



ARMENIA AND IRAN V. ACCOUNTS OF IRAN IN ARMENIAN SOURCES

ARMENIA and IRAN

v. Accounts Of Iran in Armenian Sources

From the very beginning of the Arsacid period (247 B.C.-A.D. 226) Armenia, from Achaemenian times within the Iranian zone, found itself influenced by Rome. Christianity came to Armenia first, before the conversion of Constantine, from the Syrian south; after 314, it came from Caesarea. From the time of Tiridates the Great (298-330) the Armenian Arsacid dynasty was Christian; henceforth it was contested by the Sasanians and courted by Romans and Byzantines until its power waned after the partitioning of Armenia around A.D. 387. Eventually the local confrontation of the Christian Byzantine empire and the Zoroastrian Sasanian power provoked a series of wars, annexations, and persecutions in Armenia similar to those occurring further south, around Edessa and Nisibis. In 591 Armenia was repartitioned between Iran and Byzantium, and the Greek part of this Armenia practically disappeared, absorbed by the Byzantine empire.

Since Armenian writing itself begins only around 430, almost forty years after the disappearance of the Armenian Arsacid empire, the historians who write



of Arsacid or earlier events belong to a later era, and as pseudepigraphers their identity and testimony are heavily disputed: such are P'awstos Buwzand (Faustus of Byzantium), Movsēs Xorenac'i (Moses of Chorene), Agathangelos, and pseudo-Sebēos of the *Primary History*. During the Sasanian period, on the other hand, the historians are relative contemporaries of the facts they describe. Such are Łazar P'arbec'i (Lazar of Pharbe), Ełiše *vardapet*, and Movsēs Dasxuranc'i. The works of the theologian Eznik Kołbac'i contain valuable information on Sasanian Zurvanist beliefs, and those of the scholarly compiler Anania Širakac'i also include Iranian data. These later historians give an account of the Sasanian regime's hostility toward Christianity and thus inaugurate the tales about a long series of invasions and persecutions up to the reign of Shah 'Abbās in the middle of the 11th/17th century. Many of these accounts possess eyewitness value.

Agathangelos. This Greek name, meaning “bearer of good tidings,” belongs to the presumed minister of King Tiridates, a witness to the conversion of the monarch by Gregory the Illuminator and to the overthrow of the non-Christian temple cults. The official Armenian text, although extremely lengthy (900 paragraphs), represents merely one stage of a developing legend. This official text probably took final shape about A.D. 555, and was translated into Greek undoubtedly in the 7th century; but a number of versions, mainly in Greek, Arabic, and Syriac, bear witness to earlier and later stages of the legend in lost Armenian models. The legend began around 505 by linking Tiridates the Great's persecution of Gregory with Diocletian's persecution of Christians, with Agathangelos as witness, according to all the clichés of Christian hagiography. In it Gregory's apostolate spreads also to Albania and Georgia. Gregory is shown as a Greek, married to a Greek woman, who soon becomes a cousin of King Tiridates. According to recent chronological studies, Tiridates the Great is here confused with Tiridates III (287-298) owing to his position as an exact contemporary of Diocletian. From this myth evolves an entire prehistory in which Gregory the Parthian, son of Anak and nephew of Ƙosrow, the Armenian Arsacid, atones at the hands of Tiridates for Anak's murder of Ƙosrow. In one of the latest Greek versions this episode is attached to the hostility between the Armenian Arsacids and the Persian Sasanians by borrowing from the Pahlavi *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābagān*. The Agathangelos that has reached us in a Syriac summary still stresses the legendary typology: Anak begets Gregory on the same hill of Mākū where in times gone by the apostle Thaddeus had been put to death by King Sanatruk. This version of Agathangelos, the ultimate stage of the etiological growth of the legend,



recorded around 630, is the one on which Movsēs Xorenac'i depends in the next century. Among its numerous Iranian themes we may note that of the king's hunt; the execution of Saint Hrip'simē according to the form of a rite of child sacrifice depicted by Movsēs Kałankatuac'i (1.18), the transforming of the king into a boar, *varaz* (Pahl. *warāz*); the enumeration of the princes of Armenia; the list of temples of Mihr, Vahagn, and Anahit and the *barsom*; the metamorphoses of the *divs* attached to these temples, etc. (Cf. R. W. Thomson, *Agathangelos, History of the Armenians*, Albany, 1976, pp. lx-lxiii; G. Winkler, "Our Present Knowledge of the History of Agathangelos and its Oriental Versions," *Revue des études arméniennes* 14, 1980, pp. 125-41).

P'awstos Buwzand. The second most important source of Armenian pseudepigraphy is the *History of Armenia* of P'awstos Buwzand, called Faustus of Byzantium. This Greek name conceals the apparently Iranian title *Buzandac'i*. In an article due to appear in *Mélanges H. Berberian*, A. Perikhanian suggests that what is in question here is neither Byzantium nor Buzand, a small village of Tarawn, but extracts from the "Commentaries of Faustus," the radical having to be juxtaposed with Iranian *pāzand*. This Faustus is identified with a personage in the entourage of the bishop Nerses I, quoted in Book VI, 5 of the *History*, which presents itself as Books III to VI of a larger work, and contains the events from 340 to 387, the date of the partition of Armenia. Books I and II seem to designate the *Book of Lerubna* on the apostle Thaddeus, and the Agathangelos. This arrangement probably belongs to the late 5th century. Some similarities between Procopius of Caesarea and P'awstos render possible a Greek model before the development of Armenian writing around 430. P'awstos tells of numerous confrontations between the Arsacids and the Persians (III, II, 16; IV, 16-58; V, 2-8 and 38-44). Book V and VI tell more about the organization of the church. It has long ago been shown that the events recounted by these histories cannot chronologically be condensed within so short a period of time. There is in fact a juxtaposition of a history of the south—the province of Tarawn—and a history of the north, each zone having produced its own princes, bishops, and saints. Among the numerous Iranian features one notes that Šāpūr II swears by the sun, water, and fire (IV, 7), that the Armenian Arsacid ranks the third in the Sasanian kingdom (IV, 16), that before the partition of Armenia King Aršak is bound by more than one type of allegiance to the great Sasanian king.

Movsēs Xorenac'i. The third giant of Armenian pseudepigraphic historiography, Movsēs Xorenac'i, has left three volumes beginning with the



origins and ending with the death of the archbishop Sahak in 439. Therefore Armenian historiography generally places him in the 5th century, but a series of internal indications (for instance, the use of the administrative division into four Armenias inaugurated by Justinian in 536) render certain a later composition of the whole. Scholars outside the U.S.S.R. generally place the composition toward the end of the 8th century in the wake of the coming to power of the Bagratid dynasty. In any case, Movsēs was a historian of antiquity whose genius led him to take immense trouble in assembling such scraps of history as could be found in the most ancient monuments of Armenian popular tradition. We owe to him, for instance, the transcription of an epic poem on the birth of Vahagn (I, 31). His sources are not easy to identify, but R. W. Thomson (*Moses Khorenats'i, History of the Armenians*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1978, pp. 20-52) has drawn up an eloquent list of them in which P'awstos and the 630 version of Agathangelos hold an important place. Nonetheless, Movsēs presents much information not to be found elsewhere, starting with his adapted biblical genealogies.

Pseudo-Sebēos. The *Primary History* attributed to Sebēos has been integrated by Thomson into his English translation of Movsēs (*Moses Khorenats'i*, pp. 357-68). This rather brief text contains some very ancient elements for the genealogies of kings, concerning the Parthians' assumption of Seleucid power and their succession. It allows them a total of 573 years of reign.

Eznik of Kolb. Eznik was, strictly speaking, a theologian, but his work *Against the Sects* should be cited because it describes aspects of the religion of the Zurvanist Sasanians. Eznik belongs to the group of the first translators since 430. The text was edited by L. Maries (*Patrologia Orientalis* 28, 1959, pp. 413-776).

Łazar P'arbec'i. Łazar, toward the end of the 5th century, was the first Armenian historian to have retold as an eyewitness the conflicts between the Armenians and Sasanians. Only the second volume of his work deals with events contemporaneous with the author. The first, representing itself as a continuation of Agathangelos and P'awstos, tells of the end of the Armenian Arsacids. All the events retold by Łazar form an integral part of Sasanian history. Yazdegerd II's persecution of Christians, Armenian resistance, and the reign of Pērōz are amply described.

Elišē vardapet. Elišē's work, *On Vardan and the Armenian War*, has been critically edited by E. Tēr-Minasyan (Erevan, 1957; English translation and



commentary by R. W. Thomson, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1982). Although he describes the same events as Łazar, Elišē has conceived them more as a hagiographical collection than as a history. The work, moreover, has taken the form of the earlier writings of Abraham the Confessor (*Xostovanot*), translator of the collection of Persian martyrs composed by Marūthā of Māypherqāt. *On Vardan* is composed of seven *ełanak* “modes, chapters” with supplements. Elišē has transcribed a Zurvanist manifesto attributed to Mihrnerseh, *marzpān* of Armenia (*On Vardan 2*). The replies of Joseph Hołotamec’i show no lesser an awareness of the Mazdean theological attitudes in whose name Yazdegerd justified his religious policy.

Sebēos. The historian Sebēos (Eusebius) probably took part in the council of Duin in 645, three years after the conquest of the town by the Arabs. G. V. Abgaryan’s critical edition was published in 1979 (*Patmuṭ’iwn Sebeosi*, Erevan). Sebēos presents himself as the conscious continuer of Łazar into the 7th century. He tells of the campaigns of Anūšīravān and Heraclius up to Mo’āwīa’s expedition toward Chalcedonia. A number of passages touch upon Iranian doctrines and customs, such as Bahrām’s letter to Mušel sealed with salt (chap. 11, p. 77). The History of Sebēos is the best source that has reached us for the campaigns of Heraclius.

Movsēs Dasxuranc’i is the presumed author of the *History of the Ałuans* translated into English by C. J. F. Dowsett (*The History of the Caucasian Albanians by Movses Dasxuranc’i*, London, 1961). The most ancient part of this history in three volumes may probably be attributed to the catholicos Viroy (596-630), but the last hand is undoubtedly of the 11th century. Even though this compilation is mainly concerned with relating the discovery of relics and with ascribing the ecclesiastic autonomy of ancestors worthy of their titles to the epoch of the prosperity of Partav in the 7th century, it has much to tell about the invasions from the north, taking up and adapting various legendary tales about King Sanatruk and appropriating them. Movsēs presents his own opinions on the family relations of the Sasanians in Albania (II, 7), and recounts the influence of Yazdegerd II in his country (II, pp. 1-3). His literary models are obviously Movsēs Xorenac’i and Agathangelos.

Anania Širakac’i (ca. 600-670) is a scholarly compiler who has preserved some important traditions on the Iranian calendar, which forms the basis of the Armenian year of 360 days plus five *epagomenes*. His works were edited by A. Abrahamian (*Anania Širakac’u Matenagrutyunə*, Erevan, 1944).



This list of ten Armenian historians is obviously not exhaustive. Other important writers include Yovhannēs Drasxanakertec'i (d. 931), who left a *History of Armenia* arguing ecclesiastical legitimacy from the anti-Chalcedonian point of view. He alone tells of the great fire temple erected in Duin under Yazdegerd II before the moving of the Armenian episcopate to this town in the 460s. Such historians as Դժումա Արարունի in the 10th century, Տեղանոս Ասուկի in the 11th, Արիստակէս Լաստիվերտցի between 989 and 1071, and Մատթէոս Սրհայեցի between 952 and 1136 still draw occasionally on ancient historians, some of whose data they reproduce. It is in general only because of this tendency that they are of interest in connection with Iranian material. The histories of Տեղանոս Օրբելիան and Տեղանոս Տիւնեցի, written between 1307 and 1322, contain numerous semi-legendary data on the origins of Տիւնիկ. They are a last echo of a historical method whose first impetus had been given by Մովսէս Խորենացի and Ագաթանգեղոս.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The works of Armenian historians have been conveniently assembled in *Collection des historiens anciens et modernes de l'Arménie* I, Paris, 1877; II, 1878, in which J. B. Emin gives a translation of the principal ancient chronicles.

The most recent brief presentation is that of V. Inglisian, *Armenische und kaukasische Sprachen*, HO I, Leiden, 1963, pp. 156-249.

An excellent introduction has been given in N. G. Garsoïan, "Prolegomena to a Study of the Iranian Aspect in Arsacid Armenia," *Handēs Amsoreay* 90, 1976, cols. 177-234.