



AŠTIŠAT

AŠTIŠAT, religious center of pagan Armenia and first official Christian see. Aštišat is generally identified with the site of the convent of St. Sahak or of Yaštic', on a hill at the northern side of the confluence of the Murad = nehir and the Kara-nehir, north of Muš (H. Oskean, *Die Klöster von Tarôn-Turuberan*, Vienna, 1953, pp. 260-61), near the village of Terk (N. Thierry, "Notes de géographie historique sur le Vaspurakan," *Revue des études byzantines* 34, 1976, pp. 162-63). That monastery was destroyed by Tamerlane. Etymologically, the name signifies "the joy of Ašti" (Astartè ?); (Hübschmann, "Die altarmenischen Ortsnamen," *IF* 16, 1904, pp. 400-01). The popular etymology was "[place of] the many sacrifices," *yašt* + *šat*, Arm. "many," related to the name of Sahak's convent Yaštic'.

According to Agathangelos 809, the altar of Vahevahean was the site's most famous. The three deities of Aštišat were Vahagn/Heracles, Aštlik/Aphrodite, and Anahit/Artemis. Movsēs Xorenac'i 2.12 knows of the priestly family of the Vahounis, devoted to the worship of Vahagn (Վրթրայնա). Vahagn is qualified as Višapak'al "the capturer of the dragons." Movsēs 1.31 cites a very old song which served as an introduction to the fight of Vahagn and the dragons. The relationship of that hymn with *Mahābhārata* 5.9.2 was discussed by G. Dumézil (*RHR* 117, 1938, pp. 162-70). The temple was destroyed by Gregor the Illuminator, who received there the "apostolic" (see Greek Agathangelos 158) and built the church of John the Baptist and St. Athenogenes, with the altars of the names of the glory of Christ and of the Holy Trinity. He baptized there 190,000 people. Up to the death of Sahak Paṛṭ'ev (A.D. 436), Aštišat remained



the chief ecclesiastical center of Armenia. According to P'awstos (Faustus of Buzand), it was situated at the top of the hill K'ark'ē and the churches already bore the anachronistic title of “Mayr Ekelec'i,” the Mother Church. A council gathered there in the twenty-fifth year of Nerses (ca. 354). The first non-Gregorian bishop, P'arnerseh, was a native of Aštišat. Later, the town was claimed by the historians of the Mamikonian dynasty. According to John Mamikonian, the relics of Nerses I were brought to Aštišat, but the church was destroyed by the Arabs. The convent of Glak (named of the nine sources or of St. John the Baptist), six hours west from Terk, is celebrated by Zenob of Glak as the primitive foundation of Gregor the Illuminator, but P'awstos 3.16 says that the church of John the Baptist and Athenogenes was in Matravank', in the south on the Arsanias river.

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