



Tutor's Guide to: Teaching Medieval Armenia

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Fig. 1 View north towards Mt Aragats (May 2000)

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Introduction

Unsurprisingly the study of medieval Armenia does not feature on any introductory course to medieval history currently taught in the UK at undergraduate level. From a west European perspective, medieval Armenia appears too remote and is assumed to be too different to merit inclusion. Even dedicated courses on Byzantium tend to skirt Armenia. Yet whilst the geography, language and nomenclature will be novel to the non-specialist, many of the issues confronting the historian of medieval Armenia will seem very familiar. How was 'Armenia' and 'Armenian identity' defined and did these definitions change over time? How should we read and exploit contemporary Armenian historical compositions? Why were outside powers consistently involved in Armenia? What was the nature of Armenian lordship and how was power transmitted within the Armenian

elite? What was the role of the Church in the creation and preservation of a distinct Armenian identity and cultural tradition? In the absence of national political institutions, how and why did a separate Armenian identity persist?

Medieval Armenia invites comparison with other medieval cultures and societies at several different levels. Although it may not seem an obvious step to take, the inclusion of Armenian material in the framework of a course on medieval history for comparative purposes may have a number of benefits. It will allow students to highlight similarities and differences between medieval societies. It will give them access to original source material in a field that none of them will have studied previously. It will also place them at the forefront of research, for there has been no recent comparative work between medieval Armenia and western Europe. Without wishing to prejudice the direction such a comparison might take, it seems to me that there could be a particular value in studying medieval Armenia in conjunction with medieval Irish and Scottish history. The fusion of historical and epic styles (compare the Fragmentary Annals with *Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk'* (*Epic Histories*), the clash of elite families for resources, material and human and the concentration of power in one particular house (the Ui Neill who claim the kingship of Tara; the Bagratunik' who claim the kingship in Armenia, Ashot I Bagratuni being crowned king on 26 August 884), pressures within such kin-groups at times of succession, the political and cultural impact of outside forces (Vikings in Ireland, Arabs and other Muslims in Armenia), all should resonate.

Sources

The study of medieval Armenia is greatly facilitated by the survival of a large number of Armenian historical compositions, almost all of which have been translated into English, French or German. However it is worth noting that to date few of these works have been subjected to repeated textual criticism or evaluation. Armenologists have tended to focus upon certain works to the exclusion of others. A handful of well-known medieval Armenian histories have received the bulk of scholarly attention whilst the remainder have languished in relative obscurity.

The downside of this uneven treatment is that several important texts have been largely neglected. The upside however is that there is no voluminous secondary literature on these works. Thus the easiest approach will be to identify key passages within the texts themselves and invite the students to consider their historical potential. Of course this does not mean that these texts tell us everything we might wish to know about medieval Armenia. We know very little about the transmission of land – there are no extant land charters before the tenth century – the economic life of Armenia, the legal system, taxation or indeed the vast majority of the population below the level of the elite. Medieval Armenia was a village-based society but how were the villagers tied to the local lord? What were the reciprocal rights and responsibilities between the respective parties? On the other hand, there is a good deal of information on the elite families: their ethos, their interaction with one another and with the neighbouring great powers, and a cycle of accumulation, retention and loss of individual districts played out over the course of decades or even centuries. But these sources need to be treated with care: they comprise a subtle blend of epic, biblical and historical traditions which combine to present an impression of medieval Armenia but which may not represent a complete picture.

The partial picture of medieval Armenia supplied by these Armenian historical texts can be supplemented by the study of Armenian inscriptions and colophons (unique passages found in manuscripts which identify some or all of the following: the work, the author, the sponsor, the scribe, the date of composition and/or copying, and the place of production. In the Armenian tradition, such passages can extend to several paragraphs, discussing one or more of these elements in great detail). English and French translations of these sources are beginning to emerge. They shed important light on several of the issues identified above.

Thus for example, an inscription preserved on the church at Aruch (fig. 2 above) reveals that in 867 one Grigor son of Vaüam, a servant of the *asparapet*, Smbat Bagratuni, came at the command of Smbat and shared the water between two religious communities who were in dispute, at Kosh and

Aruch. He determined that whatever the original allowance of them had been, in future Kosh would take 1½ and Aruch would take 1. Here therefore we can see the resolution of a dispute about water rights. It reveals a sophisticated mechanism for the allocation of water and seems to imply some kind of irrigation system. It was sanctioned by Smbat, the brother of the king, who held the title of *asparapet*. Although this title was centuries old, it had undergone several changes of meaning and in the ninth century seems to have indicated a second rank in Armenia after the king himself.



Fig. 2 Southern façade of Aruch (670) with capital from palace in foreground

Nor are these the only observations that can be drawn from this one inscription. Many of the colophons are equally rich, attesting not only the vibrancy of the Armenian intellectual tradition but also supplying invaluable insight into contemporary events: there is for example a Gospel dated 1099 which contains a contemporary sketch of the First Crusade, including the fall of Antioch! These sources have rarely been exploited by historians of medieval Armenia for their historical potential, partly because they have been treated as the preserve of philologists and palaeographers, partly because it is often difficult to reconcile their information with the full historical compositions. Not only will students have the opportunity to use different types of source material and think through the merits and drawbacks of these classes of evidence; they will also be at the cutting edge of historical research.

Identity

What is meant by 'Armenia'? Although this term is found in late Antique and medieval texts, both Armenian and non-Armenian in origin, it does not follow that it necessarily possesses the same meaning in every instance. 'Armenia' seems to have enjoyed a range of meaning according to when where and by whom the term was employed. Far from being able to isolate a single constant definition of Armenia, accepted by all, one finds instead different perceptions of what constituted Armenia, capable of existing at the same time.

One approach has been to move away from seeking to define what was and what was not Armenian territory at a particular moment and instead to define as Armenian those who acknowledged a common faith expressed by and perpetuated through the Armenian Church. Yet this solution too is fraught with problems, for the Armenian Church was never as uniform in its understanding of what constituted faith as many contemporary writers would have us believe. There is an argument that 'Armenian' came to be defined on a confessional basis whereby those who might have spoken Armenian and thought of themselves as Armenian but who had a different understanding of faith came to be excluded (for a brief discussion of the Armenian Church, see

also below). The sense of identity was expressed most openly through the persistence of a distinct Armenian language and evolution of a separate Armenian literary culture. Again however, it would be wrong to maintain that either the language or the intellectual tradition were necessarily singular or uniform – we know of many different dialects of Armenian current in the eighth century and contradictory works survive in Armenian. Thus Armenia could be usefully introduced into any discussion about identity and self-definition in the medieval period.

Finally, it is worth noting that many of the constructs found in the secondary literature – a single nation, a single faith, a uniform tradition, a single language – owe more to nineteenth-century aspirations of statehood than to the evidence. To give one example, Orbeli doubted the authenticity of a seventh-century Armenian inscription partly on the basis of the “obvious vulgarisms and neologisms” contained within it, assuming an initial linguistic uniformity which became debased rather than a plethora of local dialects whose differences have been lost in the course of manuscript transmission, if indeed they were ever reflected in written a form. I suspect that in the medieval period, most Armenians would have defined themselves in terms of their kin, their district or their village before describing themselves as Armenian. The application of uniform theoretical constructs across the whole of Armenia, whether in respect of social structure, belief, land-holding or cultural tradition, seems misplaced. A more complex pattern of local identities, affiliations, beliefs and views of the past may lie just beneath the apparent singularity of Armenia.

The Armenian Church

The traditional account of the Christianization of Armenia possesses an epic flavour, attributing responsibility to Saint Grigor the Illuminator at the very beginning of the fourth century. He was brought up within the East Roman Empire, in Caesarea in Cappadocia. He returned to Armenia and was incarcerated in a pit for fifteen years by king Trdat for refusing to sacrifice to the goddess Anahit. He then reappeared to heal Trdat who had been turned into a wild boar for his sins. His action prompted Trdat's conversion and that of the country. This account explains and justifies the links between the Armenian and Greek churches in the fourth century. However there is a second tradition which proposes a Syrian origin for the first missionaries to Armenia, and at a much earlier date.

This bifocal quality recurs throughout the subsequent history of the Armenian Church, especially following the partition of Armenia between Rome and Persia in 387. For whilst an initial Greek involvement is clear, the Armenian Church came to recognize that it was the Sasanian ruler who had the right to appoint clerics – indeed the head of the Armenian church, the catholicos, bore the same title as the head of the Church of the East. Although doctrinal difference within the Armenian Church is often described solely in terms of opposition to the Council of Chalcedon of 451, and indeed this became something of a touchstone, Armenian Church councils before 607 were more concerned with the spread of Nestorian ideas, percolating from the Church of the East.

In the five centuries after 607 there were usually at least two factions within the Armenian Church, one supporting the definition of the union of the divine and human natures in Christ (“in two natures”) proposed by Chalcedon and the other rejecting it in favour of a miaphysite position (“a single incarnate nature”). Even this is a simplification and one is tempted to envisage the survival of all manner of Late Antique heresies and local cultic practices in isolated parts of Armenia long after they had been repressed elsewhere. On several occasions, in 631, 690, 862-882, and more generally in the century after 950, serious attempts were made to unite the Greek and Armenian churches. At such times, the pro-Chalcedonian faction probably grew in numbers and significance. However almost all of the dogmatic literature which may have been composed by them in support of their position has been lost, leaving a theologically coherent, but arguably unrepresentative body of evidence from which to work.

Two final observations should be stressed. The Armenian Church was episcopal in structure but strongly tinged with an Armenian character; sees were identified not in terms of cities but rather of princely houses and districts – so for example there was a bishop of the Mamikoneans. Several

sees seem to have become the preserve of particular families (indeed successive generations of the Pahlavuni house held the office of Catholicos, albeit simultaneously with colleagues and rivals, between 1065 and 1203) and this may have been the tradition at the level of the village as well. In 692, one of the Armenian practices specifically condemned at the Council of Trullo was the existence of a priestly caste. Finally there are a relatively large number of complete or partially complete medieval churches, of varying dimensions, decoration and no doubt purpose, which have been well-described, if not always fully explained. Although Greek and Syrian influences have been detected, collectively they represent a powerful argument in favour of an indigenous, Armenian tradition of church design and decoration. Much the same has also been claimed for Georgian church architecture. To an untrained eye, the two traditions seem to be closely related but this subject remains highly controversial and understudied.

Armenia and its Neighbours

Armenian historical sources tell us something about internal Armenian affairs. They also provide a good deal of information about successive neighbouring great powers, both in terms of their interaction with one another, their approach to the government of Armenia and their own internal political, social and religious history as well. After 361 Armenia was partitioned between Rome and Sasanian Persia and remained so until the collapse of the Sasanian empire in the fourth decade of the seventh century. From 661, Armenia was part of the Islamic caliphate, at first under very loose hegemony but after 750 under close control. Much of the old order was swept away in the middle of the ninth century during a series of systematic campaigns but this devastation enabled the Byzantine empire to reconnect with Armenian princely families deep within Armenia.

The next two centuries witnessed a slow, uneven Byzantine advance eastwards, the Greeks being careful for the most part not to alienate Armenian allies with overambitious claims to territory or overlordship. This culminated in the take-over of the city of Ani in the middle of the eleventh century but the Byzantine defeat at the battle of Manzikert in 1071 marked an abrupt end to direct Byzantine control over Armenian territory, even if the network of clients did not disappear overnight. However at the same time, a new centre of Armenian settlement was emerging in Cilicia, to the south and west of historic Armenia, and it was Armenians in these regions who secured independent, or quasi-independent lordships for themselves, forging links with their Greek, Latin, Turkic and Arab neighbours in the course of the next two and a half centuries. In summary therefore, Armenia affords a useful perspective from which to view these great powers.

One might reasonably ask why Armenia was of such perennial significance to outside powers. There seem to be three explanations.

Firstly, key communication routes from the Anatolian plateau to the Iranian plateau ran through Armenia, as did routes north-south, linking the northern Caucasus and the steppe beyond, with Mesopotamia and the Jazira. If one power controlled the whole of Armenia, it could strike into the heart of the other – whether western Asia Minor or central Mesopotamia – along one of several routes, making frontier defence largely impossible. The north-south routes were no less important. The former gave access via the Dariel pass and the Alan gates to the steppe, whose nomad confederations (Hun, Turk or Khazar) could be encouraged, with careful diplomacy, to attack a rival. The latter allowed one to bypass heavily-fortified northern Syria. Although Armenia is mountainous, it is relatively straightforward to advance along the major river valleys during the short summer campaigning season provided these are not defended. Armenia therefore constituted a key zone of interaction between the great powers, where strategic advantage could be gained or offensives thwarted. Moreover, Armenia was not a vital agricultural or economic centre for either power. Forces could engage without running the risk of causing serious damage to their own economic interests in the event that a campaign went badly wrong (unlike along the frontier further south). It was also an environment where shock military results were possible, and where the largest army did not always win the day.

Secondly Armenia has traditionally been a major source of tough and experienced soldiers, whether recruited individually or under the command of a local Armenian prince. Military service in an imperial army provided the only route out of Armenia for many. As a highland country with limited natural resources, Armenia was largely characterized by a routine of raid and counter-raid, a constant jostling for position, within quite as much as between princely families. Military service outside Armenia offered similar risks but the prospect of greater reward. Thus it is unsurprising to find Armenians serving Justinian in Italy in the sixth century, Khusro II in eastern Iran in the seventh century and Basil II in Bulgaria in the later tenth century (and this remains true for the twentieth century as well, when large numbers of Armenians fought and died during WWII in the Soviet army). There remains a suspicion that Armenian troops were preferred not only because they were battle-hardened but also because they were available and cheap to employ.

Finally, Armenia was not only a source of precious metals and other minerals; it may also have had a role of some kind in the transit trade between east and west – a soft frontier through which goods could pass, perhaps via Armenian intermediaries. Armenian manufactures of cloth, carpets and leather may also have been significant although issues of production, including volume, sale and transport remain frustratingly opaque.

Impossible?

At first sight, the inclusion of medieval Armenia in any course or module on medieval history will seem daunting, not to say impossible. I would agree that it would be a bold step to include whole new modules solely on the basis of this short overview. However with a careful selection of source material in English translation, I believe that it would be possible to devise novel comparative exercises, encouraging independent thought from students. For example, one could look at the issue of fortifications: where were they built, by whom and for whom?

Alternatively one could examine how Armenian lords wished to present themselves through inscriptions, particularly in respect of the titles they chose to employ and in whose time they considered themselves to be living. Or again, one could study when, how and why Armenian historical compositions were put together and the models upon which they were based. Although the study of medieval Armenia may seem intimidating, there is much that will seem familiar. Although the terminology will be different, many of the translations contain glossaries of social and technical terms and a Mini-Glossary is to be found at the end of this guide.

Fast Track to Armenia

Although there are several general introductions to Armenia, they are of rather uneven quality. The following are recommended:

G. Dédéyan (ed.), *Histoire des Arméniens* (Toulouse, 1982; repr. 2003)

G. Dédéyan, *Les Arméniens entre Grecs Musulmans et Croisés. Étude sur les pouvoirs arméniens dans le proche-orient méditerranéen*, 2 vols. (Lisbon, 2003). Long-anticipated major work on the patch-work of Armenian lordships and principalities which emerged after 1050 in Cilicia and northern Syria

S. Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art* (London, 1978)

R. Hewsen, *Armenia A Historical Atlas* (Chicago, 2001). An extremely useful guide, both for its maps and its commentary

R. Hovannisian (ed.), *The Armenian People From Ancient to Modern Times*, Volume 1: *From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century* (New York, 1997). The best introduction, most chapters being written by Garsoïan

A. Kazhdan (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1991) – several useful entries

J.-P. Mahé, 'Confession religieuse et identité nationale,' in N.G. Garsoïan and J.-P. Mahé, *Des Parthes au califat. Quatre leçons sur la formation de l'identité arménienne* [Travaux et Mémoires Monographies 10] (Paris, 1997), 79-105

N. Marr, P.M. Muradyan, *Ani. Rêve d'Arménie* (Paris, 2001) – a French translation of the account of the only detailed excavations undertaken at Ani, between 1897 and 1917

V. Nersessian, *Treasures from the Ark: 1700 years of Armenian Christian Art* (London, 2001)

C. Mutafian, *Le royaume arménien de Cilicie* (CNRS, Paris, 1993)

J.-M. Thierry, *L'Arménie au Moyen-Age* (Zodiaque, Orléans, 2000)

R.W. Thomson, 'Armenia in the Fifth and Sixth Century', in *The Cambridge Ancient History Vol. XIV Late Antiquity: Empires and Successors AD 425-600*, ed. A. Cameron, B Ward- Perkins, M. Whitby (Cambridge, 2000), 662-677

M. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium 600-1025* (Basingstoke, 1996), 195-220

There are no modern source-books for medieval Armenia. The following list comprises a range of Armenian historical compositions, dating from the fourth to the twelfth centuries, each with its own historiographical strengths and challenges. The introductions to all these translations are required reading.

Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia and the Crusades, 10th to 12th Centuries: The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, tr. and comm. A. Dostourian (Lanham, MI, 1993). Covers period 951-1129, with Continuation extending from 1136-1162

Moses Khorenats'i, *History of the Armenians*, tr. R.W. Thomson [Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies 4] (Cambridge MA, 1978). See also French translation by A. and J.-P. Mahé, *Histoire d'Arménie par Moïse de Khorène* (Paris, 1993). The most famous Armenian history, it remains a highly controversial composition. It extends from Creation to AD 439

P'awstos Buzand, *The Epic Histories attributed to P'awstos Buzand (Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk')*, tr. and comm. N.G. Garsoïan [Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies 8] (Cambridge MA, 1989). Masterly introduction and invaluable glossaries. Covers fourth-century events from c. 330 to 387/390 but thought to have been compiled in the 470s

Sebeos, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, tr. R.W. Thomson with comm. J.D. Howard-Johnston, 2 vols. [Translated Texts for Historians 31] (Liverpool, 1999). Covers period 572-661; hence a contemporary work. An invaluable work, although its apocalyptic perspective influenced the selection of material

Thomas Artsruni, *History of the House of the Artsrunik'*, tr. and comm. R.W. Thomson (Detroit, 1985). A work tracing the history of a particular princely house, focused on their achievements down to the end of the ninth century

For access to Armenian colophons and inscriptions, see translations by T.W. Greenwood at <http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Eorie0442/>

Four introductory studies to Armenian historical sources:

N.G. Garsoïan, 'The Two Voices of Medieval Armenian Historiography: The Iranian Index,' *Studia Iranica* 25, no. 1 (1996)

T.W. Greenwood, 'Armenian Sources 1025–1204', in *Byzantium and the Crusades: The Non-Greek Sources 1025-1204*, ed. M. Whitby (London, Forthcoming 2004)

J.-P. Mahé, 'Entre Moïse et Mahomet: Réflexions sur l'historiographie arménienne,' *Revue des études arméniennes* 23 (1992), 121-153

R.W. Thomson, 'The Writing of History: the Development of the Armenian and Georgian Traditions,' in *Il Caucaso: Cerniera fra Culture dal Mediterraneo alla Persia (secoli IV-XI)* [Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo 43] (Spoleto, 1996), vol. 1, 493-520

Teaching Topics

Armenia Between the Great Powers

Sample Questions

- Why were the great powers of the Near East so concerned with Armenia?
- How did outside powers seek to control Armenia and with what results?
- How did a distinct Armenian identity survive in the face of centuries of division between, and occupation by, the great powers?
- How much can we know about Armenian perceptions of Byzantium other than through a clerical perspective?

Introductory

N.G. Garsoïan, *Armenia between Byzantium and the Sasanians* (London, 1985)

N.G. Garsoïan, 'The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire', in H. Ahrweiler and A.E. Laiou eds., *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire* (Washington, 1998), 53-124

N.G. Garsoïan and B. Martin-Hisard, 'Unité et diversité de la Caucase médiévale IV^e-XI^e siècles', in *Il Caucaso: Cerniera fra Culture dal Mediterraneo alla Persia (secoli IV-XI)* [Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo 43] (Spoleto, 1996), I, 275-347

T.W. Greenwood, 'A Corpus of Early Medieval Armenian Inscriptions', in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004)

J. Laurent, *L'Arménie entre Byzance et L'Islam depuis la conquête arabe jusqu'en 886*. Nouvelle édition revue et mise à jour par M. Canard (Lisbonne, 1980)

J.-P. Mahé, 'Ani sous Constantin X, d'après une inscription de 1060', in *Mélanges Gilbert Dagron, Travaux et Mémoires* 14 (Paris, 2002), 403-414

J. Shepard, 'Constantine VII, Caucasian Openings and the Road to Aleppo', in A. Eastmond ed., *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium* [Publications for the Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies 9] (Aldershot, 2001), 19-40

K. Yuzbashian, 'L'administration byzantine en Arménie aux X^e et XI^e siècles', *Revue des études arméniennes* 10 (1973-74), 139-184

Sources

Aristakēs Lastivertts'i, *Récit des malheurs de la nation arménienne*, trans. M. Canard and H. Berbérien (Bruxelles, 1973)

Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. Gy. Moravcsik, tr. R.J.H. Jenkins [Dumbarton Oaks Texts 1] (Washington D.C., 1967), chs. 43-46; R.J.H. Jenkins, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus De Administrando Imperio*, Vol. II, *Commentary* (London, 1962), 156-180

G. Greatrex and S.N.C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars Part II AD 363-630* (London, 2002)

Sebeos, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, tr. R.W. Thomson, comm. J.D. Howard-Johnston, 2 vols. [Translated Texts for Historians 31] (Liverpool, 1999)

Armenian Society

Sample Questions

- 'A rigid social structure characterized by rivalry, violence and death.' Do you agree?
- Why were princely families so eager for recognition from an outside power?
- What was the nature of Armenian lordship?
- How did princely families maintain their position over many generations?
- Did Armenian society evolve between 500 and 1000 and if so, how?

Introductory

N. Adontz, tr. N. Garsoïan, *Armenia in the period of Justinian* (Lisbon, 1970)

B. Martin-Hisard, 'Constantinople et les archontes du monde caucasien dans le Livre des Cérémonies II 48' *Travaux et Mémoires* 13 (2000), 359-530

J. Laurent, *L'Arménie entre Byzance et l'Islam depuis la conquête arabe jusqu'en 886* (Nouvelle édition revue et mise à jour par M. Canard) (Lisbon, 1980)

A. Ter-Ghewondyan, 'Le Prince d'Arménie à l'époque de la domination arabe,' *Revue des études arméniennes* 3 (1966), 185-200

C. Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Georgetown, 1963)

Sources

Thomas Artsruni, *History of the House of the Artsrunik*, tr. R.W. Thomson (Detroit, 1985), Preface, Bk. iii, chapters 12-29

John Catholicos, *History of Armenia*, tr. K. Maksoudian (Atlanta, 1987), Preface, chapters LIV-LXVII and Afterword

Stephen of Taron/Asotik, *Des Stephanos von Taron Armenische Geschichte*, tr. H. Gelzer and A. Burckhardt (Leipzig, 1907), Bk. iii (excluding chapter 21)

Aristakēs Lastivertts'i, *Récit des malheurs de la nation arménienne*, trans. M. Canard and H. Berberian (Bruxelles, 1973)

Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia and the Crusades, 10th to 12th Centuries: The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, tr. A. Dostourian (Lanham, MI, 1993)

The earliest surviving land 'charters' date from the middle of the ninth century and are preserved in a single, very atypical, Armenian text, the *History of Siwnik* compiled by Stephen Orbelean in 1301. Frustratingly, the only translation of this work is that by M. Brosset, published in St Petersburg in 1874!

The Armenian Church**Sample Questions**

- Was the unity of the Armenian Church more apparent than real?
- What role did the church play in the moulding and preservation of a distinctive Armenian identity?
- What external influences shaped the Armenian Church in the formative period?

Introductory

K. Bardakjian ed., *The Church of Armenia through the Ages* (Ann Arbor, MI, Forthcoming, 2005)

N.G. Garsoïan, 'L'Arménie' in L. Pietri ed., *Histoire du christianisme des origines à nos jours, Vol. III, Les Églises d'Orient et d'Occident (432-610)* (Paris, 1998), 1125-1168

N.G. Garsoïan, *L'Église arménienne et le grand schisme d'Orient*, CSCO 574, Subs. 100 (Louvain, 1999)

N.G. Garsoïan, 'The Armenian Church between Byzantium and the East', in Pierpont Morgan Library, *Treasures in Heaven: Armenian Art, Religion and Society* (New York, 1998), 3-12 See also articles by R.F. Taft, 'The Armenian Liturgy: Origins and Characteristics', 3-30; and K.H. Maksoudian, 'Clergy and Laity in Medieval Armenia', 31-38.

J.-P. Mahé, 'L'Église arménienne de 611 à 1066', in G. Dagron, P. Riché, A. Vauchez eds., *Histoire du christianisme des origines à nos jours, Vol. IV, Évêques, moines et empereurs (610-1054)* (Paris, 1993), 457-547

J. Mercier, *Histoire et institutions de l'Église arménienne. Évolution nationale et doctrinale* (Beyrouth, 1965)

M. Ormanian, *The Church of Armenia*, 2nd ed. (London, 1964); 3rd rev. ed. (New York, 1988)

K. Sarkissian, *The Council of Chalcedon and the Armenian Church* (London, 1965; repr. New York, 1975)



Fig. 3 Ereroyk (western and southern façades)

Armenian Architecture

Sample Questions

- How do you explain the diversity in size and design of Armenian churches?
- Who founded churches and why?
- How were churches funded?
- What are the distinctive features of Armenian Church architecture?

Introductory

P. Cuneo, *Architettura armena dal quarteo al diciannovesimo secolo*, 2 vols. (Roma, 1989)

S. Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art* (London, 1978)

C. Maranci, *Medieval Armenian Architecture Constructions of Race and Nation* [Hebrew University Armenian Studies 2] (Leuven, 2001), ch. 5

T.F. Mathews, *Art and Architecture in Byzantium and Armenia: Liturgical and Exegetical Approaches* (Aldershot, 1995)

J.-M. Thierry, *L'Arménie au Moyen-Age* (Zodiaque, Orléans, 2000)

J.-M. Thierry and P. Donabédian, *Armenian Art* (New York, 1989)

See also Armenian inscriptions at <http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Eorie0442/>

Contradictory Evidence

At the risk of gross oversimplification, Armenian historical works are not wholly consistent with one another. There are numerous examples of tensions between and within such works. Broadly speaking, these contradictions divide into two. Firstly material extracted from an earlier composition may be repeated in a later work but given a very different 'spin'. Secondly, inconsistencies may emerge within a single work. These are caused either by a contradiction between two underlying sources which has not been unresolved by the compiler or by a contradiction between one of the underlying sources and the views of the compiler himself, again left unresolved. Such inconsistencies are highly revealing for they confirm that a spectrum of different views was capable of existing at the same time within medieval Armenia, particularly in relation to the definition of correct belief within the Armenian Church.

Case Study:

The Treatment of Catholicos Ezr (630-641) and Catholicos Nersēs III (641-661)

In the History attributed to Sebeos [Trans., p.87], the catholicos Ezr is described as 'a humble and generous man who did not wish to provoke anyone to anger and no indecorous word came from his mouth'. This seems straightforward. This text [pp.91-92] later records that he participated in the controversial Council of Karin in 632, designed to bring about a union between the Armenian and Greek Churches and that he was rewarded after a successful outcome to these negotiations. Nowhere is he criticised for his actions.

Yet this sits very uncomfortably with the later presentation of Nersēs III [pp.140-142], described as someone with a 'bitter poison in his heart' who planned to convert all Armenia to the doctrinal position of the Greek Church. Whilst Ezr reached agreement with Heraclius without being criticised, Nersēs III is pilloried for adopting the same line. In my opinion, the only way to interpret this inconsistency is to accept that the neutral (or slightly favourable) view of Ezr represents the attitude of an underlying source whilst the very hostile view of Nersēs III reveals the personal view of the compiler himself.

It seems therefore that two views of union with the Greek church existed in Armenia in the middle of the seventh century, one neutral or even slightly favourable, the other implacably opposed to any accommodation. When John Catholicos came to compose his History in the early tenth century, the position has changed. Ezr is criticised for failing to take the leading Armenian theologian of the day with him when he attended upon Heraclius in 632 and of being deceived by Heraclius [Trans., pp. 99-100]. In general, John adopts a much harsher tone towards Ezr. Given that relations between the two churches were still very much a live issue in the tenth century, it is not hard to see why earlier attempts at reconciliation between the churches were now viewed with hostility.

Mini-Glossary

This glossary is far from comprehensive but is designed with the non-specialist in mind.

Akuank' – Caucasian Albania, Christian kingdom east of Armenia with separate language
amirapet – the caliph

Ani – Bagratuni capital after c. 950; major city excavated by Marr; long since abandoned
Arshakunik'/Arsacid – royal line, of Parthian royal origin, demise 428

Artsrunik' – princely family in Vaspurakan, prominent from mid-9th, separate kings after c.908; relinquished kingdom and moved to Sebastea in Byzantine territory c.1021

aspēt – from Persian 'master of the horse'; becomes title linked exclusively to Bagratuni
ark'ay – king

awan – town, probably unwallled, as distinct from *k'atak'*

aylazgik' – foreigners, used of Philistines in Old Testament, and applied to Muslims

azat – literally 'free', member of lesser nobility, collectively make up cavalry contingent,

Bagratunik' – major princely house after 600; Ashot I appointed 'king' in 884; kingdom splits into two c. 963 – major line in Ani – and further subdivisions thereafter; Ani surrender 1045

berd – fortress

bdeashkh – marcher lord, antique title

curopalates – very high Byzantine court title, granted to one individual only

dahekan – gold coin (= *nomisma*)

dram – silver coin (= *dirham*)

gawaü – district

giwt – village (nb *giwtak'atak'* = Greek *kōmopolis*, fortified village)

gund – contingent, perhaps retinue capable of being summoned by a prince

Hagarats'ik' – Hagarene, descended from Hagar, hence Muslims – rare

Hayk' – collective term for Armenians, descended from eponymous Hayk'

Hüomk' – Romans, applied to Byzantines

hayrapet – patriarch, used of catholicos

Ismayeli – of Ismael, hence sons of Ismael = Muslims

ishkhan – prince

ishkhan ishkhanats' – prince of princes, from late 630s, designates principal Armenian client

k'atak' – city, walled

kat'olikos – catholicos, head of the Armenian church – nb also used in Church of the East

Mamikoneank' – principal Armenian family after 428 to end eighth century

marzpan – originally Persian, governor of march; changes meaning after mid-ninth century, indicating third rank in Bagratuni house?

nakharar – Persian 'noble', with meaning only in Sasanian context; later, similar in Armenia

ostan – originally royal domain, applied to area around Dvin, where Persian governor lived

ostikan – originally used of Persian governor but applied to Arab governor

patrik – Byzantine middle ranking title, *patrikios*

üamik – all the non-elite, undifferentiated

sepuh – lesser noble in a princely family

shahanshan – Sasanian royal title, king of kings, adopted by Ashot Bagratuni in early tenth c.

sparapet – Persian 'commander', linked originally to Mamikonean house; changes meaning after ninth century, designates second ranking in Bagratuni house?

Tachikk' – Arabs

t'agawor – king

tēr – 'lord', head of an Armenian princely house; only one lord of a family at any one time

tun – house, family

vank' – religious community, monastery

vardapet – spiritual teacher, later with particular theological learning

Virk' – Iberia, modern central Georgia, Christian kingdom north-west of Armenia

Yoynk' – the Greeks (= Byzantines)

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