

A branch of Indo-European, Armenian seems to have reached its present location, to the south of the main range of the Caucasus, during the second millennium BC, when Indo-European-speaking invaders from the Balkans or the Pontic area (see **Indo-European Languages**) overthrew the Urartian kingdom (see **Urartian**).

Though traces of some kinship with Hellenic are discernible, Armenian is in two senses something of an isolate within the Indo-European family: in contrast to such groupings as Indo-Iranian, Italo-Celtic, Balto-Slavonic, it has no correlative; and, secondly, its Indo-European phonological identity has been crucially modified by long sojourn in a non-Indo-European phonological environment. The close analogy between the Armenian and Georgian sound systems has been emphasized by authorities on the two languages, e.g. A. Meillet.

Specifically, the term 'Classical Armenian' denotes the language as fixed early in the fifth century AD, by Mesrop Mashtots, who provided it with an alphabet, and who initiated the translation into it of the Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers. Mesrop himself seems to have translated the New Testament into Armenian.

Thus codified, the classical language, known as *grabar* or 'book language' continued to be used as the written language of Armenia up to the nineteenth century, a literary norm from which the spoken forms had by then long diverged. (Compare the Katharevousa–Demotike situation in Greek.) *Grabar* is still in use as the liturgical language of the Armenian Church.

COMPENDIUM
OF THE
WORLD'S
LANGUAGES
SECOND EDITION
GEORGE L. CAMPBELL
ISBN 0-415-20298-1 (Set)

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

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