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The Rise of Armenian Historiography in the Late Antiquity: Mythology and History* *

Geç Antik Çağda Ermeni Tarihçiliğinin Yükselişi: Mitoloji ve Tarih

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Abstract

The Iranian civilization, which was the basis of the Armenian culture until the Conversion to Christianity, was far from the historiographic tradition in comparison to Greeks and Romans even if they portrayed their own history by means of reliefs. In this respect, there is a cultural affinity between the absence of historiography before Christianity in the Armenian society and the absence of the literary tradition in pre-Islamic Iran. However, this cultural relationship, which lasted until the fourth century, modified after the adoption of Christianity by the Armenians and caused to emerge the idea of historiography among the Armenians. Thus, there is a parallel between the beginning of the custom of historiography and the acceptance of Christianity in the Armenian society.

The general structure of the Armenian historiography, originally based on patristic roots, was shaped after the Battle of Vartanants (Avarayr) in 451 and turned into an ideological struggle for Armenians. This idea shows that the Armenians tend to create historical depth and common destiny in the late antiquity. Following this, the collapse of the Sassanid Empire and the arrival of Muslims to the world of Armenians naturally opened a new era in Armenian historiography. This period was built directly on the idea of "opposition" and "other".

This study aims to establish a direct connection between the acceptance of Christianity by Armenians and the start of historiography tradition by the intellectual Armenians and examine the reasons why historiography flourished for Armenians.

Keywords: Armenian historiography, Armenians in the late antiquity, Armenia, Agathangelos, Pawstos Buzand, Movses Khorenatsi.

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* The classical Armenian transliteration used in the text is based on Heinrich Hübschmann's *Armenische Grammatik* (1897). Also, in the spelling of special words, simplification and latinization was performed.

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Öz

Hıristiyanlığın kabulüne kadar Ermeni kültürünün temelini oluşturan İran medeniyeti daha çok rölyefler üzerinden geçmişti resmederek kitabî tarih yazım geleneğinden Yunan ve Romalılara nispetle uzak kalmıştır. Bu açıdan İranlıların derin izlerini taşıyan Ermeni toplumunda Hıristiyanlıktan önce tarih yazıcılığının olmaması ile İslamiyet öncesi İran'da tarih yazım geleneğinin geniş tabanda karşılık bulamaması arasında kültürel bir yakınlık göze çarpmaktadır. IV. yüzyıla kadar devam eden bu kültürel ilişki, Hıristiyanlığın Ermeniler tarafından benimsenmesinin ardından değişmiş ve bu durum tarih yazıcılığının zamanla Ermeniler arasında başlamasına yol açmıştır. Bu yüzden Ermeni toplumunda tarih yazım geleneğinin yaygınlaşması ile Ermenilerin Hıristiyanlığı kabul etmeleri arasında bir paralellik söz konusudur.

Patristik kökene dayanan Ermeni tarihçiliğinin genel yapısı 451 yılındaki Vartanants (Avarayr) savaşından sonra şekillenerek ideolojik bir mücadeleye dönüşmüştür. Bu yaklaşım eski çağ Ermeni yazarlarının tarihsel derinlik ve ortak kader bilinci oluşturma niyetinde olduklarının açık bir göstergesidir. Sonraki yüzyıllarda Sâsânîlerin çöküşü ve Müslümanların Ermenilerin görüş alanına girmesi ise doğal olarak Ermeni tarihçiliğinde yeni bir dönem başlatmıştır. Bu dönemin temel prensibi de doğrudan "karşıt" ve "öteki" düşünceleri üzerine inşa edilmiş olmasıdır.

Bu çalışma, Hıristiyanlığın Ermeniler tarafından kabul edilmesi ve entelektüel Ermeniler tarafından tarih yazımı geleneğinin başlatılması arasında doğrudan bir bağ kurmayı ve tarihçiliğin Ermeniler arasında Hıristiyanlık üzerinden nasıl geliştiğini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ermeni tarihçiliği, Geç antik çağda Ermeniler, Armenia, Agathangelos, Pawstos Buzand, Movses Khorenatsi.

Introduction

Almost all of the sources used in determining the outlines of ancient Armenian history are of Greek, Roman and Iranian origin. In the ancient times, since the political and religious position of the Armenian region served as a buffer, Armenians could not reach the intellectual level that would create historiography and methodology in accordance with their own dynamics. The vassal status of the Armenians between Rome and Iran has naturally hindered the recording of the cultural motif of the Armenians by them. Moreover, it is also surprising that although Zoroastrianism, which played a key role in shaping the religious world of Armenians, was largely accepted until the seventh century in Iran, Iranian historiography was not as conspicuous as the Greek and Roman historiography until the arrival of Islam. Therefore, the historiography of the Armenians, who left Zoroastrianism before the Iranians, began about three centuries before the Islamic period of Iranian. In this context, a direct connection between the conversion of Armenians from Zoroastrianism to Christianity and the beginning of the historiography among Armenians is remarkable because there is no work written by Armenians in the pre-Christian periods.

Regarding the period of Tigran the Great (95-55 BC), when Armenia was politically strong, there are many archaeological materials showing that the king of Armenia minted money in their own name and made inscriptions in the Iranian style.² Moreover, the ancient Greek and Latin sources mention the interest of Artavazd II (54-34 BC), who was the successor of Tigran II, in writing history and plays (Thomson, 1997, p. 119). These early literary works, mostly shaped by ancient Greek, were not put on paper (or could not reach the present-day) and continued only in the oral tradition. Thus, it is clear that there was no written culture of the Armenians until the acceptance of Christianity due to the lack of literature continuity. Despite this unfounded background, it is significant that the Romans and especially the Syriacs, who had historiographical traditions, spread in areas close to the Armenian geography. Therefore, when considering

² Regarding coins minted by Armenian kings see, Bedoukian, 1978.

the impact of these two communities on the spread of Christianity among the Armenians, it is quite likely for Armenians to be culturally influenced by these communities and started writing *History (=Patmutiwn)*.³ The first Armenian historians, indeed, modelled the writings of the leading intellectuals of the period such as Gregorius Nazianzenus, Athanasius, Eusebius and Ioannes Chrysostom and created their own historical *fiction or mythology*. This approach is also a sign that historiography has been created in connection with the Armenian Church.

It is evident that the Armenian Church, which wished to create a *national* stance in the Armenian society along with Christianity, desired to use the alphabet as a kind of missionary power. For this reason, Armenian historians had closer relations with the church and Christianity in the beginning from the work of Agathangelos, one of the first Armenian historians, until mythological *History* of Movses Khorenatsi. Moreover, it is certainly obvious that the struggle among the Armenian aristocrats (*naxarar*) contributed to the development of the literature and historiography because aristocratic families tried to write the *History* of their dynasties in order to prove their historical and cultural superiority. The best examples of this situation is Movses Khorenatsi who dedicated his work to the Bagratuni family and Stephannos Orbelian, who dedicated his work to Siwnik family. Thus, the reason why both writers draw a positive image about these families can be understood.⁴

In the light of this framework, how the classical Armenian writers established a sensitive and inseparable bridge between Christianity and historiography is problematized with reference to discussions and palpable interpretations.

Classical Period in the Armenian Literature: Patristic History

The acceptance of Christianity, which gave dynamism to the Armenian society (at least to a part of society), paved the way for the idea of change and transformation that the Armenians were trying to build within their religious, geographical and historical areas. As a result of the legendary events between Trdat IV (298/9-330) and Grigor Lusaworic (314-331), which took place in a wide range of classical Armenian texts, the Armenian community experienced political, religious and cultural transformations. Agathangelos, who stressed the stories of the Armenian Christianity, determined the miracle of St. Grigor's healing activities for Trdat IV as the main argument at the centre of his work titled *History* (Aa, 211-225). In addition to providing this substantial piece of information, in fact, Agathangelos hinted that the cultural dimension of the turning point experienced by the Armenians with Christianity would lead to the formation of a systematic and expanding cultural accumulation in a few stages. This is attributed to fact that the Christian tradition, which the Armenians wished to be included, has generously passed on to the Armenians the ability to use the writing effectively. Christianity, therefore, came to the forefront as a primary factor in the formation of literature and cultural values in the Armenian community.

In connection with the development of Ecclesiastical historiography, after the expiration of the persecution against Christians under the leadership of the Constantine the Great (306-337) with the *Edictum Mediolanense*, which was considered to have been made in 313, the Syriacs, who were the strong representatives of eastern Christianity, and then the Armenians, began to record their own Christian history.⁵ The early beginnings of the historiography of Armenians was connected with the Armenian alphabet, which was invented at the beginning of the fifth century under the priest named Mesrop Mashtots with the support of *katholikos* Sahak I (387-439?) and Vramshapuh, king of *Persarmenia* (389-

³ For discussions on how and when Armenians were Christians see, Kaçar, 2015, p. 245-254.

⁴ For literature review and further reading see, Thorossian, 1951; Inglisian, 1963, p. 156-250.

⁵ Concerning studies on Syriac Christianity see, Brock, 1992.

c.415) (LP, I.10; MX, III.47).⁶ This new alphabet, which was more inspired by Syriac and partly by ancient Greek, has been the greatest achievement of the Armenian culture, identity and hence its historiography because it obviously allowed the Armenians to make appropriate accents and intonations according to their own languages and cultures.

The invention of the alphabet by Mesrop Mashtots directly aimed to serve the spread of Christianity in the Armenian community. The scraps of textual evidence provided by Koryun, the pupil of Mesrop Mashtots and perhaps the first Armenian historian, already show the spiritual and divine aspect of this invention (Koryun, IV; LP, I.11; Russell, 1994, p. 323). The passionate members of the clergy, who succeeded in this endeavour, has brought the idea of dominance of the Armenian Church to a more positive and comfortable environment, and, according to mythology-based *History*, written by Movses Khorenatsi, 22 books, consisting of the Bible or other Christian material, were translated into Armenian in the first place (MX, III.53).⁷ In the same period, the clergymen, especially the pioneers of the Christian writing tradition described under the name of *Church Fathers*, deeply influenced Armenian literature, which began to produce an intellectual level in the Armenian community. This exclusive impact, indeed, was not something new for Armenian aristocratic tradition since Nerses I and Sahak I, two of the important *katholikos* of the Armenian Church, were already educated in the Greek literature (Thomson, 1975, p. 458). In this regard, Koryun, who told the story of Mesrop Mashtots, emphasized the suffering (*passio*) of St. Grigor, just as Eusebius did for Constantine I, namely *vita*, and the divine aspect of the invention of the Armenian alphabet, and so he clearly demonstrated the connection between Christianity and historiography in his work (*Vark Mashtotsi*) (Koryun, IV; Russell, 1994, p. 323).⁸ Consequently, the development of Armenian manuscripts greatly contributed the deepening of the Armenian *national* identity and the exaltation of the divine feelings. *Vark Mashtotsi* has a distinctive position in the Armenian literature, which is the first study against Iranian ideology (actually Zoroastrianism) (Garsoian, 1996, p. 7). Based on this thought, this situation turned the Armenian society, which carried deep traces of Iranian culture, to the Romans or directly to Christianity. The work of Agathangelos, who was one of the most prominent Armenian historians and was described by Lazar Parpetsi as the *first*⁹ historian of the Armenians [sic], relies on Koryun's approach, turned directly to the patriarchal history understanding, which was the first period of Armenian historiography, based on Christianity. Although Movses Khorenatsi mentions the existence of the epic songs and records of Olympius, according to the pagan priest of Ani-Kamax, there is no such information or evidence to date (MX, II.48). Historical records supported by available material point out that *Church History* (= *Historia Ekklesiastike*) written by Eusebius, who was seen as a role model by the Armenians, like the Syriacs, was one of the leading sources of the history of Armenian historiography. A very clear parallelism, from this perspective, can be established between Eusebius's statements that he began his work with the approval of Jesus Christ and Agathangelos's emphasis on the sanctity of Jesus Christ and God after receiving good news from Rome in the introduction of his work (Euseb. *HE*, I.1).

Agathangelos started the *History of Armenians* (= *Patmutiwn Hayoc*) from the end of the Iranian Arsacid and ended just before the death of St. Grigor, the founder of Armenian Christianity. The main objective of the

⁶ The Georgian and Albanians, also, invented their alphabets in the fifth century and first created the *hagiographic* (Saints' lives and collections of the miracles fulfilled by saints) records. See also, Wood, 2010, p. 808.

⁷ See also, Koryun, VIII; KG, II; Thomson, 1975, p. 459.

⁸ For another biography/hagiography example in the Armenian literature see, *Nerses*.

⁹ The first Armenian historian should not be Agathangelos but Koryun, unlike Lazar Parpetsi's claim (LP, I.1). Because Koryun had gone to Constantinople when Mesrop Mashtots was alive, he translated ancient Greek, and just after the death of Mesrop Mashtots (about 10 years), he wrote the biography of his master. The work of Agathangelos probably coincides with the second half of the fifth century. See, Thomson, 1995, p. 91; Hairapetian, 1995, p. 105.

work was to explain the difficult stages and prosecutions of Christianity and ultimately how the Armenians achieved the *salvation*.¹⁰ The main character of Agathangelos, naturally, was St. Grigor, who was the first *katholikos* of the Armenians.¹¹ Hence, each point of the study was designed around the influence of Christianity, with *passio* narratives or miracles. For instance, the passages in which the *passio* of Rhipsime, one of the main characters of Armenian Christianity, is described are the best-known examples of this narrative model (Aa, 137-210).¹² Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that Agathangelos was also strongly influenced by the political developments of the time and Armenia's religious relations with the Romans because the political position of Armenia in the fourth century and the loss of power by the Christian Romans against the Sassanid since the middle of the fourth century triggered the religious imposition and oppression of Zoroastrian Iran on Christian Armenia (at least certain sections). Particularly, the partition of the Armenian territory between the Romans and the Sassanid in 387 with the Treaty of Acilisene and the administration of the *Persarmenia*¹³ by Xosrov IV (384/7-389) under the sovereignty of the Sassanid gave rise to culturally and politically devastating consequences for the Armenians (PB, VI.1; LP, I.6; MX, III.42). This process of conflict continued to increase with the aggressive policies of the Sassanid, who wanted to re-establish Zoroastrianism in Armenia. Therefore, this process of conflict continued to increase with the aggressive policies of the Sassanid, who wanted to re-establish Zoroastrianism on Christian groups in Armenia.

The effect of the Caesarea¹⁴ on the Armenian Christianity, highlighted by Agathangelos, was extended to include the Syriac influence in a study of *Epic Histories* (=Pawstosi Buzandacwoy Patmutiwn Hayoc), which was attributed to another Armenian writer named Pawstos Buzand (Terian, 2005, p. 23). Pawstos Buzand associated the Christianity of the Armenians with the Apostle Thaddeus and put forward the main argument that the Armenians were not really stranger to Christianity (PB, III.1). This idea, which overlapped with the ideology of the Armenian Church, was then reinterpreted as that the Abgar of Edessa (13-50) met Jesus Christ and that Jesus Christ sent Thaddeus, one of the disciples of his, to Edessa (MX, II.30-33).¹⁵ According to the traditional narrative, Thaddeus, as a result of the journey, illuminated Sandukht, the sister of the Armenian king Sanatruces (75-c.110). However, King Sanatruces, who learned the situation, failed to persuade her, and he killed his sister Sandukht. Adapted from this story, Sandukht began to be accepted as the first *martyr* of Armenian hagiography tradition in the Armenian Church.¹⁶ Similar stories¹⁷, from the ideological reflection of Armenian historiography took its final shape after a few centuries later when Movses Khorenatsi included the apostle Bartholomeus and the classical Armenian writers in accordance

¹⁰ For examination of the work of Agathangelos see, Kaçar, 2013, p. 225-232.

¹¹ St. Grigor became the first *katholikos* of Armenians in 314. See, Aa, 791-808; Nersessian, 2007, p. 24.

¹² On the other hand, there is a parallel narrative between the story of St. Nino in the Georgian sources and the conversion of Iberia and Georgia to Christianity and the *passio* of Rhipsime. See, KC, 45-56. See also, Toumanoff, 1943, p. 152.

¹³ It should not be confused with the word *Parskahayk*, a geographical region in the Armenian literature.

¹⁴ In ancient times, more than one city was established under the name of Caesarea. Among them, Caesarea, an important episcopal centre in Cappadocia, was the main region influencing Armenian Christianity.

¹⁵ In addition, Eusebius supports the idea that Abgar sent an envoy to Jesus Christ to get rid of his illness, but he did not give any details about Abgar's identity. On the other hand, Thaddeus, cited by Eusebius and Thaddeus in Armenian mythology, is probably not the same person. Because, according to Eusebius, Thaddeus is not one of the twelve apostles, but one of the seventies. See, Euseb. *HE*, I.13.

¹⁶ *Martyr* (*vkay*). See, NBHL, II, 825; *The Heritage of Armenian Literature*, 2000, p. 76. The Armenian Hagiography tradition that began with Sandukht was later expanded by adding the persecuted Christians such as Thaddeus, Bartholomeus and St. Grigor and Rhipsime.

¹⁷ The earliest dated Georgian source, which has the same idea with the Armenian tradition, is the manuscript of the St. Shushanik. For the Georgian literature for review see, Rapp, 2003.

with the Christian ideology redesigned the historical basis of the apostolic claim of the Armenian Church.¹⁸ Moses Khorenatsi states that Bartholomeus was killed around the Aras River, which was the heart of Armenia (MX, II.34).

The increase in the number of Armenian churches not only strengthened the church from the institutional point of view, but the historical records kept at the same time led to the creation of regional archives. The records of Zenob, who was the first chief of Surb Karapet Monastery, were developed by the priests who came after him and were converted into a historical work under the name of the *History of Taron* (= *Patmuṭiwn Taronoy*).¹⁹ Therefore, the work in question provides a Christian-centred perspective to the events of the period in accordance with the letters and monastic records (YM, XX.82). The special emphasis of the Armenian Church on writing and literature resulted in the opening of schools in many areas during the *katholikos* Sahak I (387–428) period, and the children who were good speaking were selected and sent to these schools (MX, III.54).²⁰ Thus, the Armenian language and the liturgy of Armenians along with these students were transformed into Armenian, and in accordance with the tradition of literature, the laws of the church methodized the hierarchical system.

With the influence of the cultural accumulations provided by the first Armenian historians, Lazar Parpetsi, who was actually a priest, and Elishe (Eghishe/Elisaeus), especially the witness of the Battle of Vartanants, explained the question of how the Armenians reached the idea of *common destiny* with slight differences. In particular, Elishe qualified the Armenian leaders and soldiers who died in the Battle of Vartanants as a *martyr* and described some Armenian feudal leader as holy warriors (LP, II.39; Elishe, V.p120). Naturally, both Lazar Parpetsi and Elishe underlined the victory of the Armenian Church, defending the faith of the *Saviour*²¹ against the impious Sassanid and Armenian groups. Therefore, even though the Armenians lost the war in military terms and confronted the intense religious pressure of the Sassanid for thirty years, the Armenian clergy have gained even more power. This fragile situation was transformed into an important success in 485 with the appointment of a Christian Armenian nobleman Vahan Mamikonean as the *marzpan* (governor) of Armenia (Sebeos, VIII). Lazar Parpetsi and Elishe consciously created the social symbols and characters of Armenian history in the fifth century. These *patriotic national heroes* contributed to the social reconciliation in time by creating a significant impact on the triangle of monarchy, feudal and church (Elishe, V. p119).

On the other hand, the year 451 has a special importance in the Armenian literature, since it is not only the Vartanants War but also the Chalcedon Council. Because of the frustration caused by the allies of the Romans in the Battle of Vartanants to leave the Armenians against Sassanid, the Armenians gradually moved away from the Church of Constantinople, elevated their churches, and formed an institutional structure. This process of separation, deepened by the Second Council of Ephesus in 449, which Pope Leo I (440-461) described and rejected as *latrocinium*, reached a peak with the separatist stance of the Armenians who rejected the decision of the Council although they did not join the Chalcedon Council (Sarkissian, 1965, p. 212; Norris, 2007, p. 90).

¹⁸ The fact that Sozomenus claimed that Armenians were the first to accept Christianity is an example of references not written by Armenians. See, Soz. *HE*, II.8.

¹⁹ Karapet Monastery, built by Aziz Grigor in Ashtishat, is the first church in the history of Armenians. See, Aa, 810-814; PB, III.3, III.16; AL, XXI; Russell, 1987, p. 199.

²⁰ On the other hand, some of the children divided into two groups were placed in Edessa and the other in Samosata. See, Koryun, VII.

²¹ Armenian historians as in the texts of the Romans frequently mentioned the expression of the *Savior*. See, LP, II.53; MX, II.92.

New Cultures, New *Histories*: Awareness and Expansion

The rapid development of written culture among the Armenians was not based solely on the idea of history or the recording of the past. Simultaneously with the *Histories* recorded in connection with the Church, the work inspired by *apologia* (advocacy) also emerged, just as the Romans did. Especially in the middle of the fifth century, a Christian theologian named Eznik Kolbatsi, who was the student of Sahak I and Mesrop Mashtots, wrote articles defending Christianity against pagan sects, Zoroastrianism, and even the beliefs of Greek philosophers. The philosopher David Anhagt, similarly, contributed to the recognition of ancient Greek philosophy among Armenians with his translations to Armenian.²² These studies gave a philosophical perspective to Armenian historiography and tried to systematically support the Armenian Church tradition through many channels in accordance with its own ideology.

Although the whole of the expressed literature served an idea, none of them was as wide as Movses Khorenatsi and could not have such a wide impact on the whole of Armenian history. The development of Armenian historiography in many areas reached its peak with *History of Armenians* (= *Patmutiwn Hayoc*) written by Movses Khorenatsi. However, it contains intense falsification (probably seventh century) because, he argued that Christianity actually existed from the earliest times among the Armenians, explaining basically Christian Armenian history through ancient mythological figures.²³ Movses Khorenatsi, who added to the Armenian history a mythological perspective tried to make Armenians one of the ancient civilizations by adapting the Zoroastrian and pagan traditions in the early history of the Armenians. For this purpose, Movses Khorenatsi, who emphasized the relationship between Christians and Armenians, claims that St. Nerses built buildings, such as hospitals and care centres, to bring the lepers and the paralyzed into society (MX, III.20). As can be seen from this historical record, the effort of the Armenian Church to draw a positive image at the social level is naturally the main motive behind the writing history of Movses Khorenatsi. Thus, the church-oriented general view drawn by Armenian historians completed the first phase of Armenian historiography that can be classified into two parts in the late antiquity and was placed on a solid ground with the final touches of Movses Khorenatsi, who based these touches on mythological perspectives.²⁴

Although the Armenian historiography has been re-drawn as a result of the encounter of new cultures by Armenians after the sixth and seventh centuries, this change has never been a pushing or ignorance of a church-based patriotic understanding. However, of course, the Muslims who are in the sight of Armenians shaped the new period of Armenian historiography after the seventh century. The weakening of the dominance of the Romans, who lost their former power especially after the fall of the Sassanid, on Armenia and the rapid spread of Muslims from south to north led the Armenian historians and historiography to move away from the centre of Christianity (at least compared to the past).

This historical connection between the works of religious narratives and the works that deal with political events is in fact an extremely soft alternation. For example, Sebeos, one of the most important Armenian historians of the seventh century, is also an Armenian bishop, and *The History of Sebeos* (= *Patmutiwn Sebeosi*), which is attributed to him, is not only related to Christianity but also, politically speaking, to the activities of Muslims who came to the region following the downfall of the Sassanid. In this context, considering the general situation of the sources in the seventh century, it is clear that the work of Sebeos is a biased but indispensable source to understand the political situation of the period (Arzoumanian, 1982, p. 68). Moreover, Sebeos's assessment of the battles between the Romans and the Muslims through the region of Armenia enabled the opening of Armenian historiography in another direction. As a matter of

²² For translation and interpretation of David Anhagt's work see, Topchyan, 2010.

²³ For mythological review of Movses Khorenatsi see, Cinemre, 2014, p. 212-222.

²⁴ The idea of creating a mythological and legendary leader is also present in the collection of the Georgian Chronicles (= *Kartlis Cxovreba/Tskhovreba*) and the sources of the history of Alban. See, MD, I.1-5; KC, 1-6.

fact, in the middle of the seventh century, Armenians formed an alliance with the Muslim Arabs against the Romans who were their coreligionists by experiencing a political break. Although Sebeos, in accordance with this alliance, defines Muslims as *hell* by keeping Christian identity in the foreground, this does not change the fact that Sebeos gave a new impetus to Armenian historiography (Sebeos, 48).

The main theme of the work of Lewond, who generally continued to write from where Sebeos left, was the Muslim pressure on Armenia based on Sebeos. The basic point of Lewond, the eighth century historian, was the Romans' struggle for survival against Muslims, who came like *the flying winged serpent* after the death of Muhammad the prophet, and the position of Armenians in these conflicts (LE, III). Therefore, the development of the Armenians in the recognition of neighbouring civilizations was directly transmitted to the *Histories* they wrote. In addition, this situation was not only based on the records of political history, but also the work of Stepanos Asolik, *Universal History* (=Tiezerakal Patmutiwn) and Anania Shirakatsi, the author of the most important geography book of the Armenian, called *Geography* (=Ashkharhatsoys).²⁵ Anania Shirakatsi, only three centuries after the invention of the Armenian alphabet, reached enough information to elaborate on the historical geography of Armenia and Caucasus despite some deliberate distortions and errors. While almost no Armenian source had had a detailed geographic description, for the first time, the Anania Shirakatsi included a geographic perspective to the writing of history.²⁶

The literature tradition has evolved over time, allowing new works to be carried out in many areas towards the tenth and eleventh centuries. However, significant portions of these new period writings were mostly related to *remembering* and *repeating* the old. Especially Armenian writers, such as Tovma Artsruni, Movses Dasxurantsi, Yovhannes Drasxanakerttsi and Aristakes Lastiverttsi, started their works with the reference of the first period Armenian historians, and they gave a brief overview of the past and repeated the past. For example, the first sentences of Tovma Artsruni's work titled *History of the Artsrunik Dynasty* (=Patmutiwn Tann Artsrunec) are about the theory that the genealogy of the Armenians (TA, I.1). The notes of Tovma Artsruni include a number of *accusation* or *persecution* words related to Muslims, such as Sebeos. In this regard, many of the Armenian historians, written after the ninth century, either referenced the previous information or reinterpreted the knowledge into their own era.

Conclusion

The acceptance of Christianity by Armenians is equal importance with the rise of Armenian historiography. After Christianity, the emergence of anti-Iranian and Zoroastrianist ideas strengthened the church-based Armenian society, and this process naturally led to the beginning and development of Armenian historiography. The fact that the written literature in Zoroastrian Iranian civilization is not widely accepted until the arrival of Islam also justifies this idea. For this reason, the Armenian community, which had been culturally powerful from Iran for centuries, reached a wide knowledge of Christianity by exceeding its borders from the centre to the outside. Indeed, only one century after the acceptance of Christianity, Armenians invented the alphabet, which was one of the most important developments of Armenian history under the leadership of the priest Mesrop Mashtots. However, the literary tradition in the Armenian literature, instead of referring to the peasant and feudal relations in the Armenian community, directly portrayed the church in line with its own expectations. Hence, the Armenian alphabet ensured that Christianity was more persistent, inclusive and expansionist among the Armenians in writing. Nevertheless, this developmental period is not a very short time, nor did it occur over a single method.

In late antiquity, it is possible to collect Armenian historiography under two main headings. The first includes about two centuries of spreading between the fifth century, when Armenian historiography began

²⁵ For a review of the book by Anania Shirakatsi see, Eremyan, 1963; Hewsen, 2001.

²⁶ Classical Armenian sources are used to describe "northern regions". This signifies that Armenians have adopted Iran as a satellite. See, Thomson, 1981, p. 19.

to emerge, and the seventh century. The subject of this basic period is about the church-oriented spelling tradition and *common destiny* consciousness towards the patriotic understanding that emerged with the acceptance of Christianity. For this reason, it is not surprising that the majority of the books translated into Armenian at the first stage are the teachings of the biblical copies or church fathers. The intellectual aspect of the study of the first original Armenian work written by Mesrop Mashtots's and the recording of the teachings of Saint Grigor by Agathangelos are based on the patristic conception of this period. While Agathangelos, with this perspective, emphasized the ethereal aspect of Christianity, Elishe consciously emphasized the direction of *destiny* and *patriotism* with the emphasis on *martyrdom*. Movses Khorenatsi has maintained the same understanding, even though it has had an erroneous chronology. This could be attributed to the fact that the historical perspective deliberately created by Movses Khorenatsi and the mythological figures influenced by Iran have been the intellectual basis of the integration between the Armenian Church and cultural background. However, since this information belongs to the Aristocracy, in no case does it give the day-to-day life and society definitively. Indeed, most of the pagan traditions were clearly ignored.

The second phase of Armenian historiography, starting from the political climate of Armenia that changed after the Vartanants War, was about the tenth and eleventh centuries. The important detail of the period in question was that the Armenians had entered into a period of creating *opposition* in terms of literature and historiography. The political conditions re-changing after the seventh century and the demolition of the *traditional enemy* Sassanid introduced the Armenians to a new society in which they had never had a direct relationship. In particular, the Armenians allied with the Muslim Arabs during the *marzpan* Theodoros Rshtuni and this deal led to the spread of Armenian historiography to new horizons. The desire of Armenians to open to environmental civilizations and to recognize them culturally has been an important argument for drawing a strong Armenia image. Therefore, the Armenian writers such as Sebeos and Lewond, and Aristakes Lastivertsi, directly commented on the Muslim Arabs (often based on inaccurate information). Moreover, in the period when Armenian historiography was on the rise, the old wisdom of the Greek and Latin world, which had previously led the literature, was largely disrupted. This reality emphasizes the role of Armenian historiography in understanding the Roman-Armenian-Arab struggles and the cultural and political changes of the Caucasus and Iran. The idea of naming the fifth and seventh centuries as "the classic age of Armenian historiography" can be presented as an open discussion. However, even these periods of systemization and expansion did not sharpen the patristic understanding, which was the main basis of Armenian historiography; on the contrary, Christianity continued to form the main idea of almost all kinds of material throughout the entire Armenian history. Christianity is therefore the most important starting point of Armenian historiography, and somehow it is impossible to build a qualified Armenian history without reference to the Armenian Church.

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