

The Forgotten Black Sea Armenians

Bert Vaux, Harvard University

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1. Introduction to the History, Language, and Culture of the Homshencis

If asked to identify the inheritors of the Black Sea coast region once inhabited by the Pontic Greeks,

[INDICATE AREA ON MAP FROM TURKEY TO SOUTHERN RUSSIA]

many would correctly identify the Laz in Turkey and the Abkhaz and other Caucasian tribes in Georgia and southern Russia. However, few people know of the existence of one of the most widespread and populous groups in this area, which has a population of as many as several hundred thousand. This group, which refers to itself as *homše(n)ćik* or residents of Hamshen (Turkish *hemşinli*), occupies a continuous area stretching along the Black Sea coast from the province of Samsun in north-central Turkey to southern Russia in the north. There are also significant Homshenci communities in the Izmit region of western Turkey, in various cities in Central Asia, and amongst the gastarbeiters in Germany.

One is immediately struck by two facts about the Homshencik: they are originally Armenian, and the Homshencik in Turkey are Muslim.

The presence of these enigmatic Armenians in the Black Sea area raises many interesting and difficult questions:

- Who exactly are the Homshencik?
- When did they come into the area?
- Where did they come from?
- Why are they generally unknown to the outside world?
- What effect has Islamicization had on their language and culture?

Today I'd like to give you the beginnings of an answer to these questions, based on my fieldwork with two Homshencis, one a Muslim from Turkey, and the other a Christian from Abkhazia:

- My primary informant is a 25-year-old man whose Turkish name is Temel Yilmaz (his real name is Pirtot Lazoglu). He was born and raised in the village of Köprücü, located 5 kilometers from the Georgian border and from the Black Sea coast in the Artvin province [SEE MAP].
- My other informant is a 24-year-old man named Avik Topchyan, whose family comes from the town of Novyj Afon in Abkhazia. [SEE MAP]

1.1. Who are the Homshencik?

The first question I'd like to address is "who are the Homshencik?"

There are three basic subgroups of Homshencik:

- **western Homshencik**, who live in the Turkish provinces of Samsun, Ordu, Giresun, Trabzon, and Rize, speak Turkish, and are Sunni Muslim.

- **eastern Homshencik**, who live in the province of Artvin, speak a language called Homshecma, and are also Muslim.
- **northern Homshencik**, who live in Georgia and Russia, speak Homshecma, and are Christian.

The primary traditional occupations of the Turkish (i.e. western and eastern) Homshencik are cultivating tea and corn, and beekeeping. The Homshecma lexicon includes a special term for ‘honey sickness’, a peculiar condition that afflicts unfortunates who have consumed bad honey. Their folklore reflects the daily concerns of the Homshencik as well as the mountainous coastal milieu in which they exist: it is replete with tales of protecting their fields from bears, wolves, wild men, ghosts, and Laz. Until recent times, traveling bards would congregate in the village square to compete in composing songs dealing with local trees, mountains, and foods, as well as more familiar topics such as wooing and lost love.

Their riddles encapsulate the world of life in a Black Sea village, as one can see in the following examples elicited from Temel’s mother last summer:

- (1) Q: *galat me kak bade tevi* ‘I threw a basket of shit against the wall’
A: *onguč* ‘ear’
- (2) Q: *maḡ me hagvit caxke tei* ‘I put a sieve full of egg on the roof’
A: *asdaḡ* ‘star’
- (3) Q: *gerta gerta iz čuni, yed ku ka ačvi čuni* ‘it goes and goes and has no footprint; it returns and has no eye’
A: *ked* ‘river’
- (4) Q: *ḡompu vaan hašnjaj senduk* ‘a locked lockbox on the road’
A: *mazarlux* ‘cemetery’

The first riddle, for example, reflects the Homshenci tradition of using cow dung (*kak* or *axp*) to fill in the cracks between stones in the temporary homes they erect during their summer stays in yaylas several days to the south. The other riddles display features that I will touch on later in my presentation.

Interestingly, the ethnicity of the Homshencik is no longer easily determined by consulting the Turkish Homshencis. The Homshencik in Turkey are Muslim, and are considered by many Turks to be a variety of Laz (Benninghaus 1989:497). Younger Turkish Homshencis apparently consider themselves to be a Turkic tribe, an opinion shared in print in various Turkish newspapers by older members of their community (Benninghaus 1989:486-7). Their personal names are generally of Turkish or Caucasian origin; in (5) you can see some typical Homshenci names and their Georgian counterparts.

- | | | |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|
| (5) Homshenci names | Homshecma | Georgian |
| | <i>čita</i> | <i>čita</i> |
| | <i>boko</i> | <i>boko</i> |

<i>čute</i>	<i>čute</i>
<i>χavula</i>	<i>χavila</i>
<i>mapu</i>	<i>mabu</i>
<i>dukši</i>	<i>tukhsi</i>
<i>gunti</i>	<i>gundia</i>

The Homshencik also share with the Laz their preference for the tulum, a sort of bagpipe, the horon, a particular style of dance, and a certain amount of vocabulary, such as *lazut* ‘corn’, *digina* ‘a device that children use to carry tea on their back’, and so on.

However, though the Turkish Homshencik often present themselves as Laz for convenience, it is important to notice that they do not intermarry with the Laz (Benninghaus 1989.491; confirmed by Temel). Furthermore, they rarely know more than a few words of the Laz language (Benninghaus 1989.491), and they do not refer to the Laz as Homshecik, but rather as *megreli* ‘Mingrelians’ (Benninghaus 1989.491) or *jon* ‘Laz’, from the Georgian name for the Laz, *č’ani*.

The Laz themselves refer to the western Homshencik as *ermeni* ‘Armenian’ (Benninghaus 1989.131), suggesting their true origins. Interestingly, though the same term *ermeni* is used by the eastern Homshencis to refer to drunkards, elder members of this community in fact seem to be aware of their Armenian origins, but discourage discussion of them.

The Armenian origin of the Homshencik becomes clear when one examines Homshecma, the language spoken by the eastern and northern Homshencik. As we will see later, though Homshecma contains many Turkish and Laz lexical items, genetically it is in fact closely related to the western dialects of modern Armenian.

The Armenian heritage of the Homshencik becomes even clearer when one considers the northern Homshencik, who acknowledge their Armenian roots, have Armenian names, belong to the Armenian apostolic church, and do not employ Caucasian instruments such as the tulum. In fact, some of the younger generation of northern Homshencik are not even aware that they belong to a distinct group called the Homshencik, and know only that they are Armenian and their ancestors came from somewhere in Turkey (Artak, personal communication).

So far, then, we know that the Homshencik are a western Armenian group, who are in the process of assimilating to their Turkish and Caucasian environment. Our next question is where they came from, and when.

1.2. Where did the Homshencik come from, and when?

As one can guess from their name, the Homshencik originally come from the region around the city of *Čamlıhemşin* (‘Piny Hamshen’) in the Rize province [SEE MAP]. The Armenian form of this name is *Hamšen*, to which has been added the Armenian provenance suffix *-cĭ* and the plural suffix *-k’*, as you can see in (6). Homshecma then applies a rule that changes *a* to *o* before a nasal consonant. Remember this rule, which we have already seen in the derivation of *jon* ‘Laz’ from *tsan*, because it will play an important role in the second part of my presentation today.

(6) *homšen* - *cĭ* - *k’*

Hamshen	from	plural
‘the people from Hamshen’		

The name Hamshen itself appears to derive from an earlier form *Hamamašēn*, which means roughly ‘Hamam’s hamlet’ [SEE OLD MAP and (7)].

(7)	<i>hamam</i>	-	<i>a</i>	-	<i>šēn</i>
	Hamam connective inhabited place				

Now, where did the original inhabitants of Hamamashen come from? There is a tradition in Temel’s village that the Homshencik are the descendants of the offspring of a Turkish general and his Armenian wife, who originally lived in the Van area and eventually migrated to Hamshen via Kars and Ardahan. Various other local traditions are surveyed in Benninghaus’ excellent 1989 article on the Homshencik: for example, certain Turkish nationalists have suggested that the Homshencik are the descendants of a Turkic tribe from Central Asia, or even neo-Akkadians. In reality, it seems that the original inhabitants of Hamamashen migrated to the area together with a certain prince Hamam Amatuni in the second half of the eighth century (Edwards 1988.404). Xachikyan (1969.118) suggests that these migrants came from Kotayk’ and Aragacotn in the province of Ayrarat [INDICATE ON MAP], which accords well with the linguistic facts, as we will see later. This initial migration may have been augmented by an influx of refugees from the fallen kingdom of Ani in the second half of the 11th century (Benninghaus 1989.482).

We can also get an idea of the historical movements of the Homshencis from their language. For example, the fact that all Homshencis have substantial Turkish and Laz components in their lexicon, whereas only the northern Homshencis have Russian loans, suggests that the original Homshencis lived in a Turkish-Laz milieu, and the northern group later split off from this original homeland. Similarly, the Homshecma consonant system suggests that the community originally had close ties with the Armenians who ended up in the area around the city of Akn on the Euphrates river [INDICATE ON MAP], and that both of these communities migrated from somewhere in the Ayrarat region. We’ll return to this topic later in the talk.

1.3. The Conversion

To summarize thus far, we know that we are dealing with a single original Christian community centered around the city of Hamshen, which subsequently split into the three modern Homshenci communities: two Muslim and one Christian; two Turkish and one Soviet. These facts raise three interesting problems:

- How did the Homshencis come to be distributed over such a large area after beginning with such a restricted distribution?
- Secondly, we know that it is highly unusual to come across Armenian-speaking Muslims. Many Armenians over the centuries have converted to Islam, but this conversion generally entails loss of the language and Armenian identity within two generations. Conversely, some members of neighboring ethnic groups have acquired

the Armenian language, but these minorities are typically Christian, such as the Assyrians. The question then is: what conditions have enabled the Homshencik to preserve their Armenian language and culture after converting to Islam, and how have they been affected by this conversion?

- Finally, we would like to know how the division between the Muslim and the Christian Homshencik developed.

The answers to all three of these questions revolve around a single important event in the history of the Hamshen community, which has had profound and lasting effects on their culture, identity, and language.

Beginning in about the sixteenth century, the local Turkish rulers embarked on a program of converting the Homshencik to Islam. This program assumed a significantly larger scale in the eighteenth century, and continued to a lesser degree up to the beginning of this century. Those Homshencik who converted to Islam were allowed to remain, and have essentially been left undisturbed since that time. Those who refused to convert had the choice of fleeing or taking their chances where they were. The first wave of refugees fled westwards to Trabzon, Giresun, Samsun, and so on. The Homshencik who fled during the conversions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries successfully established new communities along the Black Sea coasts of Georgia, Abkhazia and Russia, and in the western Turkish provinces of Bolu and Sakarya [INDICATE ON MAP]. Many of the Homshencis in western Turkey relocated to Armenia after the First World War.

Throughout this sequence of conversions, small pockets of Christian Homshencik survived in Turkey, until 1915. We have reason to believe that the eastern Homshencik in Temel's area, isolated in the mountain fastnesses of northern Hopa subprovince, were among the last to convert en masse, in the late nineteenth century. To the best of our knowledge, there are currently no Christian Hemshinli left in Turkey.

We don't know when the eastern Homshencik, the least studied of the various Hamshen subgroups, extended into the Hopa region and southern Georgia (Benninghaus 1989.482). We do know, however, that the Homshencik who had converted and then established themselves along the Georgian coast fell victim to Stalin's deportation of some 200,000 residents of Georgia's southern border to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in 1944. One of my colleagues met some members of the Homshenci community in Samarkand some five years ago. It is interesting to note that some members of the Central Asian Homshenci community petitioned to relocate to Armenia a few years ago, and were refused on account of their religion.

1.3.1. The impact of Islamicization

Having accounted for the distribution of the various Homshenci communities, I'd now like to consider the impact that the conversion to Islam had on the Turkish Homshencik. In answering this question I'll draw primarily on my work with Temel, who belongs to the eastern Homshenci community.

The overall effect of the conversion among the eastern Homshenci is quite striking: though they essentially preserve their pre-Islamic language and culture intact--presumably because they live in isolated mountain villages with few Turks around--both the language and the culture have been stripped of their Christian elements. For example, weddings are still performed in the traditional Armenian fashion, except that no priest is present.

Similarly, the native Armenian words for Christian terms such as ‘priest’, ‘cross’, ‘church’, and so on have disappeared.

A striking example of this de-Christianization can be seen in a Homshenci folktale that Temel once recited for me, called ‘Temel’s Head’. In order to give you a bit of a feel for the language, I’d like to play you a recording of the story: [PLAY TAPE]

(8) Temel’s Head

yiyeĸ hadik enger caxutn ive kayəv enuř gerton. caxutin keloxn ive kellin kayəve genin. řad barak gelli; hemi inĸecnuř kuzin. andi inĸecnele erguse uuř řompacove řompan iřnoĸun meg al na satarin kelxan řompan inĸecnoĸum gasa. dařin onune temel gelli. temeĸe ĸvone ředin gaba gu, ‘yes hemi asdi inĸecenim’ gasa. andi engerdake řompan kiĸnun put genin martun vuřude go keloxe ĸgo. ‘yahu,’ gasin, ‘asu keloxe gar ta ĸgar ta? inĸ enik inĸ enik oĸ?’ yuruc put genin ‘yahu,’ gasin, ‘meg erta gasa genoĸe harc enik balki genige kidena gu.’ genoĸe mode gerton, ‘yahu,’ gasin, ‘ku martun keloxe vaan er ta vaan ĸer ta?’ genign a gasa, ‘as akvan a,’ gasa, ‘kahvalti hazərlamiř i,’ gasa, ‘bat marte giav ta giav oĸ ta ĸkidim,’ gasa.

Three friends go up a mountain to make a boat. They climb up to the top of the mountain and make the boat. [The mountain] is very steep; now they want to lower [the boat down the mountain]. Then to lower it, two go down by one path; the other says, ‘I’ll lower it down the steeper path.’ The lad’s name is Temel. Temel ties a rope around his neck and says, ‘Now I’ll lower it.’ Then the friends go down the path and see that there’s a man’s body, but there’s no head. ‘Hey,’ they say, ‘did he have his head or not? What do we do, what don’t we do?’ They look at each other and say, ‘Hey, let’s go ask the wife; maybe she knows.’ They go to the wife and say, ‘Hey, does your husband have a head, or not?’ The wife says, ‘this morning he prepared breakfast, but I don’t know if he ate it, or not.’

The story of Temel’s Head is a variant of a popular Christian Armenian folktale, ‘The Priest’s Head’, of which one version from the Mush area in eastern Turkey involves two men taking a priest to a cave to search for the missing day of the week, Friday. The story concludes as follows:

(9) excerpt from ‘The Missing Friday’ (Russell 1987)

It was decided the priest should go [into the cave], so they lowered him down into the hole with his feet sticking out the top. Time passed, and the priest made no sound. They pulled him out by his feet and saw he had no head: the bear ate it.

‘Hey, son, the priest had his head on when we brought him here, didn’t he?’

‘Shucks, I didn’t look to see if it was there or not.’

‘This is pretty bad, son. We’d better go and ask his wife whether the priest had his head on or not when he left the house this morning.’

So they went to her house.

‘Ma’am, would you tell us, did the Father have his head on or not when he left the house today?’ asked the householder.

‘By my soul, I don’t know,’ replied the priest’s wife. ‘Now was it, or wasn’t it? But I do recall, while he was eating yogurt it was dribbling down his beard.’

One can see that the essence of the story of the Priest's Head is preserved in the Homshenci version. However, the priest has been replaced with a secular character, Temel, the standard hero of Black Sea tales, and the mildly anticlerical tone of the original is completely absent.

Perhaps related to the dechristianization of Homshenci culture is their loss of Armenian identity. For example, the Homshencik have completely lost the word *hay* 'Armenian' and its derivatives, such as *hayerēn* 'Armenian language', using instead the terms *homše(n)ci* 'Hamshen person' and *homšecma* 'Hamshen language'. Similarly, as I mentioned earlier, the eastern Homshencik use the Turkish term for Armenians, *ermeni*, to refer to drunkards. One also finds amongst the Turkish Homshenci sentiments such as the following, which was expressed in a 1984 letter from an eastern Homshenci to Rüdiger Benninghaus: 'the Armenians are terrorists, and therefore the peaceful Homshencik cannot be of Armenian descent' (Benninghaus 1989:486). However, it should be noted that in 1915 the entire population of Temel's village fled to the mountains, suggesting some awareness of their Armenian past.

Despite the general dechristianization of the Turkish Homshenci language and culture, we should note that there are in fact a few isolated remnants of their Christian past.

- For example, they observe *nor dai* 'New Year' on the day of the epiphany, in accordance with the Christian Armenian practice.
- Furthermore, Bryer (1975:142) reports that baptisms are still performed in at least one Homshenci village.
- In late July, the western Homshencik celebrate at their yaylas a 3 day festival called *vartivor*. This is a remnant of the Christian Armenian festival *vardavar*, the 'feast of the transfiguration', which is generally celebrated August 6th (cf. Russell 1992).

The Homshencik have also preserved a few isolated Christian items in their lexicon. For example, unlike the Laz, who have replaced their original Caucasian word for 'god' with Turkish *tanrı* (Dumézil 1937), the Homshencik have preserved the original Armenian word *astuac* in the form *aspaj*, which shows up in expressions such as the one in (10):

(10) *aspaj xendacna kezigi* 'may god make you joyful'

Incidentally, the form *aspaj* is only attested elsewhere in the dialect of Akn, which as we have already seen must have once been in closer contact with the Hamshen Armenians. *xendasna* is the causative subjunctive of the verb *xenduš*, which preserves the original meaning of the Classical Armenian verb *xndal* 'rejoice, be joyful', unlike standard modern Armenian, wherein this verb now means specifically 'to laugh'. One can also notice in this blessing the dative suffix *-gi*, which is only found in Homshecma.

Another interesting form is the verb *xačuš*, which means 'to shut off an entrance with two boards'; in certain situations it can also have the more generic meaning 'to close'. Temel describes this verb as being based on the image of the two boards nailed on top of one another in perpendicular fashion. This suggests that the verb is derived from the Armenian noun *χac̣* 'cross', which has been lost in Temel's dialect as part of the general dechristianization of the lexicon.

So far we've seen that the conversion to Islam has resulted in a striking dechristianization of the language and culture of the Turkish Homshencik. However, as you can see from the tale I presented to you earlier, the assimilation of the Homshencik to their Turkish neighbors has had a more general impact on their language and culture as well. The younger generation has assimilated many of the basic characteristics of Turkish pronunciation, so that the *ghad*, which in most forms of Armenian is pronounced as a voiced uvular fricative *ɣ*, is pronounced by the younger Homshencik in the same manner as a yumushak *ge*, that is either as a barely audible uvular approximant, or as nothing at all. The older Homshencik, on the other hand, still speak with what we can call an Armenian accent.

There has also been a massive influx of Turkish vocabulary, to a much greater extent than we find in other Armenian dialects. Some typical examples, culled from the text in (8), are given in (11):

(11)	Homshecma	Turkish	gloss
	<i>kayəɣ</i>	<i>kayık</i>	boat
	<i>vuʃude</i>	<i>vücut</i> (< Arabic)	body
	<i>ʃid</i>	<i>cid</i> (< Arabic)	neck
	<i>balki</i>	<i>belki</i> (< Persian)	perhaps
	<i>kahvaltî hazərlamiş elluş</i>	<i>kahvaltî hazırlamak</i>	prepare breakfast

The last example reveals Homshecma's predilection for compound verbs based on Turkish roots; some further examples are provided in (12).

(12)	Homshecma	Turkish
	<i>haz enuş</i> 'to love'	<i>haz</i> 'pleasure' (< Arabic)
	<i>duşunmiş elluş</i> 'think'	<i>düşünmek</i> 'think'
	<i>taşınmiş elluş</i> 'move'	<i>taşınmak</i> 'move'
	<i>emanet enuş</i> 'entrust'	<i>emanet etmek</i> (< Arabic)

Homshecma has also assimilated Turkish syntax to a degree normally not found in Armenian dialects. For example, Homshecma has developed an equivalent of Turkish *-mI*, which serves as an indicator of yes-no questions. The use in this capacity of *ta*, which originally meant 'that, if, or', corresponding to standard Armenian *tē*, can be seen in the sentences in (13), taken from our folktale:

(13)	<i>ta</i> as yes-no question marker in Homshecma	
a.	Homshecma	<i>asu keloxe gar ta čgar ta?</i> his head was Q wasn't Q 'did he have a head or not?'
	Turkish	<i>onun başı varmıydi yokmuydu</i>
b.	Homshecma	<i>ku martun keloxe vaan er ta vaan čer ta?</i> your husband's head on was Q on wasn't Q 'was your husband's head on or not?'
	Turkish	<i>senin adamın başı üstünde mıydi yoksa (üstünde) değilmiydi</i>

This peculiar usage of Armenian *tē* as a marker of yes-no questions also occurs in the nearby Hotocur dialect to the south, but otherwise is unattested in the Armenian-speaking world.

Turkish has also found its way into Homshecma poetics. For example, the eastern Homshencik have a saying *vur keči šbecu xeči*, literally ‘hit, goat, hit, so that it falls down’, used to goad someone into action (14).

- (14) *vur keči šbecu xeči*
 hit.imperative goat hit.imperative fall-3sg.subjunctive
 ‘hit, goat, hit, [so that it] falls down’

The efficacy of this idiom crucially depends on the linguistic tools available exclusively to the Homshencik: living in a Turkish-speaking milieu, they can play the Turkish verb *vurmak* ‘hit’ against its Homshecma equivalent *šbecnuš*--which, I should mention, does not seem to be used in standard Armenian, though it is found in the dialects of Van, Erevan, and Ghazax. Similarly, they can rhyme the Turkish word *keči* ‘goat’ with the Homshecma verb *xečuš* ‘fall’, which again is rare in standard Armenian. Word plays of this type are no longer possible among the northern Homshencik and other Armenian groups who do not speak Turkish.

Another interesting example of wordplay in this mixed Turkish-Armenian context is the counting rhyme in (15), which Temel’s mother used to teach him the numbers from one to ten:

- | | | |
|------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| (15) | <i>meg, terone pe(r)g</i> | one, a hoe outside |
| | <i>ergus, terone čapa</i> | two, a hoe outside |
| | <i>yyek, govu tek</i> | three, a cow’s placenta |
| | <i>čors, jile nors</i> | four, sparse corn sprouts |
| | <i>hink, terone di(n)g</i> | five, a sack outside |
| | <i>vec, kenafin tec</i> | six, smelly air in the outhouse |
| | <i>oxte, dolavin tuxte</i> | seven, the sheet of paper in the cupboard |
| | <i>ute, terone tute</i> | eight, the mulberry outside |
| | <i>ine, valan hine</i> | nine, the old pants |
| | <i>dase, tarkin tase</i> | ten, the bowl on the shelf |

Notice here that whereas the middle word is often of Turkish origin, the rhyming couplet is always drawn from the native Armenian word stock, with two exceptions, *čapa* and *tas*. The former is particularly interesting, as it alone fails to rhyme with the number it accompanies. This striking asymmetry suggests that the rhyme for *ergus* ‘2’ was originally some native Armenian lexical item, which was subsequently replaced, perhaps when the meaning of the original Armenian form was forgotten.

It is important to notice that the Homshencis are not simply assimilating features of standard Turkish language and culture, but rather of local Black Sea Turkish. Thus, for example, the Turkish Homshencik no longer employ the Christian Armenian month names, but they also do not employ those found in standard Turkish. Month names such as *gujux*

‘February’ and *čurux* ‘July’ are clearly related to the forms we find among the Turks of Çaykara to the southwest [SEE MAP], *küçük* and *çürük* respectively, rather than to the standard Turkish forms *şubat* and *temmuz*. Other months such as *sifte güz* ‘September’ and *gaakeš* ‘December’ are also of Turkish origin--*siftah güz* in Turkish means ‘first autumn’ and *gaakeš* seems to be derived from *kara kiš* ‘black winter’--but again do not correspond to the standard Turkish forms *eylül* and *aralık*.

1.4. Language

We’ve seen so far that the language and folklore of the Homshencik has much to tell us about their identity, their history, and their social and geographical context. In the second part of my talk today I’d like to present a case study that demonstrates this point more forcefully, but in order to do so I must first give you a general overview of the history and structure of the Homshecma language.

A number of conditions have conspired to make Homshecma one of the most divergent and interesting varieties of Armenian. The Homshencik moved from the original Armenian homeland to an area of isolated mountain villages at a time when the Armenian language was still relatively homogenous, and had not yet developed the mind-boggling diversity that characterizes the hundreds of modern Armenian dialects (Weitenberg 1983). Consequently, Homshecma preserves a number of important archaisms that were levelled elsewhere, and has also developed a host of peculiar innovations not found in other varieties of Armenian. The fact that the language is not written has entailed that Homshecma has not undergone *any* influence from the classical or literary dialects, which to the best of my knowledge makes it unique among the Armenian dialects. Homshecma therefore gives us our only glimpse of what Armenian in its so-called ‘pure’ form, untainted by loanwords from Classical Armenian and not stripped of the Turkish component of its lexicon, would look like.

A number of features distinguish Homshecma from all other dialects of Armenian. Whereas all other varieties of Armenian form the infinitive by adding to the verb stem the suffixes *-el*, *-il*, *-al*, and so on, Homshecma adds only the suffix *-uš*. Our tale for example contains two infinitives, *enuš* ‘do’ and *inčecnuš* ‘lower’, corresponding to standard Western Armenian *ənel* and *inčəčnel* respectively (16). In (17), we can see that Homshecma, like many western dialects, actually has four classes of verbs according to the vowel they take in conjugation, but all of these select the *-uš* infinitive.

- (16) *enuš* ‘do’
inčecnuš ‘lower’

(17)	2sg present	infinitive	gloss
	<i>-e- genes</i>	<i>enuš</i>	do
	<i>-i- gellis</i>	<i>elluš</i>	be
	<i>-a- garta gus</i>	<i>gartuš</i>	read
	<i>-u- mednu gus</i>	<i>mednuš</i>	enter

Adjarian (1911:189) plausibly relates the *-uš* suffix to the Turkish participial suffix *-iŝ*, as in *ališ-veriŝ* ‘trade’; bear this in mind, as we’ll be returning to it in the second part of my lecture.

Homshecma is also unique in using the verb *unnuš* ‘have’ as an auxiliary: in northern Homshecma it is used to form the progressive tense, and in eastern Homshecma it is used to form the perfect tense, in a manner similar to Germanic and Romance languages.

As far as I know, Homshecma is also the only Armenian dialect that uses the Middle Armenian plural suffix *-vi-* as a singulative marker for paired body parts. Other dialects use forms such as *ačvi* and *unkvi*, but these forms are always plural in meaning -- ‘eyes’, ‘eyebrows’ -- whereas in Homshecma they are singular, the plural being formed by adding the regular plural suffix *-niye* (18).

(18)	Homshecma singular	Homshecma plural	gloss
	<i>ačvi</i>	<i>ačveniye</i>	eye
	<i>unkvi</i>	<i>unkveniye</i>	eyebrow

Though the use of this particular suffix is unprecedented, the semantic development it reflects is paralleled in standard Armenian, where the Classical Armenian plural suffix *-k* is employed to mark the same paired body parts as well as certain other singular nouns.

Like most western Armenian dialects, Homshecma employs the affix *gu* to mark the present and imperfect tenses. The distribution of this affix is peculiar in Homshecma, though: it appears after polysyllabic consonant-initial verbs, and before vowel-initial and monosyllabic verbs (19).

(19)	infinitive	1sg present	gloss
	<i>xarbuš</i>	<i>xarbi gum</i>	speak
	<i>enuš</i>	<i>genim</i>	do
	<i>devuš</i>	<i>gu dom</i>	give

This behavior of the *gu* affix is unique to Homshecma.

In terms of lexical material, Homshecma possesses a host of words unparalleled elsewhere in Armenian, such as the form *hohol* or *xorxol*, which means ‘owl’. The standard Armenian form *bu/pu* is unknown to Homshencis. Another isolated form of unknown origin is *galaš* ‘wind’; again, Homshencis have not heard the standard Armenian forms *hov* and *kami*.

On a lighter note, Homshecma seems to be unique amongst the Armenian dialects in having a voiceless coarticulated dental and bilabial trill, which we find for example in the expression used to call baby chickens, *tBi jji*. This sound occurs as a regular phoneme in the Caucasian languages Ubykh and Kabardian, but does not appear to be phonemic in Homshecma. Homshecma also differs from standard Armenian in pronouncing *r* as a retroflex alveolar approximant, in the same fashion as speakers of standard American English: [PRONOUNCE AMERICAN R]. One also hears this pronunciation among elderly Armenians born in Turkey before 1915.

Two other linguistic features that distinguish Homshecma from all but one or two other Armenian dialects are the change of *a* to *o* before nasals that I mentioned earlier, and the use of the *-oB* participle to form the future tense. The change of *a* to *o* before nasals is only paralleled in the dialect of Akn, which as we have already seen is closely related to Homshecma, and in the dialect of Aslanbek in western Turkey. However, we happen to know that the Aslanbek community was formed by immigrants from Akn and Hamshen. Interestingly, this particular change is also attested in our earliest known Armenian manuscript, the Moscow gospel, which was written by a scribe from Kars, just to the west of the Homshencik, in 887, not long after Hamshencis arrived in the area.

We can see the use of the *-oB* participle to form the future tense in our folktale:

- (20) *satarin kelxan ĵompan inčecnoBum*
 cliff-gen. top-abl. path I.will.lower
 ‘I’ll lower it on the path from the top of the cliff’

The basic verb is *inčuš* ‘descend’, from which we form a causative *inčecnuš* ‘cause to descend, lower’. To make the future tense of this causative verb, one removes the infinitive suffix and adds the participial suffix *-oB*, followed by the vowel *-u-* and the personal endings. The *-um* component seems to have originally been the auxiliary verb ‘be’, and we know from other forms of Armenian that *-oB* was originally a present participle suffix, so that the entire form originally meant something like ‘I am lowering’. The development of present progressive formations of this type into future formations is amply attested in the world’s languages, including English, which has forms such as ‘I’m going to the store tomorrow.’

Homshecma also preserves a number of archaic features that have been lost in standard Armenian. I have already mentioned the verb *xenduš*; another striking example involves the formation of the past tense. Indo-European, the ancestor of Armenian, formed the imperfect tense by prefixing an *e-* to the verb root; so, for example, the word for ‘he carried’ was **ebheret*. The expected outcome of this form in Armenian is *eber*, which is in fact what we find in the Classical Armenian aorist. Standard Modern Armenian has entirely lost this *e-* augment, though, so we now have forms like Standard Western *ĵereč*. Homshecma, however, preserves the augment, as we can see in (21).

- | | | | | | |
|------|----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|--------------|
| (21) | Indo-European | Classical Armenian | Standard Western | Homshecma | gloss |
| | <i>*ebheret</i> | <i>eber</i> | <i>ĵereč</i> | <i>epi</i> | brought |

As in Middle Armenian, the augment is also extended to a number of new verbs:

- | | | | |
|------|-------------------|---------------|--------------|
| (22) | infinitive | aorist | gloss |
| | <i>toBuš</i> | <i>etov</i> | leave |
| | <i>ponuš</i> | <i>epac</i> | open |
| | <i>devuš</i> | <i>eyed</i> | give |
| | <i>eguš</i> | <i>eyev</i> | come |
| | etc. | | |

The relation in which Homshecma stands to other Armenian dialects is somewhat complex. Nevertheless, we can say that Homshecma is clearly a Western Armenian dialect. For example, it shows the voicing of original Armenian voiceless unaspirated stops that characterizes almost all western dialects, as we can see in forms from our folktale repeated in (23):

(23)	Homshecma	Common Armenian	gloss
	<i>enger</i>	<i>ənker</i>	comrade
	<i>gerton</i>	<i>ku ertan</i>	they go
	<i>šad</i>	<i>šat</i>	very
	<i>ergus</i>	<i>erku</i>	2
	<i>daxin</i>	<i>tay</i>	boy

We also know that the original form of Homshecma, before it split into the three modern groups, contained a set of sounds known as voiced aspirates: {*b^h dh gh jh ĵh*}. These sounds are preserved in the Christian dialect of Mala, but have merged with the original voiceless aspirates in Temel's dialect (since voiceless stops are predictably aspirated in Temel's dialect, as in English, we do not write the aspiration):

(24)	Classical Armenian	Mala	Köprücü	gloss
	<i>ban</i>	<i>b^hon</i>	<i>pon</i>	thing
	<i>giwt</i>	<i>g^heʙ</i>	<i>kyak</i>	village
	<i>durs</i>	<i>d^hus</i>	<i>tus</i>	outside

These two properties of the Homshecma consonant system, namely the voicing of original voiceless unaspirated stops and the aspiration of original voiced stops, are consistent with the historical evidence that the Homshencik came from the Ayrarat region, since the local dialects of Ayrarat share these properties (Markosyan 1989).

The variety of Homshecma spoken by eastern Homshecis has a number of interesting innovations. The epenthetic vowel, which normally surfaces as schwa in other varieties of Armenian, surfaces as *e* in eastern Homshecma (25a), and as *a* before the sounds *x* and *ʙ* (25b).

(25)	Standard Western Armenian	Homshecma	gloss
a.	<i>tənel</i>	<i>tenuš</i>	put
	<i>šunəs</i>	<i>šunes</i>	my dog
b.	<i>asdəʙ</i>	<i>asdaʙ</i>	star
	<i>beχ</i>	<i>baχ</i>	moustache

Eastern Homshecma also shows a predilection for metathesizing stop + sonorant clusters, particularly at the end of a word; so, for example, original *taygr* 'husband's brother' becomes *dark*; original *čamak* 'dry' gives the verb *cokmecnuš* 'dry out'; original *šitak* 'straight' gives the verb *šigduš* 'heal'; *hawkit* 'egg' becomes *hagvit*; *nosr* 'sparse' becomes *nors*, which we saw in the counting rhyme; *akray* 'tooth' becomes *arga*; and so on (26a). This metathesis also applies to some loanwords: Turkish *haber* 'news,

narrative’ (originally from Arabic) gives *xarbuš* ‘speak’; *küfür* ‘cursing’, also from Arabic, gives *kerfuš* ‘to curse’; and so on (26b).

(26)	source	Homshecma	gloss
a.	<i>taygr</i>	<i>dark</i>	husband’s brother
	<i>ćamak</i>	<i>cokmecnuš</i>	dry → dry out
	<i>šitak</i>	<i>šigduš</i>	straight → heal
	<i>hawkit</i>	<i>hagvit</i>	egg
	<i>nawsr</i>	<i>nors</i>	sparse
	<i>akray</i>	<i>arga</i>	tooth
b.	<i>haber</i>	<i>xarbuš</i>	news, narrative → speak
	<i>küfür</i>	<i>kerfuš</i>	curse

In the domain of vocabulary, Homshecma has undergone a variety of interesting semantic changes. The word *canr*, which originally meant ‘heavy’, has become in Homshecma the word *jond*, which means only ‘pregnant’. *pētĕ*, which in standard Armenian means ‘need’, in Homshecma means only ‘okay’, as in *inčbes es? bedk im* ‘how are you? I’m okay.’ The original Armenian root *xel-*, which survives in the standard Armenian forms *xelĕ* ‘brains’ and *xelōĕ* ‘clever(ly)’, is preserved in Homshecma only in the form *xelok*, which means ‘quickly’.

(27)	Classical Armenian	gloss	Homshecma	gloss
	<i>canr</i>	heavy	<i>jond</i>	pregnant
	<i>pētĕ</i>	need	<i>bedk</i>	okay
	<i>xelawĕ</i>	clever(ly)	<i>xelok</i>	quickly

With this linguistic background in hand, I’d like to move on to the second portion of my lecture, in which I present a case study demonstrating that careful examination of a people’s language and folklore can reveal important facts about their past.

2. Etymology of Pompush

2.1. Hamshen Onomastics

In January of 1995 I began working with Temel Yilmaz, the eastern Homshenci from the village of Köprücü that I mentioned to you earlier. Temel provided me with a list of personal names commonly used in his village, which I have reproduced in (28).

(28) Eastern Homshenci personal names

MALE	FEMALE
<i>boko</i>	<i>aćige</i>
<i>budig</i>	<i>adiye</i>
<i>ćita</i>	<i>budige</i>
<i>corcel</i>	<i>cencele</i>
<i>ćute</i>	<i>dukši</i>
<i>ćuti</i>	<i>fadi</i>
<i>dexele</i>	<i>gabjaĵ</i>

didom
dongo
feremuz
ĵibo
kisti
košele
koši
kosigin
mapu
mati
maχas
mufik
muti
papulik
pepe
pilo
pirtod
piti
plis
risman
suat
temal
tilist
uguli
fli

gunti
hemzet
kence
mence
menci
mentuχe
pompuš
pulli
tuχe
χavi
χavula
ameli
mufide
čičili

Given the linguistic and cultural setting in which the Homshencik have lived for the last millennium, we should expect that the stock of personal names should consist of native Armenian forms, stripped of their Christian component, alongside Caucasian, Turkish, and Muslim forms. Since the native stock of non-Christian Armenian personal names is largely of Iranian origin, we should therefore expect Hamshen personal names to be primarily of Caucasian or Iranian origin. This appears to be confirmed by the list in (28): the majority of the names appear to be Caucasian, and others are Iranian, as I'd like to suggest here.

2.2. Armenian and Iranian Queens

One of the more intriguing personal names in (28) is *pompuš*, the name of Temel's sister. This name has no synchronic meaning for the Homshencik, and in its present form means nothing in standard Armenian or in the Caucasian languages of the area. However, when we consider the phonological history of Homshecma, the name begins to make sense.

First of all, we already know that Homshecma has a synchronic rule that raises *a* to *o* before nasal consonants. This rule has produced historical changes (29), and is also responsible for synchronic alternations in the modern language (30).

(29)	Classical Armenian	Homshecma	gloss
a.	<i>ham</i>	<i>hom</i>	taste
	<i>aman</i>	<i>omon</i>	cup

b.	<i>cař</i> <i>řat</i>	<i>jar</i> <i>řad</i>	tree very
(30)	underlying form	surface form	gloss
a.	<i>gu-ert-a-m</i> <i>gu-ert-a-n</i>	<i>gertom</i> <i>gerton</i>	I go they go
b.	<i>gu-ert-a-Ø</i>	<i>gerta</i>	he/she/it goes

Given the existence of this rule of nasal raising in the history of Homshecma, it is possible that *pompuř* descended from a protoform **pampuř*.

We also know that Homshecma possesses a rule that changes *i* to *u* before *ř*¹. This rule does not apply in all of the cases where we might expect, such as *giřer* ‘evening’ > *kiřer*, but does apply in a significant number of cases, summarized in (31).

(31)	source	Homshecma	gloss
a.	from Armenian	<i>uriř</i> <i>uř</i>	other
b.	from Turkish	<i>-iř</i> <i>řiře</i>	participial suffix bottle

It is therefore possible that our protoform **pampuř* could have been produced from an earlier form **pampiř* by the application of this rule.

We also know that Temel’s variety of Homshecma underwent the same consonant shift as Standard Western Armenian, merging the original Armenian plain voiced series of consonants with the voiceless aspirates, and voicing the original plain voiceless series. I’ve supplemented the forms we saw earlier with the ones in (32) (recall that aspiration is not noted in our rendition of Homshecma forms).

(32)	Classical Armenian	Homshecma	gloss
	<i>tasn</i>	<i>dase</i>	ten
	<i>du</i>	<i>tun</i>	you (sg.)
	<i>řew</i>	<i>řev</i>	wing (Classical), arm (Homshecma)

The consonant shift in (32) could therefore have produced our protoform **pampiř* from an earlier form **bambiř*.

Finally, we know that Homshecma, like all modern Armenian dialects, at some point in its history underwent a rule deleting word-final *n* when preceded by a consonant. This rule produced outcomes of the type in (33).

(33)	Classical Armenian	Homshecma	gloss
	<i>jukn</i>	<i>cug</i>	fish
	<i>mukn</i>	<i>mug</i>	mouse

¹ It is interesting to note in this context that *ř* is produced with lip rounding in some languages, including English.

It is therefore possible that our protoform **bambiš* derives from an earlier form **bambišn*.

The form *bambišn* is in fact a Classical Armenian word for ‘queen’, used in particular in reference to Iranian queens. The form is a loan from Middle Iranian *bāmbišn*², which in turn derives from Avestan *dāmānō.paθnī-* ‘lady of the house’ (Benveniste 1966:27). In the Classical Armenian period *bambišn* was used as a personal name as well (Adjarian 1971.1.378); for example, the fifth century historian P’awstos Biwzandac’i speaks of *Bambišn*, wife of Athanagenes and sister of king Tiran of Armenia.

The word *bambišn* is no longer used as a title, a word for ‘queen’, or a personal name in modern Armenian.

(There is one notable exception: the wife of the minister in the protestant Armenian church is referred to as *ṗampiš*. However, the Armenians I have asked have been unaware of the original meaning of this term.)

The Homshenci personal name *ṗompuš* appears to be an archaic remnant of precisely the original usage, however. The steps of the derivation I’ve sketched thus far are summarized in (34).

(34)	Old Iranian	<i>dāmānō.paθnī-</i>	
	Middle Iranian	<i>bāmbišn</i>	
	Armenian I	<i>bambišn</i>	(no length distinctions in Common Armenian)
	Armenian II	<i>bambiš</i>	(all Armenian dialects lose final <i>-n</i> after a C)
	Armenian III	<i>ṗampiš</i>	(consonant shift)
	Armenian IV	<i>ṗompiš</i>	(all Homshecma subdialects have nasal raising)
	Armenian V	<i>ṗompuš</i>	(the change of <i>i</i> to <i>u</i> is peculiar to Muslim Homshecma)

A woman named *ṗompuš* was therefore originally a ‘queen’, a completely plausible label for a woman. As is often the case with personal names, however, the original meaning of the name was subsequently lost.

What conclusions can we draw this seemingly innocuous form *pompuš*, found only in a tiny mountain village of no more than a few hundred people, tucked away in the forgotten backwaters of northeastern Turkey? This single form tells us many things:

- it speaks of the Armenian roots of a people currently in the last stages of assimilating a Turkish identity;
- it reveals the historical connection between two ethnic groups, the northern Homshencik and the Turkish Homshencik, who have forgotten each other;
- it speaks of the Christian heritage of a people who now have turned to Islam and forgotten their Christian past;
- it tells of an ancient link between Armenians and Iranians that was severed more than a millennium ago.

² Manichean Middle Persian *b'nbyšn* [*bāmbišn*], Pahlavi *b'anbšn'* [*bāmbišn*]. Hübschmann 1895:117 mentions a Pahlavi form *bāmbušn*, which he claims to be an incorrect reading based on the Armenian evidence. The Sogdian form *p'mpwšt* [*bāmbušt*] mentioned by Benveniste 1966:27, however, suggests that this *-u-* may have been a legitimate Iranian development. If this is the case, we do not necessarily need to invoke the Hamshen rule in (31) to account for the *-u-* in *ṗompuš*, though it is unlikely that an eastern Iranian language such as Sogdian would have been in contact with Armenian.

Though the Homshencis have been separated from Iranian influence for more than a millennium, they have preserved in this personal name a trace of the important historical influence of Iran on Armenia that has been lost in the standard language. Perhaps closer examination of the remainder of the onomastic stock of the Homshencik will shed further light of this sort on the rich cultural history of the Armenians.

3. Conclusion

My lecture today has had two basic purposes:

- 1) To provide you with an introduction to the language and culture of the Homshencik, an important yet neglected Armenian community.
- 2) To convince you of the importance and immediate necessity of working with Armenian dialect speakers.
 - Their languages and cultures are the last remnants of premodern Armenia, and as such provide us with raw material for understanding the development of Armenian civilization and society that we can't get from the literary languages and urban Armenian societies.
 - In addition, as we have seen in our investigation of the name *Pompuš*, the study of Armenian dialect communities such as the Homshencik reveals and requires a complex synthesis of ancient Iranian, Caucasian, Christian, Muslim, and other elements. The depth and subtlety of the interactions between these elements are easily missed in studies that choose to ignore living oral traditions in favor of medieval texts, historical documents, and so on.

Since Armenian is not a tree from which dialects grew, but rather a map of different Armenic languages, the study of dialects and material transmitted in them restores a great deal of neglected material to the fund of Armenian culture. The study of Armenian literature should not be constrained by an artificial and externally imposed model according to which folk tales, songs, riddles, jokes, and so on are regarded as primitive or secondary to a canonical literature. No one should purport to deplore Orientalism on one hand and then apply extraneous criteria on the other when determining what areas should be stressed when selecting materials for the study of Armenian history, civilization, and language.

I hope to have convinced you that in order to develop a proper understanding of the history of Armenian communities and the development of their language and culture, we cannot confine ourselves to the study of classical and medieval texts. Armenian culture is not like that of the Sumerians, which by necessity we must study solely through its written records and material remains. Rather, Armenian culture is a mosaic of hundreds of subparts, many of which, like those of the Homshencik, are still alive today, continuing, unbroken, traditions developed more than a millennium ago. Written records and material remains can never fully document a living culture; by confining our attentions to these remains, we content ourselves with simply scratching the surface of deeper phenomena. We must take advantage of the living traditions in all of their manifestations if we hope to come to grips with the true richness of Armenian culture.

This work must be carried out as soon as possible, because most of the nonstandard Armenian dialects, and with them their traditions and cultures, are fading away as we speak. In Köprücü, for example, most of Temel's contemporaries speak only

Turkish; within 50 years the eastern Homshencis may well have suffered the fate of their western counterparts. Neither of my Homshenci informants from Abkhazia speaks Homshecma fluently; they tell me that most of their contemporaries speak Russian as their first language, with a smattering of standard Armenian. Thus the northern Homshencik too seem to be on their last legs.

Fortunately, the New York area, like Boston, presents abundant sources for the collection of ethnographic and historical material. With significant communities not only of Armenian dialect speakers, but also of their Caucasian and Near Eastern neighbors, located in the New York area, Columbia is an excellent point of embarkation for a project of the sort I have outlined here. Hopefully we will be able to begin this project in the near future.

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