



## ANANIAS OF SHIRAK (ANANIA ŠIRAKAC'Ī)

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**ANANIAS OF SHIRAK** (ANANIA ŠIRAKAC'Ī), Armenian scholar (ca. 600-670 CE), to whom is attributed a wide range of late Antique scientific texts, including the anonymous *Armenian Geography* (*Ašxarhac'oyc'*) which is also, confusingly, attributed to a pseudo-**MOVSĒS XORENAC'Ī**.

Ananias remains an enigmatic figure. Despite his fame as an Armenian polymath, the precise nature of his relationship to the large corpus of diverse texts attributed to him has not been established (Mahé, 1987). Was he author, translator, compiler, commentator, or some or all of these? Nor do we know much about Ananias' life, family background or career. His *Autobiography* – more a statement of his academic pedigree than a life – reveals that he came from the district of Širak, from the village of Anēank', which may be associated with the later city of Ani (now in Turkey), but that he left Armenia to pursue his love of philosophy and mathematics, “the mother of all knowledge,” in the “country of the Greeks,” that is the East Roman Empire (Anania Širakac'i, 2005, pp. 593-95; tr. Greenwood, 2011, pp. 138-42; tr. Orengo, 2016, pp. 88-100). Becoming dissatisfied with the incomplete instruction on offer in Theodosiopolis (modern Erzurum, in eastern Anatolia) and elsewhere, Ananias had decided to move to Constantinople when he heard from friends that a famous teacher, Tychikos (Arm. Tuxikos), had settled in Trebizond, at the martyrrium of St Eugenios, and was teaching pupils sent to him from Constantinople. Ananias spent eight years with Tychikos in Trebizond,



probably in the 630s, gaining a complete knowledge of mathematics and instruction in the other sciences. He comments that Tychikos had a remarkable collection of books, including secular and scientific works, historical narratives, medicinal and chronological compositions, and that he was capable of simultaneous translation from Greek into Armenian. No mention is made of an equal talent in translation from Middle Persian. His academic background and the works attributed to him reveal that Ananias and his teacher Tychikos were immersed in late Antique Greek literature and learning.

Yet closer inspection of the corpus of texts attributed to Ananias suggests a more complicated relationship with Iranian culture and tradition. It has long been recognized that the Long Recension of the *Armenian Geography* (*Ašxarhac'oyc'*), although based on the lost fourth-century *Geography* (*Chorographia oikoumenike*) of Pappus of Alexandria (and ultimately on Ptolemy's *Cosmographia*) preserves a remarkable description of Ērānšahr (Markwart, 1901). It divides Ērānšahr into four quarters, defined by cardinal direction, and lists the provinces in each. Significantly it includes Armenian glosses for the three Caucasian provinces: "...Armn which is Hayk', Varjan which is Virk', Rān, which is Ałuank'..." (Anania Širakac'ī/ps. Movsēs Xorenac'ī, *Ašxarhac'oyc'*, 2003, p. 2157; tr. Hewsens 1992, p. 72). This feature indicates that this short text was originally in Middle Persian and therefore retains an invaluable conception of Ērānšahr from an Iranian perspective. Although the relationship between the two recensions of the *Armenian Geography* seems to be more complex than previously envisaged – they both derive from a lost work and so are indirectly related to one another – the thesis that the Long Recension preserves an outline of Ērānšahr from the late *Sasanian* period, remains intact. This description was part of the lost underlying text, as the insertion of sections from it in the Short Recension confirms (Anania Širakac'ī/ps. Movsēs Xorenac'ī, *Ašxarhac'oyc'*, 2003, pp. 2189-90; tr. Hewsens 1992, pp. 72A, 74A).

Three other compositions associated with Ananias also contribute to our knowledge of late Sasanian Iran. The mathematical *Problems and Solutions* (Anania Širakac'ī, 2005, pp. 617-23; tr. Greenwood, 2011, pp. 160-67) comprises twenty-four exercises, each of which has been given a specific social or economic context. The majority reflect the everyday circumstances and experiences of a member of the local elite in Širak but several represent aspects of late Sasanian Iran, including Armenian military service in *Balk* in



eastern Khorasan, attendance at the Persian court, and commercial activity within Ērānšahr. In problem 2, fractions of a magnificent pearl are sold at different prices in the cities of Ganzak, Naḵjavān (Naxčawan) and Dvin, implying an internal market with fluctuating prices for goods rather than a state-directed, price-controlled economy. Problem 11 on the other hand imagines a travelling merchant being taxed at the same rate in three different cities, implying that a single commercial levy was applied in urban contexts throughout Ērānšahr. Finally problem 18 envisages a large silver container, called an *apaṭarē*, (a compound MPers. word, from *āb*, water [cf. Arm. *jur*]), being broken up and made into several smaller vessels, including different sized plates and drinking vessels, including a *skawarāk* (MPers. *kabārag*, plate; container); all weights are given in drachms (see DIRHAM i.). Secondly the so-called *Anonymous Chronicle*, dated to between 686/7 and 695/6 CE and variously attributed to Ananias and to P'ilon Tirakac'ī, contains a list of Sasanian kings and their regnal years, to Kosrow II (590-628). It includes patronyms – “...Šapuh y Artšrean, seventy-five, Nerseh i Šaphean, ten...” – implying a Middle Persian original (P'ilon Tirakac'ī, 2005, pp. 931-32; Greenwood, 2008, pp. 221-22). Finally in his *Cosmology*, a work which may be attributed to Ananias with confidence because it refers to the author praying to St Eugenios the martyr, the Milky Way is interpreted variously as the milk from Hera's breasts, named as the wife of Aramazd (*Ahura Mazdā*), and as the 'way of the hay-thief', Vahagn, who stole from Baršam, the ancestor of the Assyrians, and dropped some in his flight across the sky (Anania Širakac'ī, 2005, pp. 734, 757). As well as representing himself as one thoroughly conversant with Greek scholarship, Ananias was also aware of popular Iranian and Armenian cultural traditions.

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