

## Anna Harutyunyan

ЛЕВОН АБРАМЯН: ЧЕЛОВЕК-ПРАЗДНИК [LEVON ABRAHAMIAN:  
CELEBRATION MAN. AN ONLINE *FESTSCHRIFT*].  
WWW.LEVONABRAHAMIAN.AM. CREATED BY ELZA BAIR-GUCHINOVA  
AND GAYANE SHAGOYAN.

*Anna Harutyunyan. Address for correspondence: Free University Berlin, Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Landoltweg 9-11, 14195 Berlin, Germany. harutyunyan\_anna@yahoo.com.*

The genre of a *Festschrift*, or celebratory publication, is widely used in academia as a tribute to a scholar on the occasion of his or her anniversary. The anthropological *Festschrift* is of particular interest to its professional audience because it presents the anthropologist not only from a professional perspective, but also from a personal one, thus interconnecting personal and academic realities.

Such celebratory collections are usually published in book form or as journal issues. This *Festschrift* is published online, as a website that honors Levon Abrahamian, the director of the Department of Contemporary Ethnology at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Armenian Academy of Sciences.

Abrahamian initially earned an undergraduate degree in physics from Yerevan State University. He soon realized that he was more interested in analyzing prehistoric societies and their festivities, rituals, and myths than in the study of complex natural phenomena. In the mid-1970s, as a graduate student at the Institute of Ethnography (now Ethnology and Anthropology) of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, he published articles in *Current Anthropology* that discussed topics considered “untimely” in Soviet ethnography, such as the triadic relationship of thought, word, and performativity in magic rituals, emotional distancing in rituals, symbolic cultures, and prehistoric celebrations. He began working on his seminal *Conversations by a Tree* (Abramian 2005), which analyzed the rituals and traditions of different societies in their verbal and performative manifestations in the form of philosophical and poetic dialogues. Prompted by political events in Armenia in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Abrahamian turned to current ethnic and social processes in the Armenian society, covering topics such as the national movement, the post-socialist dynamics of festival, memorials and iconography in Armenian identity. His numerous publications include a number of books published both in Armenia and abroad.

The website’s first section, entitled *Profile*, includes a list of Abrahamian’s publications. His research interests set the broad thematic framework for the *Festschrift* articles: the Caucasus, Armenia, rites and cultural practices, prehistoric festivities and magic, post-Soviet cities and societies, memory and identity. The site also features a set of Conversations about and dialogues with Abrahamian (echoing his *Conversations by a Tree*). These texts shed light on the anthropologist himself and

contextualize Abrahamian's personal story within the wider history of Armenian and Caucasus ethnography in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. The website also includes artistic sections. The stories told in the Conversations are further visualized through paintings and a photo gallery, where again the private and public facets of Abrahamian's persona intertwine, blend, and intersect with other global worlds, with the figure of Sergei Parajanov featuring especially prominently.

The academic part of the site, entitled *Articles*, contains 36 scholarly contributions. Most of them are in Russian, but there are also papers in Armenian and English. The articles cover a wide range of papers from the fields of anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and linguistics, only some of which can be mentioned here. Although there is a clear emphasis on the Caucasus, the regional focus of the papers extends from Yerevan to the entire Caucasus, Siberia, and even Uvurkhangai Aimag in central Mongolia.

A number of contributors focus on society, culture, and mythology in different ethnic landscapes of the Caucasus. Thus, Georgi Derlugian analyzes the evolution of the Adygs through the prism of transformations in their ruling elite. Nona Shahnazaryan discusses the weight of informal networks in the economies of contemporary Caucasian societies.

Despite the diversity of papers on the website, there are some common thematic threads. The articles by Sergei Arutiunov, Astghik Israelyan, and Hranush Kharatyan deal with sacrifice in different contexts. Israelyan describes practices of bread offerings in pagan Armenia by comparing them with sacrificial rituals in the Christian period. Arutiunov discusses differences and similarities in sacrifices of ox and sheep across different cults. Kharatyan analyzes the concept of sacrifice through oral narratives by Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan, as well as published interviews with leaders of the Azerbaijani Popular Front. She shows how the connotations of sacrifice in this discourse changed from "giving oneself for the benefit of others" to "sacrificing the enemy."

The website will be valuable to scholars of Armenia and the Caucasus not only because of the scholarly contributions posted there; it also shows how an individual anthropologist can be deconstructed and placed at the center of the ethnographic field. Thus it will be useful to anthropology students interested in understanding how anthropologists are represented by themselves and others, how networks are established around their personality and scholarly work, and how their private and public worlds intersect. Being an online resource, it has become an interactive place that is continuously updated with new greetings, recollections, and personal and academic contributions. The online celebration dedicated to Levon Abrahamian continues each time a new visitor opens this website.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Abramian, Levon. 2005. *Besedy u dereva*. Moskva: Iazyki slavianskikh kul'tur.