

After the partition of Armenia between the Romans and the Sassanids in 363 AD, the highlands of Parspatunik were called Siah-Kouh (“Black Mountain” in Persian) because of the thick forests covering the mountainsides. After Turkic tribes conquered the region circa the eleventh century, it was called “Ghara Dagh,” a literal translation of Siah-Kouh. In the eighteenth century, Gharadagh (Karadag, Qaradag) was established as a khanate in the northeast of the Iranian province of Azerbaijan, lying along the south bank of the Arax (Aras) River, with its capital at Ahar (ancient Armenian Drounk).

Gharadagh, which corresponds to modern-day Arasbaran, lies southeast of Syunik and due south of Gharabagh. In terms of climate and geography, Gharadagh and Gharabagh are like a huge apple divided in two by the Arax River, according to historian and ethnographer Hovhannes Hovsepian.² His two-volume study of the ethnography and folklore of the region, titled «Ղարադաղի հայերը»,³ is indeed a wealth of information on Gharadagh as I have not seen in any other publication.

In the 1920s, there were about 400 villages in Gharadagh, twenty-eight of them Armenian. The total Armenian population of these twenty-eight villages was

2 See Hovhannes Hovsepian, «Ղարադաղի հայերը» (Gharadagh Armenians), 2 vols., (Yerevan: Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, 2009).

3 The reader may have noticed that I have used the new orthography (Հայաստանեան ուղղագրութիւն) in reference to the above title. This is done on the basis of my a priori decision to cite the titles of books published in Armenia in the orthography used in Armenia. For the rest of the Armenian titles cited in the present book, I have retained the classical or Mesrobian orthography in which I believe and in which I always write.