



## BURDAR

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**BURDAR**, Pahl. *burdār* “carrier, sustainer, bringer,” attested in Armenian as a proper name. According to an Armenian tradition, St. Gregory the Illuminator, who converted King Tiridates and the Armenians to Christianity early in the 4th century, was the son of a Parthian nobleman of the Sūrēn family called Anak, who had killed Xosrov, the father of Tiridates. Parth. *anāg* “evil” seems to be an epithet applied after the fact to the regicide, or else a mere invention, for it is unlikely that a Parthian nobleman would have borne from birth such an inauspicious name. After the murder of Xosrov, according to the 5th-century text of Agathangelos, Anak was slaughtered with his kin by the Armenian nobles, only two of his infant sons escaping the massacre; we are told vaguely that “someone rescued and saved them through [their] nurses” (Agathangelos, *History*, tr. Thomson, pp. xxxiii, 51 par. 34). The boy, who was later to be named Gregory, was taken to the Roman-held lands of Asia Minor; his brother was spirited off to Iran (Anak had murdered Xosrov in the service of the Persian king), and we learn nothing more of him. The narrative, already constructed on a narrative pattern familiar in Iranian and Armenian folklore, according to which one son survives the general slaughter of his clan and returns later to avenge or redeem it, is further elaborated by the historian Moses of Khorene, who adds the names of the nurse and other figures. A Persian nobleman named Burdar (mss. var. *budab*, *burdai*, *bundar*) had settled in Caesarea of Cappadocia and married a Christian woman, Sophia, daughter of Euthalius. They set out to return to Persia and were followed by Euthalius, who begged them not to continue. At this point Gregory was born, Sophia became his nurse, and it was she, together with her husband and father, who



bore him off to Cappadocia after the murder of Xosrov and the ensuing slaughter of Anak's family (Moses of Khorene, 2-80, p. 219; tr. Thomson, p. 288 and n. 5).

It seems no coincidence that the bearer of the divine wisdom from the Greek Christian West to Armenia should have as his nurse a woman named Wisdom (Gk. *sophia*), and it seems unlikely for him to have been borne to safety by a Persian whose name means "bearer." It was important to the Armenians that their Illuminator should be also of noble, Arsacid lineage (on the importance attached to such continuity, whether at a change of dynasty or of religious confession, cf. the claim of Artaxias I to be an Orontid, see [artaxias](#)).

Accordingly, Gregory is identified as a scion of the house of Sūrēn Pahlav, and the Parthians become the instruments of the will of the Christian God. The Persian Burdar is introduced by Moses, who was schooled in a tradition formulated after the lifetime of the author of the history of Agathangelos, according to which the Armenian uprisings against the Sasanian proselytizers of Zoroastrianism in 451 and later were likened to the Maccabean war against the pagan Seleucids. The powerful narrative of Elišē (see [ARMENIA AND IRAN v](#)) must have been known to Moses, the Persians came to overshadow the Arsacid forebears of the Armenians as the representatives of heathen error, and with the introduction of Burdar, even they are seen to be subordinate to the Divine plan. Through the *Sophia* of God, the Persian became a *burdār* of the doubly despised Armenian and Arsacid. This late narrative, now perfect in its symbolism, is almost certainly a complete fiction.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Hübschmann, *Armenische Grammatik*, p. 33.

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