



AGATHANGELOS

AGATHANGELOS (Greek for “messenger of good news”), the supposed author of a *History of the Armenians*, which describes the conversion of King Trdat of Armenia to Christianity at the beginning of the 4th century A.D. The Armenian version (*Aa*) of this *History* dates from the second half of the 5th century. The first mention of a history by Agathangelos in other Armenian sources is found in Lazar of P’arp (ca. A.D. 500). A Greek version of *Aa* (*Ag*) was made soon after the Armenian received its present form. On *Ag* depend an Arabic version and numerous secondary versions in Greek, Latin, and Ethiopic.

In addition to the “A” recension of versions, which all derive from the known Armenian text, there is a less homogenous “V” cycle derived from a lost Armenian text which has left no direct trace in the later Armenian tradition. To the “V” cycle belong two Greek, two Arabic, and a Karshuni version.

In the prologue to *Aa*, Agathangelos introduces himself as an eyewitness of the events he describes and claims to be writing at the express request of King Trdat. But the *History* received its present form well after the invention of the Armenian script (ca. A.D. 400). It is a compilation of various traditions welded into a none too coherent whole. The main divisions are the following: War between Armenia and Persia after Ardašīr I’s revolution; the restoration of Trdat to the Armenian throne with Roman help and the imprisonment of Gregory; the martyrdom at Valarshapat of nuns supposedly fleeing from Diocletian; the release of Gregory and the conversion of king and court; the destruction of pagan temples and the establishment in Armenia of a regular Christian clergy and hierarchy. After the prologue, one manuscript of the *Ag*



version (Florence, *Laurentianus*, Plut. VII cod. gr. 25; 12th cent.) inserts the story of Ardašīr's revolt against the Arsacid Artabanus V. It is derived from a lost Armenian version of the Pahlavi romance, *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšīr ī Pāpakān*, and does not go back to the time of the translation of *Ag*. There is no suggestion in Armenian tradition that this episode was ever associated with the Armenian Agathangelos. The Armenian *History* proper begins with an account of the wars between Khosrov, king of Armenia, and the Persians after the fall of the Parthian Arsacid dynasty. Khosrov attempted to avenge the Parthians; for the Armenian Arsacids had second rank in the Parthian kingdom (*Aa* 18). He organized a coalition of peoples from the Caucasus and the "Huns;" but after ten years of war he was murdered by a renegade Parthian noble, Anak, at Ardašīr's instigation. Armenia was then made into a Persian province, Khosrov's son Trdat having fled to the Roman empire. Trdat was later restored to Armenia by an unnamed emperor (Diocletian in later Armenian tradition). Agathangelos has thus condensed the political events of some sixty or more years into the life of Trdat from childhood to adulthood. When Trdat was restored he was accompanied to Armenia by Gregory, the unrecognized son of the regicide Anak; he had been brought up as a Christian in Caesarea. Having refused to sacrifice to Anahit (Mid. Pers. Anāhīd), he was tortured and imprisoned for thirteen (or fifteen) years. Meanwhile a group of nuns from Rome supposedly take refuge from Diocletian in Armenia, but are martyred at Trdat's capital, VałĀjarshapat. In retribution Trdat is turned into the form of a boar, but is cured when Gregory is brought alive out of prison. The rest of the *History* describes: the conversion of the Armenian court; the burial of the martyrs at sites revealed to Gregory in a vision; the destruction of pagan temples; Gregory's consecration as bishop for Armenia in Caesarea (an historical event, probably occurring in 314); the building of churches and missionary work throughout Armenia; the visit of Trdat and Gregory to the newly converted Constantine; and the attendance of Gregory's son and successor Aristakes at the council of Nicaea in 325.

The *History* of Agathangelos is not of great value as a historical document. Authentic reminiscences of the bishop Gregory, whose episcopal see was at Ashtishat in western Armenia, have been overlaid with elaborate inventions based on biblical and hagiographical motifs. The missionary work of Gregory in Armenia has been based almost verbatim on the life of Mashtots' (inventor of the Armenian alphabet) written by the latter's pupil Koriun soon after 440. The association of Gregory with the cathedral at VałĀjarshapat dates from after the division of Armenia in 387 into Roman and Iranian spheres of



influence, when the patriarchs moved to eastern Armenia. Trdat and Gregory's visit to Constantine is legendary, but the signature of Aristakes does appear on the lists of bishops at Nicaea (see H. Gelzer, *Patrum Nicaenorum Nomina*, Leipzig, 1898).

The pagan deities and their cult sites mentioned by Agathangelos have attracted attention, but little reliable information can be gleaned from this hagiographical work. Indeed, the description of Anahit's cult at Erez (Aa 48-49) bears no relation to the account in Strabo (11.14.16) but is based on a combination of passages from the Books of Maccabees unrelated to Anahit. She is described by Agathangelos as the special protectress of the Armenian people, source of life and fertility, and as the "golden mother" or "golden-born goddess" from the wealth of her sanctuaries. At Ashtishat Gregory's first church was built on the site of a "trinity" of cults: Anahit, Aramazd (Mid. Pers. Ohrmazd, father of all the gods, creator of heaven and earth), and Vahagn (Mid. Pers. Wahrām), called *vishapak'at* ("who handles dragons"). Other deities mentioned by Agathangelos are Asṭḥik ("little star," spouse of Vahagn), Tir (called "interpreter of dreams"), Name (Nanaia), Barshamin, and Mihr.

Agathangelos is also credited with a list of early Armenian kings supposedly culled from Trdat's archives and included in the so-called "Primary History." This is an account of the early mythical Armenian heroes, the settlement of Armenia, and the establishment of the Armenian Arsacid dynasty. It is of unknown authorship and date, and was later incorporated as the first chapter into the seventh century *History of Heraclius* attributed to Sebeos.

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