Published: July 20, 2004
Last Updated: May 13, 2018

ARMENO-IRANIAN RELATIONS IN THE PRE-ISLAMIC PERIOD

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The appearance of Armenian literature in the second half of the fifth century CE, in the generation which followed the great revolt of the Armenian nobles in 450 against Yazdgird II's attempt to re-impose Zoroastrianism on their already Christian country (see *EIr.* II, pp. 429-30), resulted in its almost total obliteration of Armenia's ties to the Iranian world. The ideology of its exclusively Christian, ecclesiastical authors reiterating that the Armenian self-image was Christian by definition, simultaneously obscured any memory of the country's earlier past. Consequently, Armenian sources, particularly in the case of Iran, must often be read as through a distorting mirror. Persian sources are all but non-existent except for brief references in early inscriptions, to which late Sasanian seals add occasional, mostly administrative, details. Chance references in classical sources are often inaccurate or hostile. The minimal archeological evidence for the eleven centuries separating the rise of the Achaemenids from the fall of the Sasanian dynasty, is derived almost exclusively from the territory of the present Republic covering but a scant fifth of historic Armenia. Such evidence has done little to remedy the lacunae of the native written sources and brings with it the risk of distortion through conclusions derived from *pars pro toto*.

Additional difficulties arise from the still obscure cultural chronology of early

Armenian history, which does not coincide with that of the great powers on either side. This is particularly important in the case of Irano-Armenian relations, where the junior, Armenian Arsacid dynasty survived by two centuries the overthrow of its senior, Parthian branch by the Sasanian revolution; the time lag is reflected in institutional discrepancies, since Armenian society preserved, anachronistically, an earlier Iranian pattern. Nevertheless, even in the face of such patent obstacles, no serious study can avoid recording the fundamental elements linking pre-Islamic Armenia to Iran, especially in the crucial, if occasionally subliminal, cultural aspects which were to survive the political vicissitudes of more than a millennium from the 6th century BCE to the mid-7th century of the Christian era.

The Achaemenid period. The first written evidence for the name of the plateau at the easternmost edge of Anatolia, an area increasingly dominated by the Indo-European speakers whom Herodotus (7.73), would call “Armenioi,” comes from the late 6th century BCE; Darius I’s Bisotun inscription refers to it as “Armina” (DB 1.15, par. 6; Kent, *Old Persian*, p. 119). According to Herodotus (3.93), Armenia was part of the Achaemenid empire, of which it formed the satrapy XIII; and more than a century later Xenophon would mention a “palace of the satrap” in one of the villages he passed in the tribal, non-urban land crossed by his army in its retreat from Mesopotamia to the Black Sea (Xenophon, *Anab*. 4.4.2). The actual relationship of Armenia to Iran under the Achaemenids is not altogether clear, since Darius’s inscription at Susa lists Armenia among the countries which “Ahuramazda bestowed upon me” (DSm 5-11; Kent, *Old Persian*, p. 145; cf. DB 1.14-17). At the same time, it is also given among “the countries which I got into my possession along with this Persian folk, which felt fear of me (and) bore me tribute” (DPe 5-18; Kent, *Old Persian*, p. 136).

Whatever the precise relationship of the two may have been during this early period in which a clear concept of Ērānšahr (Irānšahr) had not yet developed (Gnoli, 1989), the position of Armenia was especially privileged. Armenian satraps are singled out by Xenophon as having normally intermarried with the family of the king of kings (Xen., *Anab*. 2.4.8, 3.4.13), so that the refusal of one of the king’s daughters promised to him was considered sufficient cause for one of them to rebel (Xen., *Anab*. 4.4.4). According to the same author, the satrap of western Armenia, “a friend of the king ... was the only man permitted to help the King mount his horse,” whenever he was present (Xen., *Anab*. 4.4.4). Perhaps as a result of this privileged status, the Armenians

generally remained loyal to their Achaemenid overlords. It may have taken three campaigns to subdue Armenia in the chaotic period which attended Darius I's accession to the Iranian throne, though even here, an Armenian, Dadaršiš, commanded the Persian army. However, Armenian contingents under the leadership of Darius's son-in-law Artochmes (Herod., 7.93) took part in the great expedition of Xerxes against Greece in 480 BCE, and they were still found 150 years later, in 331, supporting Darius III Codomanus against Alexander the Great at the battle of Gaugamela (Arrian, *Anab*. 3.8.5).

The clearest evidence for the interrelation of Iran and Armenia has been derived from a comparison of classical and eastern sources juxtaposed and interpreted by Manandian (1966, p. 36-38) and more particularly by Cyril Toumanoff (1963, pp. 277-305). These are: Strabo (11.14.15), the later semi-mythological material preserved in the *History of Armenia* by the Armenian historian Movsēs Xorenacʿi (MX, 2.27-46), the fragments of Hellenistic Greek graffiti found at Armawir on the left bank of the middle Araxes, and finally the genealogical inscription of king Antiochus I of Commagene at Nimrud Dagh from the middle of the first century BCE, in which he claimed descent from the Achaemenid kings. The result of their work revealed the presence of a forgotten native dynasty of Iranian origin, called "Eruandid" (cf. Av. *auruuant-* "mighty, hero;" Mid. Pers. *arwand*) by the Armenians from the repeated name of its rulers, or Orontid from the various awkward Greek transcriptions of their name—such as "Orontes Aruandes" or "Ardoates—"found in classical sources. The presence of this Iranian native dynasty can now be attested from at least 400 BCE, and it can be shown to have ruled, from the centers of Armawir and subsequently Eruandašat on the middle Araxes with only a brief hiatus, until the first years of the Christian era.

Very little is known about Armenia's early tribal society, beyond its agricultural wealth and absence of cities, as noted by Xenophon in the description of his journey across the Armenian plateau; but its ties to Iran are also clearly attested. We learn from Xenophon that the Armenians paid tribute to the Achaemenids. According to Strabo (11.14.9 [C 530]), they were particularly known for the prized horses that they raised and sent to Iran for the celebration of the Mithracina (see MEHRAGĀN). These statements are supported by the presence of male figures usually identified as Armenians, wearing the Persian or rather Median dress of short tunics and trousers and leading a horse, represented in the procession of gift-bearers figured on the great staircase at Persepolis (Ghirshman, 1964, p. 271, fig. 216), as well as by

the discovery of silver gilt plates with the central relief of a horse raising his right foot in obeisance to a fire altar, found north of Armenia at Aramazis-xevi, near the early Georgian capital of Mtsxetʿa (Lang, 1966, p. 89, fig. 20).

The Hellenistic period. The campaigns of Alexander shifted the position of Armenia for centuries from that of an intrinsic component part of the Achaemenid empire to that of a disputed borderland at the limit of the classical and the Iranian worlds. The strategic position of the region lying athwart the east-west military and trade routes, both along the valley of the Araxes leading from Iran to Cappadocia and more particularly through the Mesopotamian plain dominated by the Armenian plateau, made it far too important to permit its concession to a rival power. Alexander himself never entered the country, and the control of the plateau by his Seleucid successors was intermittent. Nevertheless, Armenia came under a powerful Hellenic influence that probably reached its zenith in the last century BCE at Tigran II the Great's Greek-speaking court. Eponymous cities following the pattern of the ubiquitous Alexandrias, such as Artašat, Eruandašat, Zarišat, Zarehawan, Vałaršapat, and Tigranakert, were founded in Armenia. The country's Iranian base seems to have survived, however, since the names of the eponymous founders are invariably of Iranian origin. The reappearance of an "Orontes" as early as 316 BCE, and of a "Mithranes," another member of the Eruandid house, even earlier (Toumanoff, 1963, p. 280), clearly demonstrates that the rule of this local dynasty of Iranian origin had survived, with hardly any interruption, the destruction of the Achaemenid empire by the Macedonian conquest.

According to Strabo (11.14.5), new dynasties were established in Araxene Armenia and its southwestern neighbor Sophene by Artaxias (Arm. Artašēs) and Zariadris (Arm. Zareh) at the end of the 2nd century BCE. He identifies both rulers as generals of the Seleucid king Antiochus III who had established themselves as a result of Antiochus's defeat by the Romans in 188 BCE. However, the recent discovery in Armenia of boundary stones with Aramaic inscriptions, in which the ruler Artašēs proclaims himself "the son of Zareh" and an "Eruandid king" (Perikhanian, 1966), demonstrates that both "generals," far from being Macedonians, belonged in fact to the earlier native dynasty, albeit probably to collateral branches, and that the Eruandids, or Artaxiad/Artašēsids as they came to be known, with their Iranian antecedents, continued to rule Armenia as before. An unexpected corroboration of this dynastic continuity is also provided by Xenophon's much earlier choice of the

name “Tigranes” for the crown prince of Armenia in his historical romance, the *Cyropaedia* (Xen., *Cyr*. 3.1.7).

Our information remains very meager concerning the history of the later Eruandid/Artašēsids, beyond the names of some of the rulers and occasional references, until the accession of Tigran the Great (96/5–55 BCE). Politically, these Armenian rulers were forced to resist the repeated, though short-lived, attempts of the Seleucids to establish their rule over the country, as well as the rising power of the Parthians, to whom Tigran himself had been sent in his youth as a hostage and to whom he had been forced to surrender seventy valleys to free himself at his accession (Strabo, 11.14.15). Even so, during Tigran’s reign in the first half of the last century BCE, Armenia briefly became the leading power of the East in the vacuum created by the decline of the Seleucids, as well as by the rivalry between Rome, temporarily distracted by the Mithridatic wars (see PONTUS), and the growing power of the Parthian empire.

The depth and pervasiveness of the very visible Hellenistic wave, which had broken over Armenia as well as the rest of the Near East in the wake of Alexander and produced problematic hybrid cultures, now appears to have been considerably less overpowering than had been assumed previously. Its unquestionable presence in Armenia and the opening of the country to world trade, evidenced by the presence of coin hoards, did not succeed in obliterating earlier Iranian traditions. Not only did the local Eruandid/Artašēsid dynasty survive the conqueror’s death by nearly three centuries, but Armenia maintained many of its political and cultural ties with the Iranian world. Achaemenid Aramaic remained the official written language of the Armenian chancellery. Intermarriages between the Iranian and Armenian royal houses continued to be celebrated with great pomp, as was that of the sister of the Armenian king Artawazd II to the Parthian prince Pacorus at which the head of Crassus was used during a performance of Euripides’ *Bacchae* (Plutarch, *Crassus* 33). In his description of the new capital of Tigranakert, Appian (*Mithr*. 12.94) noted that for all of its typical Hellenistic features, the new city was also flanked by a royal hunting preserve or “paradise” (MIr. *pardēz*) of purely Iranian type. Despite Tigran II’s use of Greek in the proclamation of his title, its formula “King of kings” was as Iranian as his own Eruandid name. The reverse of the king’s coins, on the famous silver tetradrachms commemorating his capture of Antioch on the Orontes in 84 BCE, displays a purely classical iconography; but on the obverse the king is

represented wearing the tiara, decorated with pearls, of the Parthian rulers and marked with the symbolic star of the semi-divine Oriental monarchy (Der Nersessian, 1969, fig. 24); and there is some evidence for the existence of an epic about Tigran following an Iranian pattern.

Additional evidence for the Armenians' share in the world of Iran is readily found in the realm of religion. In accordance with the syncretic fashion of the times, later Armenian authors, such as Agatʿangełos (Aa, secs. 785, 809) or Movsēs Xorenacʿi (MX, 2.12, 77) gave Greek equivalents for the names of the gods worshipped in Armenia during the Hellenistic period; but there can be little doubt that their identifications of Zeus/Aramazd, Artemis/Anahit, Apollo/Tir, Herakles/Vahagn (Av. Vərəθragna), or Hephaistos/Mithra merely covered a purely Iranian pantheon, whose presence in Armenia has been minutely studied by James Russell (1987). The very name of the Eruandid holy city of Bagaran (< OIr. *baga* "god" + *–dāna* the Iranian suffix of place > Arm. *–aran*) points to the Iranian antecedents of the holy place. The same derivation is also to be found in numerous other Armenian toponyms such as Bagawan, Bagrewand, Bagayarič, whose meaning was still altogether clear to Christian Armenian writers of the 5th century CE (Aa, secs. 790, 817). Anahit/Anāhīd/Anaïtis seems to have been especially reverenced, as she is usual styled "the lady" (Mid. Pers. *bānūg*, Arm. *tikin*) in both Pahlavi and classical Armenian sources. Strabo (11.8.4 [C 512]; 11.14.16 [C532]) further describes a temple of Anaïtis erected by the Persians and the "exceptional honor" paid to the goddess by the Armenians, "who have built temples in her honor in different places, and especially in Acilisene." These shrines were still known to later Armenian writers (Aa, secs. 48, 50, 53, 59, 127, 786). Strabo (1.2.39 [C46]) also mentions shrines called Iazoneia, which he mistakenly associates with a cult of Jason, but which may in fact have been sacred places whose name derived from OIr. *yaz-* "sacrifice," although this interpretation has recently been questioned. The famous journey of the Parthian prince Trdat I for his coronation by Nero at Rome was greatly lengthened because the future king of Armenia, accompanied by Magian priests, insisted on traveling the entire way by land from fear of accidentally polluting the sea. Once in the capital, both adored the emperor "as I do Mithra"; and the prince is said to have initiated him into some of the Magian rites (Pliny, *N.H.* 30.6.16-17; Dio Cassius, 63. 5. 2). Excavations on the site of the Artašēsid capital of Artašat, destroyed by the Romans and rebuilt with Nero's permission after Trdat I's coronation, have yielded, side by side with a statuette of clearly Hellenistic origin, a series of clay plaques with the representation of an idealized rider

who must be Mithra the hunter (Garsoïan, 1997, p. 15, figs. 3-4). At a much later date, the Christianizing message to the Armenians in the 5th-century CE work attributed to Agatʿangełos becomes comprehensible only if addressed to an audience familiar with the Zoroastrian epic tradition rather than classical mythology (Garsoïan, 1985).

Roman-Parthian rivalry. With the establishment of Roman dominion in the eastern Mediterranean after the campaigns of Pompey and the end of the Seleucid dynasty in the mid-first century BCE, as well as with the disappearance of the Eruanid/Artašēsids at the very beginning of the Christian era, Armenia became for centuries an apple of discord for the Romans and the Iranians, be they Parthians or subsequently Sasanians; both sides vied with each other to place their candidate on the Armenian throne. According to the Roman historian Tacitus (*Ann*. 12.1), the Parthian king Vologeses (Arm. Vałaršak) considered the Armenian throne "once the property of his ancestors, now usurped by a foreign monarch by virtue of a crime"; but Armenia continued to see-saw for nearly four centuries in alternate allegiance between the Parthians and Rome. The Parthian Arsacid (Arm. Aršakuni) dynasty, of Iranian origin, like its Eruandid/Artašēsid predecessor, which was eventually to hold the undisputed rule of the country, made its first appearance in Armenia with the king of kings Vonones, who established himself there in 12 CE after having been driven from the Iranian throne, although he did not succeed in maintaining himself there for more than three years. A period of war closed with the compromise accord of Rhandeia in 63 CE, which stipulated the accession in Armenia of a younger son of the Parthian Arsacid king, as long as he was crowned by the Roman emperor. This ceremony incidentally provides us, albeit in Greek translation, with the first recording of the formulaic attributes of the Iranian ruler: *baxt ud xwarrah* "good fortune and transcendental glory" (Dio Cassius, 62 [63].5.2). This compromise, whereby a junior line of the Parthan Arsacid house ruled Armenia as Roman clients, was not officially abrogated, although it was breached on several occasions: on the Roman side by the emperor Trajan, who annexed Armenia outright between 115 and 117 CE, by Antoninus Pius, who proclaimed on his coinage that he had "given a king to Armenia" (*rex Armeniae datus*), and by Marcus Aurelius, who seems to have stationed a garrison in the Armenian capital of Vałaršapat in 164 for some twenty years. Similarly, the Sasanian ruler Šāpūr I profited from his overwhelming defeat of the Roman emperor Valerian in 260 by installing two of his sons, Hormizd-Ardašīr and Narseh, on the Armenian throne, which was consequently held directly by Persia until 293 (ŠKZ, Parth., ll. 20-21;

Paikuli, p. 28, sec. 3).

The Armenian Arsacids/Aršakuni. Insofar as we can judge from the chaotic situation reflected in the inadequate sources, Arsacid rulers held Armenia repeatedly during the first century CE. In fact, “for some one hundred and sixty five years [of the Parthian period]...thirteen sovereigns succeeded one another in Armenia, eight of whom were indeed Arsacid cadets” (Toumanoff, 1969, p. 233), whose blood relationship to the Parthian royal house is constantly stressed (Garsoïan, 1981, pp. 36-37 and nn. 33, 35). Although they did not begin to consolidate themselves in the country, until the very end of the 2nd century CE, and even then precariously, the Armenian branch of the Parthian Arsacids was to rule the country almost continuously from the end of the following century to 428, despite the overthrow of their kinsmen in Iran by the Sasanian revolution two centuries earlier. In the eyes of the Armenian sources, the bond between the royal houses of Parthia and Armenia was indissoluble. Inflexibly the native authors use the terms ‘king’ and ‘Aršakuni’ as interchangeable synonyms to the very end of the dynasty. They deny that any circumstance could deprive them of the crown or that anyone else, no matter how illustrious, might legitimately wear it. They exhort the Armenians to die for their “true Arsacid lords.” So deep was the identification of the Armenians with the Arsacid dynasty, that even in the period of its final decline early in the fifth century, the Sasanians usually conceded to them rulers from this house in order to insure their loyalty (BP, 6.1). Except for the occasional princes imposed by the Romans, none of whom succeeded in consolidating himself on the throne, all the dynasties to rule pre-Islamic Armenia were of Iranian stock.

The extreme political instability marking the history of Armenia in the first centuries of the Christian era does not seem to have affected its cultural identity. We have only glimpses of the situation within the country in this period, but these indices, which coincide with some customs and institutions that are far better attested in the subsequent 4th and 5th centuries, continue to reflect a thoroughly Iranized society persisting despite the political upheavals of war. Tacitus (*Ann*. 2.56) shrewdly observed that even early in the 1st century CE, long before the consolidation of the Arsacid dynasty in Armenia, the Roman candidate to the Armenian throne, prince Zeno of Pontus, wisely changed his Greek name to the more acceptable one of Artaxias/Artašēs upon his accession; and he endeared himself to his new subjects by his taste for hunting and banquets, the only two pastimes suitable for a nobleman in the

Iranian world. The 120 "strategies" into which Armenia was subdivided at the time, according to Pliny the Elder (*N.H.* 6.10.27) and to which he refers as "kingdoms" (*regna*) were presumably the dynastic principalities of the great magnate; and as such they reflect the decentralized pattern of the Parthian period in Iran. The four kings who are said to have attended Tigran the Great at all times (Plutarch, *Lucul.* 21.5) may be the prefigurations of the four great keepers of the marches or *bdeašx*sof later Arsacid Armenia. The hereditary claim of the Armenian Arsacid monarchy to the throne of its ancestors and the dominant power of the "magnates," called *megisthanes* or *nobiles* by Tacitus, all bespeak an aristocratic society of Iranian type in no way compatible with the theoretically republican Roman world.

The first of the two major events which altered significantly the relations of Armenia to Iran was the overthrow of the last Parthian Arsacid ruler Ardawān V by the Sasanian Ardašīr I early in the 3rd century CE; the second one followed nearly one hundred years later—the Christianization of the country. Although the "Sasanian revolution" did not interrupt the Arsacids' rule over Armenia, its immediate result was to transform its Arsacid rulers from relatives of the Iranian royal house into enemies and avengers, as the Armenian king was said to have sworn "[to] seek vengeance for the blood of Artawan" (Aa, sec. 19). This enmity unquestionably pushed the Armenian rulers in the direction of the Romans, though they continued to vacillate in their allegiance. It led to repeated Armeno-Sasanian wars during the 3rd and 4th centuries, culminating in the disastrous campaign of Šāpūr II in 363/4. Armenia was overrun; its Arsacid king Aršak II was deported to die in the Castle of Oblivion in Khuzistan, and all of the country's earlier Hellenistic cities were destroyed. Armenia briefly recovered under his son Pap, with some help from the Romans, but soon agreed to collaborate with the Sūrēn sent by the Sasanians as *marzpan* "governor" of the country after Pap's murder, in cooperation with the powerful commander-in-chief of the realm, Manuēl Mamikonean, who acted as regent for the widowed queen and her minor sons.

The Marzpanate. The final solution for the endemic enmity of Rome and Iran over the control of Armenia finally came with the replacement of the unsatisfactory compromise of Rhandeia by the outright partition of the Armenian kingdom between the two great powers ca. 387, in which the overwhelmingly larger part, some four-fifths of the realm, was conceded to the Sasanians. The abolition of the Arsacid monarchy followed soon thereafter: in ca. 390 on the Roman side and by 428 in the Sasanian portion, which was soon

to take the name of Persarmenia. The subsequent period, which was to last until the downfall of the Sasanians in the mid-7th century, is known in Armenian history as that of the Marzpanate [*Marzpetutʿiwn*]. The earlier "ignobile decretum" of Jovian in 363 (Amm. Marc., 25.7.12-13) abandoning his client Aršak II to the Persians had already tightened the Sasanians' hold on Persarmenia. It returned to them the eastern portion of the semi-autonomous, southern Armenian principalities lying along the eastern Euphrates/Arsanias (mod. Murad su), commonly known as the Satrapies or *ethnē/gentes*, which had been lost to the Romans by the earlier Peace of Nisibis of 299 CE. Following the 3rd-century example of Šāpūr I, Yazdgird I even went so far as to impose his son as direct ruler of Armenia at the beginning of the 5th century (MX, 3.55-56). But the young prince's reign was brief, and the Sasanians thereafter ruled Persarmenia through marzpans, a number of whom were local Armenian princes. Sigillography also attests the sporadic presence in Armenia of Sasanian military and finance officials, several of whom belonged to the great Iranian house of the Mihrān (Gyselen, 2001a, pp. 44-45; Idem, 2002, pp. 110-11, 120-21, 131-32). Persarmenia was not only by far the largest portion of the Armenian lands until 591, when Xusrō II surrendered much of it for a time to the emperor Maurice, it was the political, religious, and intellectual center of the Armenian world. Duin, its administrative center and the normal residence of the marzpan, was also the seat of the Armenian patriarch or katʿołikos from the end of the 5th century, as well as a major center for international trade (Proc., *Pers*. 2.25.3). The creation of the Armenian alphabet and the consequent development of its early literature, as well as the elaboration of its ecclesiastical doctrine, likewise took place within the territory of the Marzpanate and not in the portion of the country under Roman control.

The restlessness of the Armenia magnates, who jealously guarded their prerogatives against any hint of encroachment, at first on the part of their own Arsacid dynasty, whose abolition they themselves had requested from the Persian king (MX, 3.63-64), now turned them against the Sasanians' centralizing attempts threatening their privileges; and they revolted repeatedly through most of the period of the Marzpanate. The major rebellion in 450/1 resulted from Yazdgird II's attempt to force Zoroastrianism on an already Christian Armenia; but its sequel in 482, and especially that of 571/2, inaugurated by the murder of the Persian *marzpan*, do not seem to have had the same exclusively religious basis. The first ecclesiastical historians, writing in Armenian some two generations after the end of the Arsacid kingdom and

the disastrous defeat of 451, understandably stressed the enmity of the Armenians to the Sasanians and exalted the rebels as Christian Maccabees and martyrs for the faith (BP, 3.11). However, the actual situation does not seem to have been so simple. Even after crushing the great Armenian revolt of 451, the Sasanian court, possibly distracted by the Hephthalite ("Kušan" in the Armenian sources) threat on their eastern border, made no attempt to pursue religious repression. Rather, it sent a marzpan, whose name Atrormizd Aršakan indicates his descent from the former Parthian dynasty, with instructions "not to disturb the Armenian populace but to subdue it peacefully and allow everyone to practice Christianity freely" (ŁPʿ, 2.40), in direct reversal of the very policy that had provoked the rebellion. One generation later, the leader of the rebellion, prince Vahan Mamikonean, was recognized by the Persian court as marzpan of the country; and religious as well as political autonomy was granted to Armenia in 485. At various other times also the Persian marzpans were in fact native Armenian princes, and no attempts seem to have been made to destroy local titles and institutions (Garsoïan, in press). In response the Armenians often displayed their loyalty to Persia. The Armenian elite cavalry seems to have served regularly in the Sasanian army during its eastern campaigns (Ps. Seb., 11, 28). According to the 7th-century *History* of the Pseudo-Sebēos, the Armenian commander Mušeł Mamikonean withstood the blandishments of Bahrām Čōbīn and would not support his struggle for the throne against Xusrō II in 591 (Ps. Seb., 11). The last great Sasanian reign of Xusrō II Parvēz proved to be one of particularly felicitous relations between Iran and Armenia, as the latter flourished under the supervision of the king's favorite, Prince Smbat Bagratuni, called Xosrov *šum* "the joy of Xosrov" (Mid. Pers. *xšnūm*) by contemporary Armenian sources (Ps. Seb., 28).

Most significantly, no cultural break seems to have gone hand in hand with the dynastic change in Iran and the attendant political antagonism in Armenia. The exact status of Armenia vis-à-vis Iran does not seem to have changed greatly and remained ambiguous, as had been the case much earlier under the Achaemenids. In the great trilingual inscription celebrating his victories over the Romans at Naqš-e Rostam, Šāpūr I claimed that "Of the Aryan Empire [MIr. *Ērānšahr*] the principalities and provinces (are) these: Pars, Parthia, … Armenia …" (ŠKZ, Parth., l. 1). An inclusion confirmed by the *Letter of Tansar* (p. 63), which defined "the land called Persia … from the river of Balkh to the furthermost boundaries of the land of Adarbāigān and Persarmenia." However, the great mōbad Kerdīr (q.v.) included Armenia in

"the region of non-Ērān, ...where the horses and men of the King of kings penetrated" (KKZ, p. 71, l. 15); and one generation later the king of kings Narseh twice underscored the separation of the two realms in his inscription at Paikuli, when speaking of his move "from Armenia hither to Ērānšahr" (*Paikuli*, p. 35, secs. 18, 20).

Despite this ambiguity, however, Armenia even in this period remained closer to Iran than to Rome. The late Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus might call the Armenian king Aršak II, "our constant and faithful friend" (Amm. Marc., 25.7.12-13); but Armenia, lying beyond the Euphrates frontier, remained a foreign land, its annexation by Trajan an act of conquest. On the contrary, even for the Sasanians, as for the Parthians before them, Armenia claimed as an ancestral land required particular care. In justifying the inauguration of his second campaign against the Romans, Šāpūr I complained that, "Caesar, secondly, lied and did wrong to Armenia" (ŠKZ, Parth., 1.5). Possibly self-servingly, the late 5th century Armenian historian writing under the Greek pseudonym of Agatʿangełos affirmed that: "whoever was king of Armenia had second rank in the Persian kingdom" (Aa, sec. 18). This assertion was to be corroborated, for the Sasanian period as well, by the contemporary compiler of the *Epic Histories* (*Buzandaran Patmutʿiwnkʿ*), formerly mistakenly attributed to an otherwise unknown Pʿawstos Buzand or Faustus of Byzantium:

Šapuh king of Persia [Šāhpūr II] invited Aršak king of Armenia, whom he honoured with the greatest deference and glory [*pʿaṙkʿ*] ... and with full royal pomp. He treated him as a brother, like a son and gave him the second domain in the realm of Atrpatakan. And they reclined together on one and the same banqueting throne in the hour of festivity, and they wore the same garments of the same colour with the same insignia and ornaments. And day after day the Persian king prepared the same crown for himself and for him. Linked together like two indivisible blood-brothers, they enjoyed themselves jointly at festivals. (BP, 4.16)

We have no explicit evidence on the Persian side that the Armenian king ranked immediately after the Iranian king of kings, but the title of *wuzurg* "great" used by Šāpūr I for his son Hormizd-Ardašir "wuzurg Armenān šāh" is not repeated for his other sons ruling elsewhere (ŠKZ, Parth., ll. 20-21). In 293 CE, Narseh found Armenia the final stepping stone to the throne of the king of kings (*Paikuli*, p. 32, sec. 13; p. 35, secs. 18-19), as had Darius III Codomanus, long before him, in 336 BCE (Justin, 10.3.3-5; Diod. Sic., 17.6). On their side, the

Armenian magnates as well as the royal dynasty and even the family of the Christian patriarch prided themselves on their descent from the great Iranian houses of the royal Arsacids, the Surēn or the Kāren. In the opinion of the Armenian historian Movsēs Xorenacʿi, the last representative of the patriarchal Gregorid house, Saint Sahak, "was greatly honored [by the Persian king during his visit to the court at Ctesiphon] first, because of his noble Pahlavik family" and only then because of the reverence due to God's servants (MX, 3.51; cf. 3.64).

Social structure. So far only minor and disconnected yet tantalizing glimpses have been available for the earlier period of Armenian society, going as far back as Seleucid times, during which its basic institutions seemingly first arose. The curiously anachronistic continuity of a Parthian society in Armenia long after its replacement in Iran by its Sasanian successors was first clarified by the extensive linguistic studies of Emile Benveniste, who demonstrated that the linkage of the overwhelmingly large number of Iranian loanwords in classical Armenian is to Middle Parthian rather than to Sasanian Pahlavi forms. The striking similarities of the two, which have permitted the reconstitution of a considerable number of lost Middle Parthian words from their Armenian derivatives, identify this period as the one of particularly close contact and cultural penetration between the two societies.

Similarly, the iconography and ideology of Iranian and Armenian societies were so close at times, despite the absence of chronological synchronism in the political sphere, that the juxtaposition of examples taken from the two sides can serve to supplement the deficiencies of Sasanian written sources and of Armenian monuments during this period, thus providing what may be called a single illustrated document (Garsoïan, 1997, pp. 19-23). Even so, the chronological discrepancies manifest themselves visually. On the numerous surviving steles Armenian noblemen invariably wear the typical Parthian trousers and characteristic tunic with longer pointed sides as late as the 7th century CE (ibid., p. 17, figs. 7-8).

Finally, these similarities and their continuity beyond the point of political association can best be traced in our main source for this study, the almost contemporary *Epic Histories*, which probably date from the 470s CE, whose reliance on the oral tradition preserving the folk memory reveal a far more accurate picture of late Arsacid and Marzpan Armenia than can be gained from more learned authors. They too reveal the image of an unmistakably aristocratic society of Iranian type, but a largely anachronistic, primarily

Parthian one, displaying none of the centralizing elements seemingly introduced by the Sasanians (Garsoïan, 1976). As such, their information further permits the partial reconstruction of institutions characteristic of the all but lost Parthian period in Iran, for which we have almost no native sources.

The three main estates in Armenia, that of the "magnates" (*mecamec naxarar*s), that of the lesser nobility (*azat*), and what may be called the third estate, consisting of the "artisans" (*ṙamik*s) and "peasants" (*šinakan*s), correspond precisely to the Iranian *wuzurgān, āzādān*,and *vastrōšān* "farmers." Only the Sasanian administrative fourth estate of the "clerks" (sing. *dabīr*, Arm. *dpir*) is missing in Armenia; its function possibly was taken over by the Christian clergy. The foundations of both societies were the great noble families, of whom some fifty can be identified by name in 4th-5th century Armenia, and whose power, at least in Armenia, and probably in Parthian Iran, did not derive from the authority or will of the king, who was but *primus inter pares*. At the head of each of these families was its senior member, called in Armenian *nahapet* or more commonly *tanutēr* "lord of the house," a title to which Rika Gyselen has found the precise Pahlavi equivalent *kadag-xwadāy* on a late Sasanian seal (Gyselen, 2001a, pp. 61-68). The economic basis of these clans lay in their possession of vast, unalienable principalities belonging to the "eternal family," past, present, and future, of which the *tanutēr*, who led its "contingent" (*gund*) in battle, was the temporary administrator, but not the owner, and which he consequently could not transmit or dispose of in any way. Perhaps still more important were the hereditary offices held by the chief houses, which were reserved exclusively to each. Thus, the title and office of "commander-in-chief" of the Armenian army or *sparapet* (< OIr.**spādapati*, cf. NPers. *sipāhbad*) could belong to no one except a member of the great Mamikonean house, even if its only representative was a small child patently incapable of fulfilling its duties and for whom temporary substitutes had to be appointed. For he was the heir of the house and the only one entitled to its insignia and privileges (BP, 3.11). Even the king's manifest will could not alter the hereditary nature of this transmission, and his interference could end only in failure and tragedy:

… when Manuēl [Mamikonean] reached the land of Armenia … Vačʿē, who had previously been *nahapet* before his return, saw him, he handed over to him the princely diadem that he had received from King Varazdat because [Manuēl] was the senior member of the clan. And so Manuēl held the dignity

of *nahpet-tanutēr* of the clan and Vačʿē was in second place. And when Manuēl had attained the glory of his lordship [*tanutērutʿiwn*], he first seized the office of *sparapet* and commander-in-chief without an order from King Varazdat. Manuēl took back for himself the authority that his ancestors had held by nature from the beginning and which King Varazdat had granted to his tutor Bat. (BP. 5.37)

The position of the Mamikoneans in Armenia was thus the precise equivalent of that of the Surēns in Iran, whose hereditary dignity proved incomprehensible to classical historians such as Ammianus Marcellinus, who could not decide whether "Surena" was a family name or the title of an office. The same confusion is found later in the case of the Bagratuni princes, whose hereditary office in Armenia during the Arsacid period was that of *aspet* "master-of-the-horse," and whose Byzantine descendants were known as the "Aspetianoi" to the Byzantine historian Procopius (Proc., *Pers*. 3.12). The very terms for the various high offices in classical Armenian are identical with those found in Iran: *sparapet-spāhbad, aspet–*aspapati, hazarapet-hazārbad* "second after the king," and others; these, as is the case with most of the Armenian administrative vocabulary, are unmistakably borrowed from Iranian terminology.

Theoretically equal in status, since they belonged to the same estate, these noble families were in practice ranked according to a rigid hierarchy governing the *gah* "throne" or "cushion" (< OIr. *gāθu-*), occupied by their representatives at court banquets. These correspond to the differing "entrance- and drinking places, sitting- and standing places … according to the dignity of each man's rank" set by the king of kings, according to the *Letter of Tansar* (p. 44; Garsoïan, 1997, p. 13, figs. 1-2). The precise order of this hierarchy cannot be reconstructed, since the surviving Armenian "Rank List" (*Gahnamak*), of which the original was said to have been kept in the Sasanian court archives (MX, 3.51), is a late document of dubious authenticity; but the *Epic Histories* define the return home to normalcy after a period of crisis as the time when "every magnate [was] on his throne" (BP, 4.2). The Armenian sources stress the rage of the Arsacid king Aršak when driven from his share of the royal couch at the Persian court to the lowest place (BP, 4.54) and that of prince Andovk of Siunikʿ, relegated to the fourteenth cushion far below his dignity (MD, 2.1). It is the same range as that of the Iranian epic hero Rostam humiliated by the inferior place unworthy of his rank assigned to him at the banquet of Esfandiār (*Šāhnameh* xv, vol. IV, pp. 492-93).

The Iranian aspects of Early-Christian Armenia were not merely reserved to these social and official aspects; they pervaded the whole of its culture. The cities built in the Hellenistic period under Greek influence and destroyed by the great Persian invasion of 364 were not rebuilt, as unsuitable for an aristocratic society; its magnates preferred to remain entrenched in the fortresses of their distant domains far from the arm of the king (Garsoïan, 1987), thus perpetuating the non-urban, Parthian, centrifugal pattern rather than that of the new "royal cities" used by the Sasanians as means for strengthening the direct authority of the ruler (Gnoli, 1989, p. 157). The Armenian kings themselves, far from residing normally in their capitals, continued to lay out hunting preserves or *partez* (BP, 3.8), such as Tigran the Great had once created near Tigranakert and as still can be seen in the reliefs at Ṭāq-e Bostān (Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 194-99, figs. 236-38). They chose to move about the country making use of rich and elaborate, but transportable, tents or pavilions, such as the ones (*maškapačen, maškawarzan*) used by the Persian king in his travels and campaigns (BP, 3.21, 4.15). As in earlier times, the only acceptable diversions for kings and nobles were banquets and the hunt; and like his Iranian counterpart, the Armenian king, when in mourning, refrained from hunting (Aa, sec. 211; Suet., *Calig*. 5).

Most outward features of the nobility spelled out its Iranian antecedents and counterparts. The entire early Armenian anthroponymy, ecclesiastical as well as secular, is riddled with Iranian names, whether understandably in the Arsacid royal house—Trdat, Tiran, Aršak, Pap, Varazdat, Vałaršak, Vramšapuh, Xosrov, Vardanuhi, Xosroviduxt, Banbišn—or more unexpectedly in that of the Mamikonean, martyrs *par excellence* for the Christian fait h—Artawazd, Vardan, Vahan, Vasak, Hmayeak, Hamazaspuhi. The same is surprisingly true for the Christian clerics, among whom names drawn from the general Judeo-Christian fund are remarkably rare, both in the patriarchal house of Saint Gregory the Illuminator with its Aristakēs, Vrtʿanēs, Yusik, Nersēs, Pap, and still more startingly in the unsuitable names of the co-presidents of the great church council held at the patriarchal residence of Duin in 555: the katʿołikos Nersēs II and bishop of Meršapuh/Mihr-Šāpūr of Tarōn (Garsoïan, 1996, pp. 229-32). In peacetime the aristocracy apparently continued to wear the Parthian dress depicted on steles, but its military armament was clearly Sasanian. Mounted on horseback, heavily armored (as were their steeds), charging with a long lance, but carrying two swords and a bow as well, the Armenian elite cavalry presented the same aspect as the warriors on the monumental Sasanian reliefs at Naqš-e Rostam (Ghirshman,

1962, pp. 177-79, figs. 219-20). The menacing presence of the *sparapet* Manuēl Mamikonean, lance in hand, is described: "in the greatness of his stature, the splendor of his person, the extremely strong and impenetrable iron armor [that covered him] from head to foot, also the robustness of his person and the solidarity of his armor-clad charger also bearing indestructible trappings" (BP, 5.37). This description might as easily fit the formidable royal figure in the lower register of the cave at Ṭāq-e Bostān (Ghirshman, 1962, p. 192, fig. 235).

Political Theory and Ideology. Reaching beyond outward manifestations, Arsacid Armenia in both Parthian and Sasanian times shared in the political, and especially the religious and epic, ideology of the Iranian world; and it is in this area that the closest and most striking similarities are to be found.

The Iranian rulers carefully traced their hereditary descent. Early on, Darius boasted: "I am Darius the Great King of Kings, King of Persia, King of Countries, son of Hystaspes, grandson of Arsames, an Achaemenian. Saith Darius the King. My father was Hystaspes; Hystaspes' father was Arsames; Arsames' father was Ariaramnes; Ariaramnes' father was Teispes; Teispes' father was Achemenes. Saith Darius the King: for this reason we are called Achaemenians. From long ago we have been nobles. From long ago our family have been kings" (DB 1.1-8; Kent, *Old Persian*, p. 119).

Some seven centuries later, Šāpūr I wrote: "I [am] the Mazda-worshipping divinity [*bag*] Shahpuhr. King of Kings of Aryans and non-Aryans, who is of the stock of the gods, son of the Mazda-worshipping divinity Artakhshatr, King of Kings of the Aryans who is of the stock of the gods, grandson of the divinity Papak, King" (ŠKZ, Parth. l. 1).

So too, the Armenian Arsacids regularly transmitted the crown in hereditary succession from father to son, and on the eve of their conversion to Christianity still sought: "greeting and prosperity by the help of the gods … protection [for us] from our heroic Parthians, from the glory (*pʿaṙkʿ*) of [our] kings and from [our] valiant [*kʿajʿ*] ancestors" (Aa, sec. 127). This formula interestingly is omitted in the Greek version of this text by its translator, to whom its Iranian ideology was probably incomprehensible. Even Christian authors writing after the fall of the dynasty would deny that any but the Arsacids could be the 'true lords' of Armenia. Thus a rigidly hereditary base for the royal power distinguished both the Iranian and Armenian kings from classical rulers, who were, at least *de jure*, elected magistrates to the very end of the Roman imperial tradition.

Hailed as *Helios* "the Sun" (Toumanoff, 1963, pp. 477-78), as his Sasanian counterpart was "the brother of the Sun and Moon" (Amm. Marc., 17.5.3), endowed with supernatural strength, like the elephant-bodied Rostam (*Šāhnāmeh* vii, vol. I, p. 278); Aa, secs. 42, 123, 767), the Armenian Arsacid king received his legitimacy and power from the Zoroastrian deity Vərəθraγna (Arm. Vahagn) the giver of victory and the companion of Mithra whom he invoked directly: "May… valour come [to you] from valiant Vahagn" (Aa, sec. 127). Through this divine mandate, the Armenian kings, even after their conversion to Christianity, as well as the Iranian rulers, were endowed with "valor" (*kʿaǰutʿiwn*), "good fortune" (*baxt*), and especially the "transcendental glory" (Mid. Pers. *xwarrah*, Arm. *pʿaṙkʿ*) which rendered the Iranian ruler legitimate and invincible, as is evidenced in the *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr* (ed. Antia, 5.8-14, 12.4). This "kingly glory" could manifest itself even in the king's absence or after his death and abandoned him only for his sins, as in the case of Yazdgird I "the Sinner" (*Šāhnāmeh* xxxiv, vol. V, pp. 415-19; cf. *Zamyād Yašt* [*Yt.* 19] 34). These purely Iranian concepts were so deeply ingrained in Armenian tradition that they were still familiar and understandable to the Christian author of the *Epic Histories*,who clearly shared these beliefs, although he brands them as "heathen":

[The Persians] opened the tombs of the former kings of Armenia, of the most valiant [*kʿaǰ*] Aršakuni and they carried off into captivity the bones of the kings … For they said, according to their heathen beliefs: "This is the reason that we are taking the bones of the Armenian kings to our realm: that the glory [*pʿaṙkʿ*] and the fortune [*baxt*] and valor [*kʿaǰutʿiwn*] of this realm might go from here with the bones of the kings and enter into our realm. (BP, 4.24)

Equally familiar to him was the concept of the protection given by the "kingly glory," which could manifest itself even in the absence of the ruler, as is evident from his citation of what may have been a lost paean to the Armenian, king Aršak:

Šapuh king of Persia… wondered at the valor [*kʿaǰutʿiwn*] the fighting contingents displayed before him and said: "I marvel… at the steadfast devotion of the Armenian contingent in its love for its lord. For so many years have passed since Aršak their lord has been lost to them, and yet, they were inspired by him in battle. And whenever they struck down their foe, they ever cried out: 'To Aršak!', and yet he was not among them. But because of the devotion they bore to their own true lord, they dedicated to him every foe that they slew … And so many years have passed since Aršak their lord has been

lost to them, for he lies in the castle of Andmeİš [Ir. Andmēš] in the land of Xužastan, yet they, in their piety, believed that he stood at their head as their king, that he stood with them in the midst of the host [*gund*], at the head of the fray, and that they performed their service to him in his very presence." (BP, 5.5)

This passage is all the more constant with epic Iranian beliefs in that it invokes the "glory" of the absent, captive king Aršak and not that of his son the reigning king Pap, whose devotion from birth to the power of the *dev*s made him unworthy of this divine attribute.

In this epic world, the hunt and the banquet rose above aristocratic diversion or social settings in which noble rank could most easily be displayed, to a transcendental level. The hunt was the setting *par excellence* of the hero in the Iranian world both real and legendary (Harper, 1978). The man on horseback was not merely a social superior. The horse of the evildoer stumbled at the critical moment. The first apocalyptic sign of the world turned upside down in the vision of the Zoroastrian *Jāmāsp Nāmag* was that "a horseman will become a man on foot, and the man on foot a horseman." In his official representations on numerous Sasanian silver plates, the hunting king, on horseback, wearing all his supernatural attributes—the halo, the crescent moon set on his crown, and the symbolic floating ribbons of the *xwarrah* (Garsoïan, 1997, p. 23, fig. 14)—unmistakably displayed the full majesty of his "glory." For the hunt in the Iranian epic tradition was not merely the *locus* of the "transcendental glory," it was simultaneously the setting for the heroic apotheosis of the royal hunter (Garsoïan, 1997, p. 24, fig. 15). It is consequently of particular significance as a sign of the depth of penetration of Iranian culture into that of Armenia that we find the precise conjunction of (1) the iconography of the Sasanian hunting kings on their own silver cups and (2) the transcendental ideology underlying that iconography, in the *Epic Histories*' description of the apotheosis, for his valor and nobility, of the Armenian hero Mušel Mamikonean:

In those days, Mušel possessed a charger, a white steed. And whenever Šapuh, king of Persia took [a cup] of wine in his hand to drink in the hour of festivity, as he entertained his forces, he would say: "Let the rider of the white horse drink!"And he ordered a cup decorated with the portrait of Mušeł with his white steed, and in the hour of festivity he placed the cup in front of himself and constantly he remembered, repeating the same words: "Let the rider of the white horse drink!" (BP, V.ii)

The same setting for the royal apotheosis rather than a scene of secular entertainment was provided by the banquet, where the Iranian ruler was also represented adorned with the crescented crown and undulating ribbons of the xwarrah (Ghirshman, 1962, p 218, fig. 259). Its eschatological implications as a prefiguration of the banquet of eternity appear in both the final banquet concluding Mithra's terrestrial exploits and the heavenly vision of a golden throne dominating a banquet described in Kerdīr's inscription at Sar Mašhad (KSM, p. 98, ll. 32-34). The two themes of the hunt and the banquet in which the king and the hero sheds his mortal form to reveal his supernatural attributes are constantly joined on Sasanian silverware and in the epic traditions of both Iran and Armenia. They are explicitly linked on the silver plate from Strelka (Garsoïan, 1997, p. 13, fig. 2) and in the twin Parthian frescoes of the heroic hunt and the funerary banquet at Dura Europos (Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 49-50, fig. 62; p. 54, fig. 67). In the contemporary Armenian *Epic Histories*, all the crucial events of the king's or the hero's life and especially his death—suicide or murder—occur either on the hunt or at banquets, coinciding with the moment of apotheosis and thus, in the last case, raising the horror of the scene from the level of a crime to that of sacrilege (Garsoïan, 1981, pp. 47-64). As in Iran, the two settings are commonly linked, so that the apotheosis of Mušel "the rider of the white horse" takes place "in the hour of festivity."

The Christian period. The event which unquestionably had the greatest effect in the separation of Armenia from the Iranian world to which it was so closely tied was the Christianization of Arsacid Greater Armenia at the beginning of the 4th century. Earliest Christianity had probably reached the southern regions of Armenia and of the semi-autonomous Satrapies of the south in the 3rd century and had come to them by way of Mesopotamia from Edessa and ultimately Antioch. The main current, however, which led to the conversion of the Arsacid monarchy and was ultimately to become the dominant one in the Armenian Church, reached the country from Cappadocia to the west and was associated with the mission of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, who was consecrated patriarch of Armenia by the bishop of Caesarea of Cappadocia, probably in 314 rather than the traditional 301. As a consequence, the Armenian State Church remained at first tied to Caesarea, where its patriarchs continued to be consecrated until the latter part of the 4th century, and its orientation was toward the Greek-speaking Christianity of the Byzantine empire, rather than to the Orient.

The Christianization of Armenia obviously separated it once and for all from the Zoroastrian world of which it had formerly been a part, even though its mythology had sunk so deep in the Armenian popular tradition that early Christian writers were apparently forced to alter Biblical stories in order to make their evangelizing mission comprehensible to their hearers (Garsoïan, 1985); and the Armenian patriarch still shared officially the title of Zoroastrian mōbads: "Defender of the dispossessed" (Mid. Pers. *driγōšān jātakgōw*, Arm. *Jagatow amenayn zrkeloc'*) as late as the second half of the 4th century (Garsoïan, 1981, pp. 21-32). Nevertheless, Christian Armenia gradually drew back from the Persian spiritual tradition; and its opposition to the religion of the Sasanian empire was not limited to its official Zoroastrianism but soon progressed to include the Christian Church of the Orient, usually misnamed the Church of Persia, which was officially recognized by the Sasanian state at the Council of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 410 (*SO*, pp. 253-75).

We have no evidence that the Armenian Church was ever considered part of the Church of the Orient, although the Persian katholikos was styled on occasion: "Father, head and director of all the bishops of the East" entrusted with the spiritual and canonical direction and ordinations "for every country and every city of the entire territory of the Persian empire, the rest of the East, and the neighboring countries (*SO*, pp. 285-87, 319-20), which should naturally have included Persarmenia. Greater Armenia was not mentioned in the hierarchical list of the Church of the Orient promulgated in the twenty-first canon of the council of 410 (*SO*, p. 272). No Armenian bishop ever attended any of the Persian councils, although the bishops of some of the Satrapies bordering on Mesopotamia were listed at the council of 410 as suffragans of the Persian metropolitan sees of Nisibis and Arbela, and their titulars usually, but not always, participated in the Persian councils.

This administrative separation of the two Churches may at first have resulted from the Armenian orientation toward Caesarea of Cappadocia; but by 410, when the Church of the Orient emerged as a *religio licita* in the Sasanian empire, the Armenian Church was no longer dependent on Caesarea and considered itself autocephalous. Part of this alienation may have been due to a fundamental difference in ecclesiastical structure. Organized under the direction of the Byzantine bishop of Marutʿa of Martyropolis/Miyafarqin, the Church of the East shared the western practice of geographical sees identified with a particular city and sharing the hierarchical status of that city, in a pattern prefiguring the one promulgated more than one generation later in

the twenty-eighth canon of the Council of Chalcedon of 451. Following the secular hierarchy of the state, the bishop of the capital of Seleucia-Ctesiphon became automatically the head of the Church of the East; he and the other bishops were chosen and their status ratified by the ruler. The anachronistic, Parthian, non-urban, and decentralized pattern of Armenian society could not be adapted to this type of hierarchy, which ran counter to its traditions and would have fostered an unacceptable control by the central authorities. Until the Arab conquest, the early Armenian ecclesiastical hierarchy remained inextricably enmeshed in the para-feudal nexus of its society, and Armenian bishops were wholly identified with the families of the magnates of which they were the members and ecclesiastical representatives, just as the *tanutēr* was their military leader and administrator. Like any other hereditary office, the patriarchate passed from father to son in the house of Saint Gregory the Illuminator until the death of its last direct male descendant in 438, and no other candidate could be considered as long as a member of the Gregorid house was available (BP, 3.13, 15, 17,19). As late as the seventh century, an Armenian prince could still be cited as referring to “the bishop of his house” (Ps. Seb., 23), and surviving conciliar lists show that these family bishops invariably signed conciliar decisions in the name of their clan (Garsoïan, 1999, pp. 439, 476-77).

Even more fundamental was the doctrinal opposition which developed between the two churches. At first, the Armenian Church, especially in its southern portion still strongly under the influence of Antiochene Christianity, as was the Church of the Orient, seems to have shared its Christology, which tended to divide the divine and human natures in the person of the incarnate Logos. Although the Sasanian Church separated itself from Antioch, as well as from all the “Western fathers,” at its council of 424, it maintained and eventually adopted officially the dyophysite Christology of the Antiochene School which became identified with the doctrine of bishop Theodore of Mopsuestia. As the northern hellenophile party came to dominate the Armenian Church and the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus condemned dyophysite Christology as heretical in 431, the Armenians accepted the decision of Ephesus and formally anathematized the dyophysites at its councils of 506 and 555, thus creating an impassable breach between itself and the Church of the Orient.

Bitter as was the separation between the Armenian and Sasanian Churches, however, it did not extend into the secular sphere to the Sasanian state itself.

As a resident on Persian territory, even after the Byzantine frontier was shifted eastward in 591 by Xusrō II's cession of most of his Armenian lands to the Byzantine empire, the Armenian patriarch, as a subject of the king of kings, was in no position to disregard his will. During the entire period of the Marzapanate, even after the grant of religious autonomy to Armenia in 485, the Armenian Church recognized Sasanian secular jurisdiction even in ecclesiastical matters. The invariable dating of the Acts of every Armenian council by the regnal year of the current Persian monarch demonstrates *ipso facto* the recognition of his ultimate sovereign rights (Garsoïan, 1999, pp. 55-57, 412, 514).

More immediately, the organizing Council of Seleucia-Ctesiphon of 410 had granted to the Persian king, even though he was not a Christian, the same rights as the Council of Nicea had conceded to the Orthodox emperor in 325, among them, that of ratifying all episcopal elections. This right apparently extended to Armenia, since we are told that Šāpūr II was angered when the Armenian king, Xosrov III/IV, appointed as patriarch Saint Sahak the Great in 387 without the authorization of the Sasanian ruler (MX, 3.1), even though according to Armenian tradition, Sahak, the last descendant of the house of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, was the only person then entitled to this office, which was hereditary in his family. Going further, at the time that he put an end to the Armenian Arsacid dynasty in 428, Bahrām V simultaneously deposed Saint Sahak from most of the functions of his office, exiled him to his own estates, and replace him with an Armenian, followed by two Syrians. The Armenians apparently accepted this high-handed interference in their ecclesiastical affairs, since the native sources, while giving unedifying accounts of the morals of the Syrian antipatriarchs, never question the Persian king's right to appoint them (MX, 3.64, 66). More particularly, after Sahak's death, the same sources never refer to his successor Joseph, chosen without the ratification of the Persian court, as katʿołikos, but only as "a certain priest" (MX, 3.67), who, "although he was by ordination [only] a priest, yet at the time held the throne of the katholikate of Armenia" (ŁPʿ, 1.23, 43)—this despite the fact that they do not hesitate to refer to Joseph as "holy" or "saint." More than a century after the grant of religious autonomy to Armenia in 485, king Xusrō II had his Armenian favorite, prince Smbat Bagratuni, summon the council which elected the new katʿołikos Abraham I in 607 after a three years' hiatus following the death of his predecessor. Despite the total doctrinal break between their two Churches, Sasanian secular justification over the Armenian Church remained unchallenged to the end.

This Sasanian secular control over the Armenian Church was not necessarily damaging to the latter, since it simultaneously protected it from Byzantine doctrinal pressures especially during the reign of Maurice (582-602) and his immediate successor Phokas. So great was the favor shown at that time by Xusrō II to his Armenian subjects, that native Armenian sources went so far as to claim unrealistically that the shah had converted to Christiantiy (Ps. Seb., 151). The change of religious policy which manifested itself in Xusrō II's reign, as he shifted his goodwill to his monophysite subjects from the usual Sasanian recognition of the State Church with its opposing dyophysite doctrine, was probably not due to the influence of his favorite wife, the Christian Širin, as has sometimes been suggested. Nor is it likely to have been instigated by his favorite, Smbat Bagratuni. The final official doctrinal break of Armenia with the Byzantine Church at the time provides a far more probable cause, since it ended the perennial Sasanian fear that their Christian subjects might betray them to "Caesar their coreligionist" and transformed Armenia from an untrustworthy region strategically located on the border between the Iranian and Byzantine empires into a loyal supporter (Garsoïan, 1999, pp. 20, 383-84). Whatever the reason, Armenia and particularly its Church, weakened by the hostile policy of Maurice seeking to force it into doctrinal union with Constantinople, benefited from the Persian king's benevolence and protection, so that Smbat Bagratuni was not the only one favored. At Xusrō II's order, Smbat restored the authority and prestige of the Armenian administrative capital of Duin, overriding the objections of the local Persian marzpan and the military commander of the city (Ps. Seb., 27). Abraham's successor, Komitas, would similarly reconstruct the martyria of Armenia's early female saints in the holy city of Vałaršapat. The position of the Armenian Church was further reinforced by the Persian capture of the great imperial fortress of Theodosiopolis-Karin and the exile of the anti-patriarch John of Bagaran installed by Maurice, thus ending its twenty years' internal religious schism. Pressure exerted over the heads of the neighboring Churches of Siwnikʿ and Caucasian Albania forced them to recognize once more the authority of the Armenian katʿołikos, from whom they had withdrawn during the period of the schism (Garsoïan, 1999, pp. 374-78). The strengthening of the Armenian Church under Sasanian auspices during the early part of the 7th century undoubtedly helped it resist the repeated subsequent attempts of the Byzantine emperors to impose a dogmatic union upon it. The enormous building activity which covered the plateau with churches in this period provides still visible evidence of the prosperity of Armenia and its Church under the Marzapanate in the last years of the Sasanian dynasty. At the same

time, the modest dimensions and scattered locations of the majority of these churches identify them as the palatine chapels of local dynasts and give additional proof that the centrifugal pattern of Armenian society had not been obliterated by centralizing developments during the Sasanian period.

In the case of the Church, then, as in the other aspects of its society, the relations of the Armenians to Iran were by no means altogether negative, despite the one-sided, invariably hostile image given by the native Christian sources. At first an integral part of the Achaemenid empire, Armenia's position was radically altered from the time that Hellenism began to spread through the East in the wake of Alexander's conquests and all the more with the Roman domination of the Mediterranean world. Armenia now tended to be politically ambivalent between the two world powers of Rome, then Byzantium, and Iran – Parthian or Sasanian, albeit its outward forms, customs, and institutions remained throughout almost exclusively eastern rather than classical. The partition of the Armenian Arsacid kingdom at the end of the 4th century CE, put most of Greater Armenia once again within the Iranian empire, though Armenia's ambivalence unquestionably grew as its conversion to Christianity transformed its self-image and turned it toward the west. Thereafter, its fervent adoption of the new faith pulled it in the opposite direction from its social structure and former traditions. However, for all of its unquestionable, ultimate dedication to Christianity, Iranian social forms and especially Iranian ideology had sunk so deeply into the substratum of its institutions and beliefs that they long outlived its conversion. Politically and culturally, if not religiously, as well as physically linked to Iran, pre-Islamic Armenia continued to lie significantly beyond the eastern limit that Augustus had presciently set for the classical world.

See also: ARMENIA AND IRAN.

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