). High vowels and some diphthongs undergo a regular and predictable raising or reduction when not lying under the stress accent. The synchronic rules for vowel alternation are broadly as below:

(4) In stressed syllables	In unstressed syllables
i	ə
ow	ə
ê	i
oy	ow
ea	e

Consider the following examples: (i) *hin* “old,” genitive *hnoy* (read as *hənoy*); (ii) *sowt* “false,” derived verb *stem* “I lie” (read as *sətem*); (iii) *gitem* “I know,” but *angêt* “ignorant”; (iv) *yoys* “hope,” genitive *yowsoy*; (v) *sirec'i* “I loved,” aorist of *sirem* “I love,” 3rd singular *sireac'* “(s)he loved.”

3.3 Phonotactics

In Classical Armenian texts the vowel ə (*schwa*) is not written except in word-initial position before a cluster of nasal or *t* followed by a consonant. This may give the impression that the language admitted complex and lengthy consonant clusters, for example, *čšmarit* “true,” *sksanim* “I begin,” *mkrtem* “I baptize,” *mštnjēan* “eternal.” However, the traditional pronunciation of Classical Armenian, and the writing of *schwa* at line-endings in some manuscripts reveal that Armenian avoided complex consonant clusters in syllable-initial position. In fact, no syllable could begin with more than a single consonant. Initial combinations of the type *sibilant* + *obstruent* were pronounced with *schwa* preceding the cluster: orthographic *stin* “breast” = [əstin], *sksanim* “I begin” = [əskəsanim]. Note that such initial clusters could also be read with *schwa* separating the sibilant and obstruent in some derived terms, such as *stem* “I lie” = [sətem] from *sowt* “false.” In combinations of the type *obstruent* + *liquid*/*nasal*, the *schwa* was inserted after the obstruent: orthographic *glowx* “head” = [gəlux]; *grem* “I write” = [gərem]; *gnam* “I go” = [gənam], etc. Certain clusters of two consonants are admitted in syllable-final position, but the exact rules governing the occurrence of such clusters are not exactly known (see further Godel 1975:9–23). As stated above, geminate consonants are almost entirely excluded in Armenian; where geminates appear to occur they generally straddle a morpheme boundary.

3.4 Historical phonology

The development of the Classical Armenian sounds from the Indo-European parent language involved a number of intricate and sometimes unusual sound changes. However, the paucity of inherited vocabulary, and uncertainty over the correct etymologies of much