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ARMENIA I. IMAGE OF PERSIANS IN

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In the Sasanian period Armenians developed a self-awareness as Christians against the background of their earlier Iranian social and religious culture (see ARMENIA AND IRAN i-v). Although written texts, beginning in the fifth century CE, only give a partial view of Armenian ideas about themselves and their place in the larger world, the long-term impact of the early major texts was formative for later ideology down to modern times. The native script was developed in the Iranian sector of the country during the reign of Yazdegerd I (for background see Winkler), and the literary genres that shaped Armenian literature were primarily those of Christian Syria and the world of Greco-Roman antiquity (see *East of Byzantium*).The first Armenian historians naturally rejected Persian traditions overtly, though they were still influenced by them, as is particularly obvious in the *Buzandaran* (see Garsoïan's Introduction to *The Epic Histories).* Persian mythology, when deliberately cited, was treatedwith scorn, as in the work of Eznik (see EZNIK OF KOŁB). And the historian Movsēs Xorenac'i contrasts "senseless" Iranian myths with Greek fables which have hidden in themselves an "allegorical" meaning (Moses Khorenatsʿi, *History,* "From the Fables of the Persians," at the end of Book I, tr. Thomson, pp. 126-28). Unlike the Christian Georgians (the Iberians

of K'art'li), Armenians were never tempted to integrate into their own pre-history the heroes of Iranian legend.

Several writers, however, did attempt to work out the practical aspects of their relationship with the Sasanian regime. In his History Łazar of P'arp accentuates the positive, setting out a clear picture of the responsibilities of ruler and subject. He accepts the position of Armenia as a province within the greater Sasanian Empire, but one with its own Christian traditions which the Persian Great King should not attempt to subvert. Yet he makes no attempt to envisage a larger Christendom of which the Armenian Church might be a part, and his idea that Christianity was an ancient and ancestral Armenian tradition is disingenuous. For Łazar the empire consists of many peoples with differing customs (religion included), but united in military and political loyalty to a common sovereign.

Ełišē's *History* accepts the same general principle, but his message is more directed towards the Armenians themselves. Iranian attempts to impose Zoroastrian conformity on Armenia must be met with armed resistance. Ełišē is much indebted to the Armenian version of the *Martyrs of the East,* accounts of the fourth-century Syrian martyrs in Iran (see ACTS OF THE PERSIAN MARTYRS; for the influence of this on Armenian writers see Ter-Petrosyan). But his own ideology emphasizes collective, not individual action; secession from the covenant of church and people is equivalent to betrayal of both. The imagery that Łazar and Ełišē employed struck a receptive chord in later Armenian historiography. The parallels they drew between the Maccabees and the Armenian faithful remnant – for many Armenians were more prepared to stress their allegiance to the Persian Great King than to hold out for religious freedom – have often been noted and were applied by later historians todifferent circumstances (see Thomson "Maccabees," and the Introduction to *Thomas Artsruni).* Nonetheless, it remains difficult to consider Armenia a homogenous entity within the empire; the local rivalries of major families continued to dictate the course of politics.

After the Persians had suppressed the rebellion of 450-451 an uneasy symbiosis was worked out. Armenian sources do not suggest that Persian law was imposed on the country – as opposed, of course, to tax. Indeed the author responsible for the homilies known as *Yačaxapatum* states that unlike the Greeks, the Persians had no law (p. 90). This reflects the state of legal administration in Armenia, where local traditions were applied in areas governed by the various noble families. Attempts to produce a general

Armenian code of secular law were not made for many centuries; even in the 12th century Mxit'ar Goš did not consider his work as a code for all Armenians (see his own Introduction to the *Girk' Datastani,* pp. 1-25*).* Canon-law, on the other hand, did cut across the social and political divisions of the country. Greek canons were augmented by Armenian legislation from the fourth century, first written down in the fifth; but only in the early eighth century was the first formal collection compiled (the *Kanonagirk').*

When Armenians described their position vis-à-vis Persia in specifically geographical terms vagueness pertains. Although the majority of Armenians lived within the boundaries of the Sasanian Empire, their writers give no clear idea whether they thought Armenia was part of *Eran* or of *Aneran* (< Mid. Pers. Ērān and Anērān, "Iran and non-Iran"; see ANĒRĀN, ĒRĀN, ĒRĀNŠAHR). The famous early seventh-century Geography, the *Ašxarhac'oyc',* includes detailed descriptions of Armenia and the Caucasus, and a section on Iran. But the book is a disparate compilation, and the unknown compiler has not attempted to bring his material into a coherent whole (see Hewsen's introduction to *Geography).*

Influenced by biblical genealogies, as expounded and integrated with Greek traditions, the Armenians classified the various peoples of the world as descended from one of Noah's three sons, and integrated their own legendary ancestors into that schema as the line of Japheth. This echoes the earlier classification found in the original Greek *Chronicle* of Hippolytus (sec. 68) and the expanded Armenian version known as the *Anonymous Chronicle* (forArmenian versions of Hippolytus see Mahé, 1987). The Persians are descended from Sem (Sam) via Abraham; again, the view of Hippolytus.

The bible also provided a schema for the classification of the world's kingdoms. Beginning with Sebeos in the seventh century, Armenian historians used imagery from the Book of Daniel to contrast the Greeks, Persians, Medes, Parthians, and Arabs. After Sebeos such comparisons were combined with themes from apocalypses like that of Pseudo-Methodius. Recourse to such imagery occurred whenever an established order had been overthrown. Later writers thus updated such categories to cover the Saljuqs, the Crusaders, and then the Mongols, by which time the picture of Sasanian Iran had faded away (see Thomson, "Crusaders," Garsoïan, "Reality and Myth").

Although the Armenian *Anonymous Chronicle* indicates which peoples used writing, including the Persians, the languages themselves are not classified.

Early Armenian texts have remarkably few references to Persian as a language or to Armenian knowledge of it. But it seems to be taken for granted that Armenian nobles and Persians could converse without difficulty. The close family links between them, especially the tradition of sending a son to be brought up by a foreign tutor (the relationship of *san* to *dayeak;* see Garsoïan, *Epic Histories, p.* 521), are often mentioned (see also HORMOZD III).

Some characteristics of Persian as a language are mentioned in the Armenian commentary literature. The early eighth century scholar Step'annos of Siwnik', for example, notes the prevalence of compound nouns in Persian. This is an elaboration on the discussion of compounds in Dionysius Thrax, whose Greek grammar was translated and served as a basis for numerous Armenian commentaries (see Adontz, *Denys de Thrace).*

The Armenian model of their place in the world, owing political allegiance to the Great King but preserving their traditional customs, was shaken by the overthrow of the Sasanian Empire. The Muslims were outsiders, a different people, *ayl azgi*, and for centuries little or no attempt was made to understand Islam as a religion or a society (see Thomson, "Muhammad and the Origin of Islam," "Mxit'ar and the Muslims"). Following the Muslim conquest, the term "Persia" was restricted more and more to the Eastern Caucasus, to Ran (Arrān) and Atrpatakan (Azarbaijan). The adjective "Persian" could now be used in the sense of "Muslim," regardless of the ethnic origin involved, Turkish, for example, The old word for the Arabs of Northern Mesopotamia, *tačik* (cf. Mid. Pers. Tāčik, Pers. Tāzi), also gained wide acceptance in the new sense of Muslim, especially after the Seljuk invasions, and it later came to mean simply "Turk."

The shift of power from the Sasanians in Ctesiphon to the Umayyads in Damascus and the establishment of military garrisons in the Muslim province of Arminiyya (Armenia) did not stifle the continuing process of Armenian self-assertion. A definite process of codification of faith and practice was now put into effect, the leading figure in this process of framing Armenian liturgical practice, theological orthodoxy, and canon-law being Yovhannes III Awjnec'i, Catholicos 717-28 CE (see Mahé in *Des Parthes au Califat,* pp. 59-105).

Another important aspect of Armenian self identity was the use of anational calendar. Back-dated to 552 AD, this was worked out in the mid-seventh century (see Grumel, pp. 140-45*),* but did not come into general use until the end of the eighth. The standard means of dating for Armenian historians

during the Sasanian era was by regnal year of the Persian Great King. The historian Łewond (after 790) adapted this system, using caliphs instead of Great Kings. He gives only one reference to an Armenian era: Hamazasp Arcruni's martyrdom in 784 is said to be in the year 233. The earliest attested surviving inscription with an Armenian date is that of 783 from T'alin, while the earliest dated manuscript is the Queen Mtike Gospel of 862 (see Stone et al. ,pp. 115, 120). The Muslim *hejra* is hardly ever used for dating by Armenian authors. Memory of Persian Great Kings lingered on. Even in 1181 CE an Armenian scribe in Cilicia dated his manuscript to the year 630 from "Xosrov of the Persians" [i.e., Ḵosrow I] (see Conybeare, p. 5). This was more a parade of learning than an accepted method of reckoning, for he simply meant "of the Armenian era," which had indeed been retrospectively dated to the reign of Ḵosrow I Anōširvān.

Armenian awareness of Sasanian Persian traditions gradually faded. The majority of medieval Armenian historians regarded the conversion of King Trdat to Christianity as the beginning of Armenian history. Hence, naturally, it is not the Sasanian background but the fact that Trdat was an Arsacid that is stressed. Furthermore, the supposed alliance of Trdat with the emperor Constantine, first found in Agat'angelos (Agathangelos) and greatly elaborated over the centuries (see Thomson, 1997), takes on a new life once the Armenians came into direct contact with the West. The Crusaders, interpreted as Romans, were introduced into the apocalyptic schemes that became popular from the twelfth century onwards. Armenians found solace in foreseeing a new Trdat emerge in alliance with a new Constantine, with a direct successor of Saint Gregory at the head of the church. Romans and Armenians together would trample on the infidels before the coming of Anti-Christ and the Last Things (see Sanjian, pp. 227-39). The formative process of Christianization in Armenia did indeed begin with an Arsacid on the throne; but the development of Armenian literary traditions only started in the fifth century, and the most enduring images of the early Armenian Church and state were the products of later times under Sasanian influence.

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