



RUDOLF VIRCHOW, CAUCASUS, AND ARMENIANS

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Historical Essay

"Armenian art of the country that belongs to
High Hajk is significantly more ancient than the
art of Van State"

Rudolf Virchow

Abstract

The article embraces materials elucidating the obscure page in the biography of a great German physician Rudolf Virchow, who was the founder of pathological anatomy and creator of cellular theory. The study deals with the last period of Virchow's life and creative work associated with the Caucasian expedition and excavations at the territory of the Armenian Highland, which shed a new light to Virchow's connections with the history and culture of Armenia, as well as with eminent representatives of Armenian culture in 19-20th centuries.

Keywords: Virchow, Caucasus, Armenian Highland, archeological excavations, Andreas Artruni, Levon Babayan, Levon Atabekyan.

Rudolf Virchow (1821-1902), the great German physician, founder of pathological anatomy and creator of cellular theory, ranks high amongst the constellation of bright lights in science and reformers of the modern medicine. Like numerous scholars of his epoch who were brought up in the traditions of the European Renaissance, Virchow never limited himself to a narrow range of issues related to his speciality, but strived to elaborate them in a context of problems relevant to general medicine, biology, and culturology.

At the same time, indeed, he was a true son of the 19th century, a period fraught with great political and social perturbations and revolutionary storms, which told upon succeeding periods. Hence, this is the source of his clear-cut insight and comprehension of the social character of numerous diseases and necessity to carry out socio-hygienic reforms in medicine. Hereof originated his strive for the active socio-pathological work, his sympathy to 1848 revolution and, further on – his role in the German Parliament (*Reichstag*) as the leader of the opposition and one of co-founders of the Progressive party (*Fortschrittspartei*), as well as his passionate polemics and

conflict with "iron" Chancellor Bismarck.

All the above mentioned made him unreliable and suspect in the opinion of the Government. Being forced to cease his scientific-pedagogical activity at the Berlin University and Charité hospital and exiled to the quiet provincial town of Würzburg, Virchow anew plunged into his scientific research. The outcome of his almost seven year stay was not only the fundamental work "Die Cellularpathologie in ihrer Begründung auf physiologische und pathologische Gewebelehre" (1858) that was generally recognized world-wide, but also such works devoted to general medical problems and anthropological studies "Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur wissenschaftlichen Medizin" (1856), "Untersuchungen über die Entwicklung des Schädelgrundes" (1857).

Upon his victorious return to Berlin University, Virchow received a chair of Pathological Anatomy and, alongside with becoming the Head of the Institute of Pathology that was specially established for him, undertook large-scale scientific-research and pedagogical activity. He studied pathogenetic mechanisms of numerous human diseases, as well as the pathogenesis of such general biological processes as inflammation, regeneration, and neoplasms. Virchow founded the "Archiv für pathologische Anatomie und Physiologie" known also as "Virchows Archiv"

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and above 200 of his works related to the mentioned issues were published in this edition.

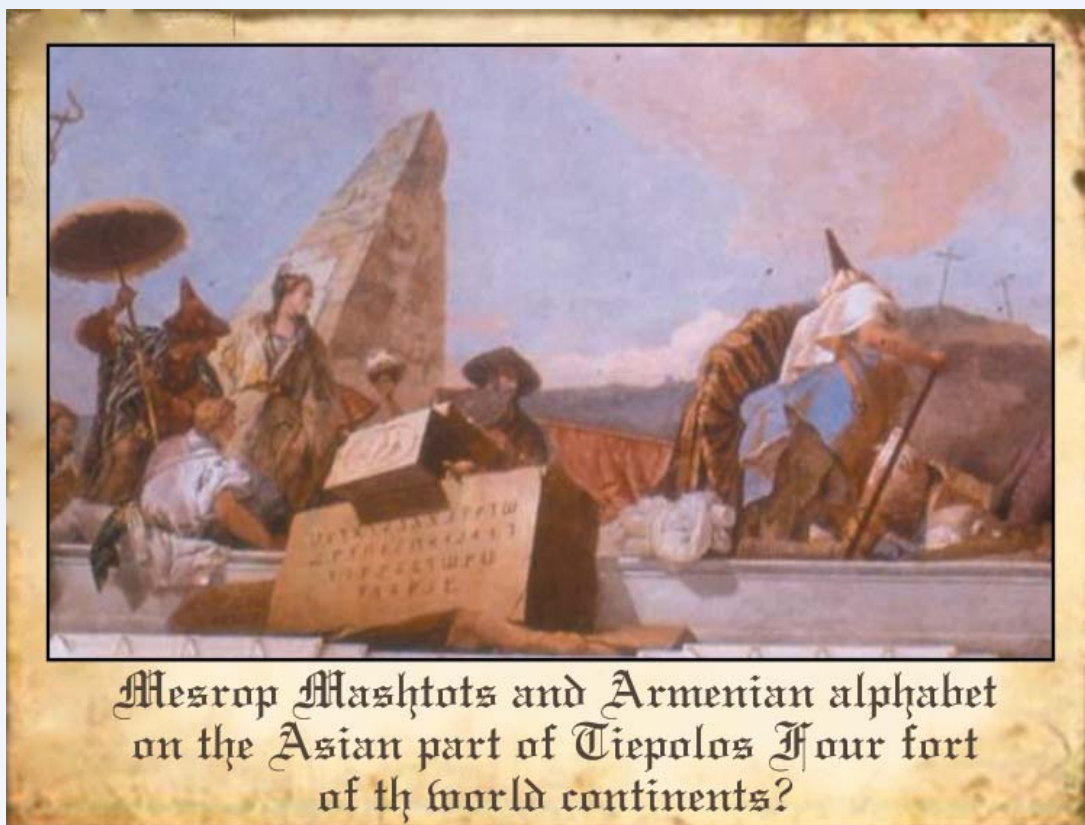
Since 1879, Virchow actively participated in Heinrich Schliemann's archeological excavations in Asia Minor, the aim of which was search for ancient Troy. The results of performed anthropometric studies on skulls found in burial grounds of Troy were systematized by Virchow in a special work "Altrojanische Gräber und Schädel". He joined Schliemann in his excavations in Egypt, Ethiopia, and Greece.

The Caucasus and Armenia were of special interest for Virchow as he considered both the most important centres of world civilization, links between the West and the East. One cannot exclude that the interest towards Armenia might have originated in this great German scientist since the period of his stay in Würzburg. Indeed, it was precisely in this town that 100 years before Virchow the brilliant master of fresco Tiepolo (1696-1770) symbolically presented Armenia as the cradle of Christian civilization in Asia depicting it in his illustrious fresco "The Four Parts of the World" in the person of the great Armenian enlightener Mesrop Mashtots behind the stone stela with an inscription of the Armenian alphabet (Picture 1) [Vardanyan S., 2001].

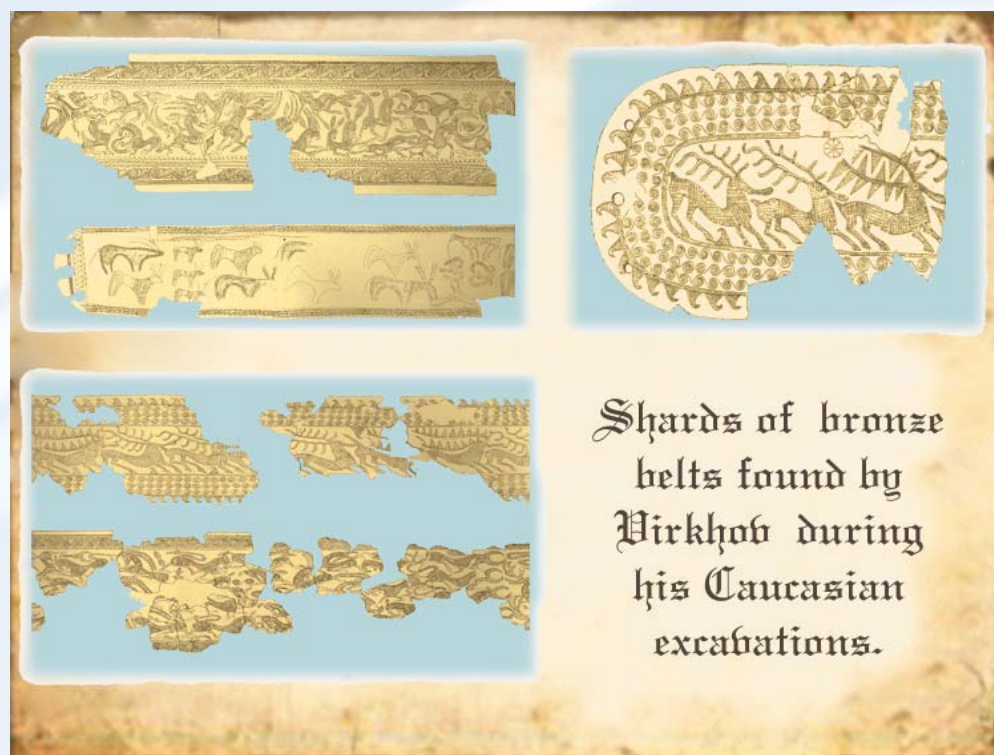
Since 1881, Virchow together with the group of German archeologists began systematic studies of burial grounds of Caucasia and Transcaucasia, investigating the structure of skulls found, as well as objects of material culture, in particular: bronze belts decorated by whimsical ornaments depicting various real and fantastic animals (deer, horse, bull, dog, buffalo-horse, falcon, snake) (Picture 2). Based on anthropometric studies Virchow drew a conclusion that ancient skulls found at the territory of the Armenian Highland should be related to brachicephalic type, i.e. to Indo-European race, whereas in later burial places the skulls of dolichocephalic structure were found.

Doctor Hovhannes Margaryan (J. Markaroff) on the instruction of Virchow gathered a collection of Armenian skulls, which belonged to brachicephalic type and with the assistance of Dr. Friedrich Bajern sent them to Virchow in November-December 1881 [Christian Andree, 1976].

The significant part of findings collected during the expeditions to Caucasus, in which Virchow participated in person and supported by Virchow's Foundation, was presented by objects of material culture of exceptional artistic value. These objects were mostly found in burials of Akhtala, Sevan region and Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh). According



Picture 1.



Picture 2.

to Virchow, of special interest were the findings of his colleague, archeologist Valdemar Belk in a Paradise fortress (Paradiesfestung) in the vicinity of Kalakend, as well as objects found in necropolises of Khojalu and Arjadzor near the town of Shushi [Virchow R., 1895].

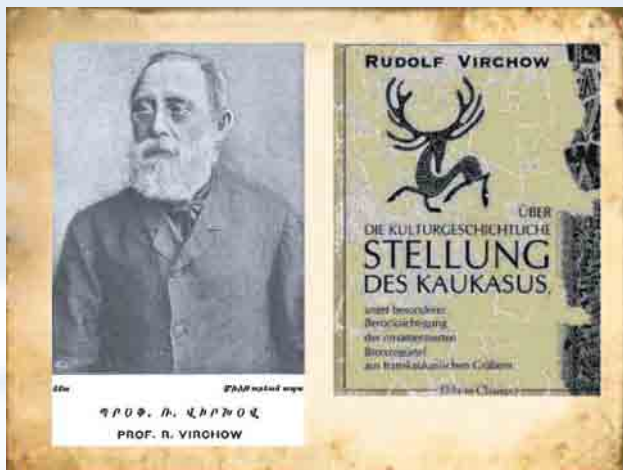
Upon analysis of materials obtained in his expeditions from the point of view of art studies, Virchow concluded that Armenian art, i.e. art localized in High Armenia was significantly more ancient than that in the Kingdom of Van [Virchow R., 1895], namely: more ancient than the art of Urartu State. All these findings as stated by Virchow made grounds to suppose that at the territory of the Armenian Highland and, particularly, in the vicinity of Shushi and Kalakend in the epoch of bronze age there existed major centers of metallic applied art [Virchow R., 1895].

Data of anthropological and archeological research performed by Virchow at the Caucasus were presented by him to the attention of authoritative scientific circles of Berlin, Paris and Vienna and then described in details in his work “Über die kulturgeschichtliche Stellung des Kaukasus unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der ornamentierten Bronzengürtel aus transkaukasischen Gräbern” (On Significance of the Caucasus in the Culture History, in Particular, Taking into Consideration Ornament Decorated Bronze Belts from

Transcaucasian Burial Grounds). The interest of the Armenian public to this work was so great that in a month after publication the book was translated into Armenian. In 1895 it was published by the “Ethnographic Journal” in Shushi town (Picture 3) [Virchow R., 1895].

The book was translated by the connoisseur of the Armenian history and culture, a well-known translator Levon Babayan (1855/60 – 1920), who was educated in Germany [Stepanyan G., 1973]. He also introduced the Armenian readers to the biography of the great German scientist that was presented in detail in the preface of the book supplemented with the author's portrait done in the publishing house of Vienna congregation of Mkhitarists probably during Virchow's visit to the library and the museum of the Abby; this latter is another evidence of Virchow's interest to the Armenian culture (Picture 3).

L. Babayan visited many European countries with established Armenian diaspora and was among those who firstly described Armenian colonies of Moldova and Wallachia [Babayan L., 1911]. Native of Shushi town, in the vicinity of which there took place numerous excavations described by Virchow, he was well informed about them. Naturally enough, the results of those excavations, which were still going on upon his return to the motherland, presented keen interest



Picture 3.

for Babayan. One cannot exclude that he was personally acquainted with the great German scientist and even attended his lectures in Germany.

Alongside with the names of European scientists who collaborated with him in a period of excavations on the Caucasus, Virchow especially mentioned the name of Andreas Arteruni (1847-1898) (Picture 4), brother of a progressive Armenian publicist Grigor Arteruni – the publisher of “Mshak” newspaper issued in Tiflis [*Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia, 1974a*]. Arteruni brothers belonged to a noble Armenian stock and were educated at Heidelberg University in Germany.

Andreas Arteruni specialized in chemistry, geology, and mineralogy. His scientific works in mineralogy and, in particular, “Physical Chemistry of Crystals” were numerous re-published and made him famous all over the Europe. A mineral artsrunit was named after him. In 1877 he was awarded the title of private-docent of the Berlin University; in 1880-1883 he headed the Museum of Mineralogy in Berlin. Since 1884 till his last days Professor Andreas Arteruni was the Head of Mineralogy Chair at Aachen Polytechnic Institute. Afterwards, the bust of Professor Arteruni was placed in front of the Institute building.

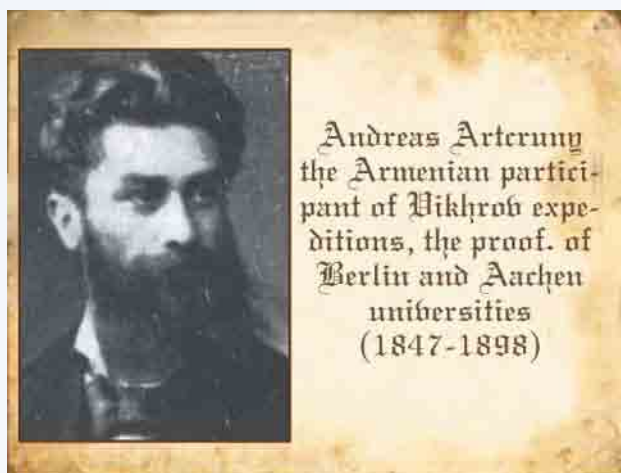
During his whole life, Andreas Artsruni never ceased to have contacts with the Caucasus and Russia. He proposed the challenge of developing metallurgy and chemical industry on the Caucasus, participated in many scientific expeditions to the Caucasus, the Urals, in Egypt, Brasil and other parts of the world. Professor Arteruni was elected to be a member of Turin, Bawarian, and St.-Petersburg Academies of Sciences.

As a scientist interested in a wide range of

problems, as a man with a great name, Arteruni made an impression on Rudolf Virchow with whom he, in person, was engaged in a long-term collaboration.

The correspondence of R. Virchow with Andreas Arteruni and Avetik Babayan (1844-1913), a well-known Armenian physician and public figure, was preserved [*Christian Andree, 1976; Vardanyan S., 2000*]. The latter, as one of founders of the Caucasian Medical Society, heartily welcomed the German scientist during his stay in Tbilisi in 1881. In 1891, when the whole world of culture celebrated the seventieth anniversary of Rudolf Virchow, on initiative of A. Babayan and several physicians, including Stepan Ananyan, Samson Maisuryants and Hovhannes Margaryan, the marble plate, which immortalized the name of Virchow, was mounted on one of cliffs in the vicinity of Abastuman in memory that the outstanding German physician and statesman visited this health resort and predicted a great future to it.

And last but not least, a few words about the person, whose name with a brief dedication is stated on the title page of the Armenian translation of Virchow’s book “On Significance of the Caucasus in Culture”. It was a young Armenian physician, sociologist, poet, and a great sociopolitical figure - Levon Atabekyan (1875-1918) (Picture 5) [*Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia, 1974b*]. L. Atabekyan was born in Kusapat village of Artsakh. In 1893 he graduated from Shushi non-classical secondary school and continued his education in Europe: studying social sciences in universities of Tübingen and Leipzig and medicine in Berlin and Zurich.



Picture 4



Picture 5.

Upon his return to the motherland Levon Atabekyan, heart and hand, got involved in issues relevant to medicine and social medicine in Transcaucasus: towns of Shushi, Gandzak, Yerevan, Tiflis, Baku. Due to his efforts, a clinic for tubercular patients was established. Likewise Virchow, Levon Atabekyan was a broad-minded person with the temperament of a social figure and

reformer. He was among those who firstly initiated social studies in Artsakh and then published his rather valuable work “Statistical Data on the Entire Province of Shushi” at the pages of “Ethnographic Journal” [Atabekyan L., 1897].

Levon Atabekyan was also a tribune and poet, one of those who at all times were storm petrels of coming revolutions and the first victims thereof. Being the member of “Dashnaktsutyun” Party, he died in Baku in an ethnic conflict on March 20, 1918 while endeavouring to reconcile conflicting parties.

We are almost unaware of Rudolf Virchow’s personal contacts with Levon Atabekyan, but they definitely took place. Probably, they began in the period of Atabekyan’s studies at Berlin University. It is not by chance that Levon Babayan dedicated his translation to Levon Atabekyan (he himself and not the author, as on the title page of the German edition there was no such dedication). Levon Babayan adored and considered Levon Atabekyan to be future Armenian Virchow.

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