



AĀRAK'EL OF TABRĪZ

AĀRAK'EL OF TABRĪZ, Armenian historian, born at Tabrīz in the 1590s, died at Etchmiadzin in Armenia in 1670. He studied at the theological seminary of Etchmiadzin, where he was ordained a *vardapet* (celibate priest). In 1636 he was appointed abbot of the monastery of Yovhannavank' in the region of Aštarak in Armenia; and later, as a nuncio of Catholicos P'lippos Albakec'i, he was dispatched on various missions to Isfahan, Urfa, Aleppo, Jerusalem, and Athens. Aṛak'el of Tabrīz is one of the three outstanding Armenian historians of the 17th century, the others being Grigor of Kamax and Zak'aria of K'anak'er. His *History* (completed in 1662) was written at the behest of Catholicos P'lippos and published during his own lifetime—at Amsterdam in 1669. Second and third editions were published at Vałaršapat-Etchmiadzin in 1884 and 1896. It comprises 56 chapters. In the first edition, the printer Oskan Erewanec'i interpolated two chapters written by himself. These were eliminated in the subsequent editions; instead, between chapters 55 and 56, we find a new chapter—not found in the original manuscript but authored separately by Aṛak'el—on the Jews and their false messiah Sabbatai Zevi.

Aṛak'el's work is a significant and reliable source for the histories of the Persian and Ottoman empires, Armenia, Azarbaijan, and Georgia for the period 1602-62. The author was an eyewitness of many of the events that he has described, and he has recorded the accounts of other eyewitnesses, Armenian and non-Armenian, whom he encountered during his travels. Moreover, he has made extensive and scrupulous use of literary sources, such as contemporary Armenian chronicles, colophons of manuscripts, and



archival materials found at Etchmiadzin and elsewhere. With appropriate attribution, Arak'el incorporated passages from other works, such as the section in chapter 54 dealing with the history of the Caucasian Albanians from the work of Yovhannēs Carec'i, and part of chapter 53 dealing with precious gems from a study compiled by Sargis Beriac'i.

The *History* depicts political, social, and economic conditions of the Armenians in the khanates of Erevan and Naḵjavān under Safavid Persian rule in the context of the constant warfare between the Persian and Ottoman empires and of their impact upon the native populations of Armenia and neighboring countries. The book concentrates on Shah 'Abbās I's invasions of Armenia, the forcible displacement of the population from Naḵjavan and Jolfā to his capital of Isfahan in 1604, and the many difficulties which they encountered. It provides abundant data on matters of great interest to Armenian history—e.g., the construction of churches and monasteries in Armenia and the revival of cultural and literary activities; the internal problems affecting the Armenian community in Istanbul; the repercussions of the conversion of Polish Armenians to Catholicism; and the martyrdom of several Armenians for their Christian faith in Persia and the Ottoman empire. More broadly, it also discusses the havoc wrought by the insurrections of the Jalālīs, the disastrous effects of the exorbitant taxes imposed by Persian and Ottoman rulers, the displacement of populations, and the consequences of famines and other natural calamities. The book devotes individual chapters to the genealogies and brief histories of the Ottoman sultans and Persian kings, the forced conversion of Jews to Islam in Iran, earthquakes that occurred in Tabrīz and Van and their environs, and a major fire in Istanbul.

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