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Summary Article: **Armenian language**

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member of the Thraco-Phrygian subfamily of the Indo-European family of languages (see Indo-European). There is evidence that in ancient times a distinct subfamily of Indo-European languages existed that is now called Thraco-Phrygian. To it belonged Phrygian (an ancient and now extinct Indo-European language of Anatolia) and Thracian (a now dead Indo-European tongue of the Balkans in antiquity). Modern Armenian may well be a direct descendant of Phrygian. Today Armenian is the mother tongue of more than 5 million people, of whom over 3 million live in Armenia; more than 1 million live in Russia, Georgia, and Ukraine; and the rest are in the Middle East, the Balkans, and the United States. Armenian is an old, rich, and vital language. Although spoken in antiquity, it was not recorded in writing until the early 5th cent. A.D. At that time an alphabet of 36 letters was specially designed for Armenian by St. Mesrop, who used Greek and Iranian letters as a basis. Later, two more letters were added to the alphabet. In its early, or classical, form, Armenian is called *Grabar* or *Krapar*. This was the literary language until the 19th cent. and is still the liturgical language of the Armenian Church (see Armenian literature). It differed greatly from the spoken language. Grammatically, it has six cases for the noun and nine tenses for the verb, but it has lost gender. The modern form of Armenian, now used for literature as well as for speaking, dates from the 16th cent. and is known as *Ashksarhik* or *Ashksarhabar*. Its grammar is simpler than that of Classical Armenian. The history of the Armenian people is reflected in the sources of the words borrowed by their language. For example, Armenian has absorbed words from Persian, owing to Parthian domination in the centuries immediately before and after Jesus, from Greek and Syriac as a result of Christian influence, from French during the Crusades, and from Turkish in the course of several centuries of Turkish rule. For grammars see S. L. Kogian (1949) and K. H. Gulian (1954); John A. Greppin and A. A. Khachaturian, *Handbook of Armenian Dialectology* (1986).

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