

Society and Politics in 4th and 5th–Century Armenia. The invention of the Armenian Alphabet

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Dopo l'adozione del cristianesimo come religione di stato, avvenuta per opera di Grigor Lusaworič' (Gregorio l'Illuminatore) in una data che convenzionalmente si colloca nel 301, l'Armenia viene a trovarsi in una posizione politica per più aspetti difficile. La casa regnante degli Arsakuni (Arsacidi), cui appartiene il primo re convertito, Trdat (Tiridate) III, è un ramo collaterale della dinastia partica, spodestata qualche decennio prima dai nuovi signori di Persia, i Sassanidi. Questi ultimi non vedono di buon occhio la presenza di sovrani arsacidi in un paese limitrofo al loro, tanto più quando il cristianesimo, adottato dagli Armeni, diviene la religione di stato dei tradizionali nemici dei Persiani, i Bizantini.

La spartizione del territorio armeno in due zone di influenza, una bizantina ed una persiana, attuata intorno al 387, rende la situazione degli Armeni ancor più difficile: la zona sotto controllo bizantino è presto inglobata nell'impero, mentre l'altra, nominalmente indipendente, deve sempre più subire l'ingerenza persiana, che si manifesta presto anche nel campo religioso.

A questo punto, gli Armeni si sentono minacciati nella loro stessa identità, e si pensa che l'invenzione di un alfabeto con cui scrivere la loro lingua possa in qualche modo preservarli dal pericolo di un'assimilazione culturale. In effetti fino ad allora, per ottemperare alle esigenze della burocrazia si era fatto ricorso alle lingue veicolari del tempo, in particolare al greco ed all'aramaico, ed anche la predicazione religiosa si svolgeva in greco o in siriano, a seconda delle zone del paese. Questo peraltro comportava una certa difficoltà nell'opera missionaria, soprattutto quando, durante la celebrazione dei riti, non c'era nessuno in grado di tradurre in armeno i testi letti nelle lingue d'uso liturgico. Di qui l'idea di trovare una scrittura adatta a rendere l'armeno, idea che, partita da un ecclesiastico di nome Maštoc' (noto anche come Mesrop), trova subito il pieno appoggio delle massime autorità civili e religiose, il re Vramšapuh ed il primate Sahak. In un primo tempo Maštoc', venuto a conoscenza dell'esistenza di un alfabeto che si riteneva potesse essere usato per l'armeno, se lo procura e comincia a scrivere con quello, ma presto si accorge della sua insufficienza, trattandosi probabilmente di un alfabeto di tipo semitico, tale cioè da non denotare le vocali con specifici grafemi.

Maštoc' prosegue dunque il suo lavoro, arrivando alla fine a creare un sistema scrittorio soddisfacente per le esigenze dell'armeno, in cui è per molti aspetti evidente l'influenza della scrittura greca, anche se non è da escludere un qualche influsso anche da parte di alfabeti orientali. L'invenzione di Maštoc' è tradizionalmente datata al 405.

Avendo così messo a punto un sistema scrittorio capace di rendere bene la sua lingua, Maštoc', con un gruppo di giovani che si sono riuniti intorno a lui, comincia un'intensa attività di traduzione, a partire dalla Bibbia e da testi di tipo religioso, attività cui presto si affianca la produzione di scritti originali, di argomento biografico, teologico, storico ecc.

In questo modo, quando, un po' più tardi, gli Armeni perderanno quel poco di autonomia politica che era loro ancora rimasta, potranno comunque sopravvivere come etnia, salvaguardando la loro cultura e tramandandola attraverso i secoli.



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Who were the Armenians? Maybe people not dealing with Oriental studies or with historical linguistics connect this name with fabulous Eastern countries such as those represented in "A Thousand and One Nights". Others, better informed, know perhaps that Charles Aznavour and William Saroyan are Armenians by origin, and maybe still others remember that the Armenians were the victims of the first genocide in the past century: this happened during World War I.

Indeed, the Armenians are an old people dwelling on a large plateau roughly bounded by the Caucasus Mountains, the Black and the Caspian Seas, Iran and Mesopotamia. The highest mountain is Mount Ararat now in Turkey, where, according to the Bible narrative, Noah's Ark is supposed to have landed. Historical Armenia included three great lakes, Urmia, Van, and Sevan, only the last of which is now in the territory of modern Armenia. The most important river is the Araxes.

Reports concerning the Armenians have come down to us from many old sources, among them Old and Middle Persian, Greek and Latin sources, and, last but not least, an Armenian king is supposed to have been the first to adopt Christianity as state religion. This epochal event took place in the early fourth century; the traditional date is 301, and we will begin our exposition from this very moment. In this period Armenia or, better, the greatest part of the country inhabited by Armenian speaking people, was ruled by a king of the Aršakuni (or Arsacid) dynasty, Trdat (Tiridates) III. The main branch of this same family had ruled for centuries in Persia, during the Parthian period up to 224 or 226, when its last member Artawan (Artabanus) V was deposed by a coup d'état, following which the Sasanian Ardašir was enthroned. This king was obviously hostile to the Aršakuni ruler of Armenia, called Xosrov by the Armenian sources, because no king would wish to have, in a neighboring country, a ruler from the dynasty he had just dethroned. The Sasanians tried to conquer Armenia by all means. According to the legend, they organized the treacherous murder of the Armenian king Xosrov; with the help of an Armenian noble man named Anak, they arrived to kill the king and later on to conquer the country. Taking their revenge against the murderer, the Armenian noblemen killed Anak and his family; only his two sons were saved and taken abroad, one of them being Grigor (Gregory), the future Illuminator (*Lusaworič* in Armenian), through whose efforts Armenia was Christianized. He was secretly taken to Caesarea in Cappadocia and educated as a Christian. The king's family, too, was extermi-

nated: only Xosrov's son Trdat was taken by his tutor to Greek territory. Later on he ascended the throne thanks to the powerful help of the Romans. This was the same Trdat about whom we have already spoken, who was finally persuaded by Grigor, and particularly by the miracles he operated, to embrace Christianity as state religion.

We will not go into the facts which caused this conversion; they pertain more to legend than to history: if one wants, one can read them narrated by the Armenian sources, particularly in the book ascribed to a certain Agat'angelos. On the contrary, I cannot overlook what happened after the conversion, when a policy of forced Christianization started in the country, with the destruction of pagan temples, the confiscation of their property, but also with the integration of old pagan priests, or at least their relatives, into the new Christian clergy: for them ecclesiastic schools were also created. We shall see later the reason why Grigor and Trdat were compelled to act in this way: now we can state that, thanks to Grigor and Trdat, Christianity became one of the core elements of Armenian identity, although such Christianity had to take into account both the religious and the social past of the country.

Also the way of occupying the highest religious office in Armenia was very peculiar, at least if one compares it with the uses of other Christian churches. The first bishop was obviously Grigor himself; after him his younger son Aristakēs, and later on his elder son Vrt'anēs occupied the See, at this time only an Episcopal or Archiepiscopal one. As one can easily understand, it was not strange that a bishop had sons (by the way, they were born before their father was engaged in ecclesiastical career), but that they became both primates of Armenia immediately after their father. Moreover, if one looks through the list of the Armenia primates after Grigor, until the mid 5th century, one finds nine persons, five of whom are direct relatives of Grigor, while four are all relatives of a certain Albianos, probably to be identified with one of the pagan priests converted by Grigor and the first bishop consecrated by him.

Let us summarize what we have said so far: during at least the first 150 years when Christianity was the state religion in Armenia, the title of Primate was hereditary, assigned to the members of two families, the Hellenized descendants of Grigor, and those of Albianos, more oriented toward Syriac culture. We can add that also later on, when the Primate's office became elective, to be eventually approved by the political authority ruling at the moment, the fact that the candidate was a relative of the former Primate had nonetheless a certain weight. This tendency culminated in the period between 1066 and 1203, when seven patriarchs (*kat'olikos*), members of the same family, were elected, one after the other.

From the Western point of view one can charge the Armenians with nepotism, but if we want to understand the reason that the system operated this way, we need to know something about the structure of Armenian society during the 4th and 5th centuries.

According to many scholars, 4th-century Armenian society was not an urban one: there were only few towns, above all trade centers, mostly inhabited by non-Armenian people. During the 4th century further reasons for building or, better, for restoring and enlarging towns were connected with military purposes. This was the case for example of Karin-Theodosiopolis (today Erzerum) in the part of the Armenian territory controlled by the Byzantines. In this period the major part of the Armenian people lived in villages or in fortresses situated in the countryside. Armenian society was divided into two main classes, the noblemen (*azat*) and the so-called people (*šinakan, řamik*). Furthermore, as happened in the Parthian Iran, the Armenian territory



Fig. 1 Armenia in the 4th century.

was divided into large estates, which were the property of a enlarged noble family (*naxarar*) and were ruled by a member of it, to whom the title of *nahapet* “chief of the family” or *tanutēr* “master of the house” was given. Other members of a *naxarar* family in their turn ruled over smaller portions of the family estate. This system has often been labeled as feudal: for practical purposes we can describe it that way, but we need to be aware that there are differences between this system and the feudal system current later in Western Europe. Indeed, if the estate as a whole was actually ruled by a single person, it was nonetheless considered the property of his whole enlarged family, so that, if the ruler died heirless, he was succeeded by a member of a different branch of the family. Furthermore, it was allowed to alienate a part of the family property only to another member of the family or by permission of the whole enlarged family. This may also explain why Armenian feudal families were normally endogamic: in order not to scatter parts of their property, as would have happened if they had to give a part of their property to another family as dowry. It must also be noted that endogamic marriages had a religious reason too, because Zoroastrianism, at this time the faith of the Armenians, favored marriages between relatives very highly.

As we have seen, in 4th century Armenia, as in Parthian Iran, large estates were hereditarily possessed by noble families and actually ruled by a member of them: the whole enlarged family was devoted to the worship of the same ancestors, lived in small fortified villages and spent the most part of their time in hunting and in banqueting. Furthermore, each *naxarar* family had a particular social function: in Armenia a member of the Aršakuni family was chosen as king, who was consequently a sort of *primus inter pares*; among the Mamikoneans the chief general of the army (*sparapet*) was chosen, one of the Bagratunis was the chivalry chief (*aspet*) and king crowner (*t'agadir*), and so on.

This social pattern has been applied to the church too: if in the period of paganism some temples and their property were hereditarily possessed by some families, one can easily understand why Grigor chose the sons and relatives of old priests when he created a new, Christian clergy to whom he granted almost all privileges and property they previously possessed according to the ancient family right.

We know that in Western countries too it happened that old pagan temples were transformed into churches for the new Christian cult: people accustomed to go to a certain place to worship a false god were persuaded to frequent the same place where they could adore the true God. Something like this happened in Armenia, where, nonetheless, not only the temples, but the old clerical families too remained, their members transformed into priests of the new cult.

Moreover the bishops themselves continue to live and act within the estate of their families, so that they are often qualified not as the bishops of certain dioceses but as the bishops of certain families. Finally, the office of the Armenian Primate too was considered a sort of social office pertaining to two families, at least for a certain period.

One can easily see to what extent the old social and religious patterns penetrated into the new faith: this can be observed in other cases as well such as in the customs of mourning for the dead (this function was often entrusted to specialized persons) and in the prevalence of marriage between relatives. These and other similar “barbaric” habits were the target of the struggle of the Armenian Primate and the clergy throughout the 4th and 5th centuries and later as well, as we can see from the Armenian historical sources as well as from the canon laws. Such was the social and religious situation in Armenia when, in or around 387, the country was divided into two spheres of influence, the western one under the Roman control, which was quickly incorporated into the Roman empire, and the other, eastern part, the larger one, where the Armenian king retained nominal power, but was in fact a vassal subject to the Persian king. Indeed, in both parts Armenian ethnic survival was threatened, because the Armenian people risked being culturally assimilated, and this started from their faith itself, given the fact that, as autonomous Christians with their own hierarchy and institutions, Armenian Christians were divided from and to a certain extent disliked by the Greeks, whereas just because they were Christians they were considered hostile by the Zoroastrian Persians.

At this time the Armenians had no writing system for their language, or at least such a system was not in use: we shall elucidate this statement later. Indeed the Armenians knew what a writing system was and what the advantages of having one were; this can be proved, for instance, by many official inscriptions in Greek, Latin and Aramaic found in their country. They had also oral literature, some fragments of which have been preserved in the works of later historians: they are probably excerpts from sacred poems, such as the one describing the birth of the god Vahagn, and from epic songs such as the one speaking about a hero (king Artašēs) abducting his future wife by catching her with a lasso from among her father’s army and carrying her to his camp. Another fragment describes the celebration of their marriage. It has also been supposed that the 4th century Christian Armenians had their own literature written in Greek or Syriac, and indeed some later theological or historical texts have been considered to be translations into Armenian from books previously written in Greek or Syriac but destined for Armenian readers.

Finally, a particular translation technique was developed, this too for religious purposes. Indeed from some sources we know that liturgy was performed in Greek or Syriac, but passages from the Bible were often translated impromptu into Armenian if an educated priest was present: otherwise no translation

was given and people understood nothing at all. This translation training as well as the language of oral literature mentioned above probably formed the basis of the later literary Armenian.

But let us return to the difficulties the Armenian people had in understanding the liturgy when no one was present who could translate it into their own language. This situation compelled one of the greatest persons of this time, Maštoc', also called Mesrop, to work in order to create a writing system for Armenian, which is an Indo-European language such as Latin or Greek. Maštoc' was a learned Hellenophile; he had been court secretary, and later on he devoted himself to the church life. While preaching, he personally experienced how difficult it was for people to be taught in a foreign language, when no translator was present, and consequently he decided to discuss the problem with the Armenian primate, Sahak, in order to find a solution. Sahak too was aware of the situation, and they turned to the Armenian king, Vramšapuh. He told them that a Syrian bishop named Daniël possessed a writing system by which one could write in the Armenian language. We must remember that the motivation of these individuals in endowing the Armenians with a writing system was not simply religious: as we have said, Christianity, or, if you wish, the Armenian way of conceiving it, was and in the course of time became more and more one of the core elements of Armenian identity in a moment when it was continually threatened both from East and West. The invention of a script and, consequently, the creation of local literature was perceived as and in fact was a way of maintaining this identity.

With the help of the Armenian king, Daniël's alphabet was immediately obtained, and Maštoc' tried to work with it, but soon he realised that this system could not fully reproduce the syllables and the phonological nexuses of the Armenian language: in fact those letters were collected from a different writing system, as we can read in the most important source we have about these facts, the biography of Maštoc' written by Koriwn, one of his disciples [See Sources].

As we have just seen, our source says that Daniël's alphabet was not fit to reproduce the syllables of the Armenian language: this would probably mean that it worked somehow like the Semitic alphabets, for instance the one used for Hebrew or Syriac or Arabic, by which only the consonants are indicated by a particular letter.

After Maštoc' had ascertained he could not work with Daniël's alphabet in order to write Armenian, he continued his search and finally, in 405 according to the tradition, he succeeded in generating, with God's help, a new and marvellous son, of which he was the father: I mean the alphabet of the Armenian language. Immediately he traced the new letters, gave them names, put them in order and with them formed syllables having both consonants and vowels. Koriwn, as you see, considers the invention of Maštoc' as the work of a human, albeit with some miraculous aspects: a very peculiar birth given by a man, with God's help. A quite different exposition of this same fact is offered by a later source, Movsēs Xorenac'i's *Patmut'iwn Hayoc'* (History of Armenia). Here it is said that, while Mesrop (that is Maštoc') was praying, a right hand appeared in the depths of his heart, writing letters on a rock as tracks are traced in snow. After this vision Mesrop was able to fashion the new alphabet. This hand was obviously God's hand. So, within some decades, or maybe some centuries (Movsēs' date is controversial), the human creation of Maštoc' became the product of a divine act. In the same way, in the course of time the usual human acts of the saints were transformed in super-human performances in Latin and Greek hagiographical texts. If we analyze this creation, whether human or divine, we can be sure that it was of certain political value. As we said, at this time both Western and Eastern influences were exerted on Armenia. We saw

that the ruling class was trying to balance those influences and, at the same time, to maintain the Armenians' own peculiar national identity. With this purpose of balancing, both Greek and Syriac languages were used as liturgical languages and the Armenian intelligentsia was urged to learn both the Greek and Syriac languages and literature. The script invented by Maštoc', even though it combines both Eastern and Western features, seems indeed to have been more influenced by the Western pattern. It is possible, as some scholars have supposed, that Maštoc' reworked Daniēl's alphabet, which followed an Oriental pattern: but in so doing, he added peculiar letters for the vowels, as in Greek; the writing is from left to right, as in Greek; the letters are arranged according to the Greek alphabet; the forms of some letters resemble the Greek ones and have the same value. Also the way to write the vowel /u/ is the same we have in Greek, that is, two letters which we could describe as <o> plus <w>. The script invented by Maštoc' was composed of 36 letters, to which two others were added later, during the 12th century.

It is not easy to summarise briefly what happened after this invention. Afterwards, an intensive translation activity started in which many persons were engaged. The first book translated was obviously the Bible, soon followed by other books concerning religious matters, such as some of Basil of Caesarea's and John Chrysostom's works. This activity intensified during the following centuries, when many Greek and Syriac works, mainly pertaining to philosophy, were translated into Armenian, transforming this literature into a sort of depository where we can find translation of some works whose originals are lost. At the same time as these translations were produced, original Armenian literature developed too, and 5th century Armenian authors dealt not only with religious matters, writing homilies or hagiographic works, but with history too, collecting information from the classical sources or from their own oral literature, and also narrating what happened in Armenia after Christianity became the state religion. In this way the national identity of the Armenians was strengthened.

We can state that Maštoc' chose the moment to act with perfect timing: after about two decades, in 428, the last Aršakuni (Arsacid) king ruling in the greater Eastern part of Armenia was dethroned by the Sasanians. The Armenians strongly risked losing their national identity together with their freedom, particularly after 439, when the Persian king Yazdgard II was trying to convert them forcibly to his own faith, which at the time was Zurvanism, an heresy within Zoroastrianism, to whose confutation Eznik Kołbac'i, a writer of this time, devoted a large section of his theological treatise.

Around 449 there was an exchange of letters between the Persian court and the most prominent Armenians, both clerics and laymen: when the former ordered the Armenians to adopt their ruler's faith, they answered the Persian king had sovereign rights upon their bodies, not upon their souls. The state of unrest which followed these facts culminated in the battle of Awarayr, in June 451, when the Armenians fought a desperate battle against the overwhelming Persian army. Despite of the heavy tolls in that battle, the obstinacy Armenians demonstrated in defending their faith forced the Persian king to avoid further confrontation: a moderate policy was conducted in Armenia, although members of the Armenian intelligentsia, both clergymen and lay people, were deported to Persia.

If we consider Maštoc's invention from a modern point of view, we must recognize that, thanks to it, the Armenian people was able to survive during the centuries of foreign domination, avoiding or at least strongly reducing the risk of losing their national identity. They developed a sort

of book worship, when books became something like a depository of that identity. Furthermore, they could produce an original literature, a unique mix of Western and Eastern features, which is a humanity heritage. In short, thanks to this person, thanks to his vision if you want, the Armenians could remain Armenians during a little less than 1600 years, until 1991, when they again gained their independence.



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SOURCES

The Armenian texts reproduced are taken from *Matenagirk' Hayoc'*, vol. I-II, Antelias 2003, with slight adaptation of the spelling.

The translations of the *Buzandaran*, by Łazar P'arpec'i and Movsēs Xorenac'i reproduce, with minimal adaptation, those contained in:

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The translation of Koriwn is by the author.

PRE-CHRISTIAN ARMENIA

1. Fragments of poetical compositions on religious or epic matters.

Սորա [Տիգրանայ] որդի Բաբ, Տիրան, Վահագն, զորմէ ասեն առասպելք աշխարհիս.

«Երկներ երկին,

երկներ երկիր,

երկներ եւ ծովն ծիրանի.

երկն ի ծովուն ուներ

եւ զկարմրիկն եղեգնիկ.

ընդ եղեգան փող ծուխ ելաներ,

ընդ եղեգան փող բոց ելաներ.

եւ ի բոցոյն վազեր խարտեաշ պատանեկիկ.

նա հուր հեր ուներ,

բոց ուներ մարուս,

եւ աշկունքն եին արեգակունք»:

His [Tigran's] sons were Pap, Tiran, Vahagn, of whom the fables of our land say:
Heaven was in travail,
earth was in travail,
the purple sea was also in travail;
in the sea travail
also gripped the red reed.
From the tube of the reed came forth smoke,
from the tube of the reed came forth flame.
From the flame a red-headed young boy ran out.
He had fire for hair,
and had flame for beard,
and his eyes were suns [translation cited, p. 123].

Movsēs Xorenac'i, *Patmut'wn Hayoc'*, I, 31 (32), 7 [*Matenagirk' Hayoc'*, II, 1830]

Քանզի զորդի Ալանաց արքային ձերբակալ արարեալ զաւրացն Հայոց ածեն առ Արտաշէս՝ զխաղաղութիւն խնդրել արքայն Ալանաց, տալ Արտաշիսի զինչ եւ խնդրեսցէ. եւ երդնունս եւ դաշինս ասէր հաստատել մշտնջենաւորս, որպէս զի մի՛ եւս մանկունք Ալանաց ասպատակաւ հինից ելցեն յաշխարհս Հայոց: Եւ ի չառնուլ յանձն Արտաշիսի առ ի տալ զպատանին՝ գայ թոյր պատանւոյն յափն գետոյն ի դարաւանդ մի մեծ, եւ ի ձեռն թարգմանաց ծայնէ ի բանակն Արտաշիսի.

«Քեզ ասեմ, այր քաջ Արտաշէս, որ յաղթեցեր քաջ ազգին Ալանաց. ե՛կ հաւանեա՛ց բանից աչագեղոյ դստերս Ալանաց՝ տալ զպատանիդ. զի վասն միոյ քինու ոչ է արէն դիւցազանց՝ զայլոց դիւցազանց զարմից բառնալ գկենդանութիւն, կամ ծառայեցուցանելով ի ստրկաց կարգի պահել, եւ թշնամութիւն յաւիտենական ի մէջ երկոցունց ազգաց քաջաց հաստատել»:

Եւ լուեալ Արտաշիսի զայսպիսի իմաստութեան բանս՝ գնաց յեզր գետոյն. եւ տեսեալ զկոյսն գեղեցիկ, եւ լուեալ ի նմանէ բանս իմաստութեան ցանկացաւ կուսին: Եւ կոչեցեալ զղայեակն իւր զՍմբատ՝ յայտնէ նմա զկամս սրտի իւրոյ, առնուլ զաւրիորդն Ալանաց ի կնութիւն իւր, եւ դաշինս եւ ուխտս հաստատել ընդ ազգի քաջացն, եւ զպատանին արծակել ի խաղաղութիւն: Եւ հաճոյ թուեցեալ Սմբատայ, յղէ առ արքայն Ալանաց՝ տալ զտիկին աւրիորդն Ալանաց զՍաթինիկ ի կնութիւն Արտաշիսի: Եւ ասէ արքայն Ալանաց.

«Եւ ուստի՞ տացէ քաջն Արտաշէս հազարս ի հազարաց եւ բիւրս ի բիւրուց ընդ քաջազուր կոյս աւրիորդիս Ալանաց»:

Զայս տեղի առասպելաբանելով վիպասանքն յերգելն իւրեանց ասեն.

«Հեծաւ արի արքայն Արտաշէս ի սեան գեղեցիկ,

եւ հանեալ զոսկեաւղ շիկափոկ պարանն,

եւ անցեալ որպէս զարծուի սրաթեւ ընդ գետն,

եւ ձգեալ զոսկեաւղ շիկափոկ պարանն՝

ընկէց ի մէջք աւրիորդին Ալանաց,

եւ շատ ցաւեցոյց զմէջք փափուկ աւրիորդին,

արագ հասուցանելով ի բանակն իւր»:

[...]

Դոյնպէս եւ զհարսանեացն առասպելեալ երգեն, այսպէս ասելով.

«Տեղ ոսկի տեղայր ի փեսայութեանն Արտաշիսի,
տեղայր մարգարիտ ի հարսնութեան Սափնկանն»:

Because the Armenian army had captured the son of the Alan king and had brought him to Artasēs, the king of the Alans requested peace, offering to give Artasēs whatever he might ask. He promised to make a sworn and lasting treaty that the young men of the Alans would come no more on raids for plunder into Armenia. And when Artasēs refused to give back the youth, the prince's sister came to the bank of the river onto a large hillock and through interpreters called to the camp of Artasēs:

I say to you, valiant Artasēs, that you have conquered the brave nation of the Alans. Come, consent to the request of the beautiful-eyed Alan princess to give up the youth. For it is not right for heroes to take the lives of the progeny of other heroes for the sake of vengeance, or by subjecting them to keep them in the rank of slaves and perpetuate eternal enmity between two brave nations.

When Artasēs heard such wise words he went to the bank of the river; and seeing the beautiful maiden and hearing words of wisdom from her, he desired the maiden. He summoned his tutor Smbat and revealed to him the wishes of his heart - to marry the Alan princess, make a treaty and pact with the valiant nation, and to free the youth for the sake of peace. This pleased Smbat, and he sent word to the king of the Alans that he should give the princess of the Alans, Sat'inik, in marriage to Artasēs. The king of the Alans said:

And whence will the brave Artasēs give a thousand thousands and a myriad myriads in return for the noble-born princess of the Alans?

This episode the storytellers rehearse, as they sing their fables, in the following way:

Noble king Artasēs mounted a beautiful black horse,
and taking a strap of red leather with golden rings
and crossing the river like a swift-winged eagle
and throwing the strap of red leather with golden rings
he cast it around the waist of the Alan princess,
greatly paining the tender maiden's waist;
and he quickly brought her to his camp.

[...]

Similarly they also sing in their fables about the wedding:

A shower of gold rained down at the marriage of Artasēs;
it rained pearls at the wedding of Sat'inik [translation cited, pp. 191-193].

Movsēs Xorenac'i, *Patmut'iwñ Hayoc'*, II, 50, 5-15 [*Matenagirk' Hayoc'*, II, 1926-1928]

2. Marriage and funeral customs:

Եւ Ներսէս գերկուս զայսոսիկ յազգաց նախարարացն բառնայ. մի՝ զմերձաւորաց խնանութիւն, զոր վասն ազաիելոյ սեպիական ազատութեանն առնեին. եւ միւս՝ որ ի վերայ մեռելոց գործեին ոճիրս ըստ հեթանոսական սովորութեանն:

These two things he [archbishop Nersēs] abolished from the princely families: first, the marriage of close relatives, which they practiced to restrict the noble class [or in order to preserve their privileges avidly]; and second, the crimes they committed over the dead according to the heathen custom [translation cited, p. 275].

Movsēs Xorenac'ı, *Patmut'ıwn Hayoc'*, III, 20, 12 [*Matenagirk' Hayoc'*, II, 2032]

Ներսէս շինեաց սոյնպէս, կարգեաց կազմեաց եւ հաստատեաց, բազում եւ այլ ողորմութիւնս ուսուցանէր աշխարհի. բազում կարգս կանոնաց հայրենիս կարգէր: Եւ առ յոյսն յարութեան ցուցանէր ունել ակնկալութիւն. եւ զի մի՝ զմահ մարդկանն առանց դարձի միւսանգամ կենդանանալոյ համարիցին, եւ անյուսութեամբ ի վերայ գնացելոցն աւճիրս գործիցեն լալեացն կոծոյն, զանառակութիւնս աշխարհն դնելոյ. այլ յուսով Տեառն զալստեանն ակն ունել եւ յարութեանն նորոգութեան, եւ իւրաքանչիւր գործոցն զյաւիտենական զհատուցումն առնուլ իւրաքանչիւր յոյս ունելով՝ աւուր զալստեանն Տեառն սպասել: Եւ զի լինիցին յամուսնութեան արիճաւորք, մի՛ ստել եւ մի՛ դաւ բերել իւրեանց ամուսնութիւնընզալ կողմանց. եւ փախչել աւելի ի մերձաւոր եւ յազգին տոհմակից խառնակութեան ամուսնութենէն, եւ մանաւանդ ի մերձաւորական ի նուոց, եւ որ զամ մի այսմ մման լեալ էր ինչ:

Likewise he [archbishop Nersēs] built, ordered, and consolidated; he taught many other charities to the realm and regulated many canonical rules of his fathers. He taught everyone to look forward to the hope of the resurrection; not to believe human death irreversible and without return once again to life, nor to perform hopelessly over the departed the excessive weeping and lamentations of unbridled mourning, but rather to look forward with hope toward the coming of the Lord and the renewal of the Resurrection, to await the day of the coming of the Lord in the hope that each one will receive the eternal reward of his deeds. He also taught that marriage should be lawful, and neither to deceive nor betray one's spouse, and above all to refrain from incestuous marriages with close family relations within the clan, especially from intimacy with daughters-in-law or anything of the kind, as had once been the custom. [translation cited, pp. 113-114].

Buzandaran IV, 4, 40-43 [*Matenagirk' Hayoc'*, I, 316]

ARMENIA AFTER THE CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY

1. Translation techniques used in preaching

Եւ ի վարդապետել երանելոյն Սեսորոպայ՝ ոչ փոքր կրէր վտանգս, քանզի ինքն էր ընթերցող եւ թարգմանիչ. եւ եթե այլ ոք ընթեռնոյր, ուր նա ոչ հանդիպէր՝ զանխուլ ի ժողովրդոցն լինէր, յաղագս ոչ լինելոյ թարգմանիչ: Վասն որոյ եղ ի մտի հնարել գտանել նշանագիրս Չայոց լեզուիս. եւ արկեալ զանձն ի ջանս՝ պէս պէս փորձիւք տաժանէր:

In his teaching the blessed Mesrop endured no little hardship, for he was both reader and translator. And if someone else read when he was not present, it was unintelligible to the people since there was no translator. Therefore he decided to try to invent letters for the Armenian language. Putting himself to the task he became very worn out by his various attempts [translation cited, pp. 310-311].

Movsēs Xorenac’i, *Patmut’iwn Hayoc’*, III, 47, 7-8 [*Matenagirk’ Hayoc’*, II, 2070-2071]

2. Biographical note on Maštoc’

Ի ժամանակս սորա [Վռամշապիոյ] թագաւորութեանն տուաւ շնորի հոգողութեան յամենախնամէն Աստուածոյ առն միում ճշմարտի՝ Մաշտոց անուն կոչեցելոյ, որ էր ի գաւառէն Տարունոյ, ի Յացեկաց գեղջէ, որդի առն, որուն անուն էր Վարդան. ի տիս մանկութեան իւրոյ ուսեալ դպրութիւն գոյն, զհնուորեալ ի դուռն Յայոց արքային Խոսրովայ, կարգեալ յերամ մատենագիր արքունի դպրացն. վասն զի ասորի եւ յոյն գրով վճարեին յայնժամ զգործ թագաւորացն Յայոց՝ արքունի դպիրքն, զվճռոցն եւ զիրովարտակացն: Եւ սպասաւորեալ անդ ամս կարգաւորապէս առանց եպերանաց, յետ այնորիկ տենչացեալ կարգի վանականութեան՝ երթայ ի վանս բազմութեան եղբարց :

During his [Միշամաբուհի] reign solicitous grace was given by all-provident God to an upright man called Maštoc’, who was from the province of Tarōn, from the village of Hac’ekac’, the son of a man named Vardan. In the years of his youth he had studied Greek literature, had occupied a military position at the Armenian court of king Xosrov, and had been appointed to the office of the royal scribes; for the royal scribes at that time conducted the business of the Armenian kings, decrees and edicts, in Syriac and Greek. After serving there in a regular capacity for some years without reproach, he then became desirous of the monastic order. He went to the monastery of a large group of brothers [translation cited, pp. 46-47].

Łazar P’arpec’i, I, 10, 1-2 [*Matenagirk’ Hayoc’*, II, 2211-2212]

3. The creation of the Armenian alphabet.

2

Եւ իբրեւ [Մաշտոց] աւուրս բազումս անդէն ի նմին դեգերեր, յարուցեալ այնուհետեւ հասաներ առ սուրբ կաթողիկոսն Յայոց Մեծաց, որոյ անունն ճանաչէր Սահակ, զոր պատրաստական գտանէր նմին փութոյ հաւանեալ: Եւ միանգամայն յաւժարութեամբ գումարեալ հանդերձ աղաթիւք մեծաւք առ Աստուած կանխեին, վասն ամենայն ոգւոց քրիստոսաբեր փրկութեանն հասանելոյն: Եւ զայն առնեին աւուրս բազումս:

Ապա ելանէր նոցա պարգեւական յամենաբարին Աստուածոյ ժողովել զաշխարհահոգ խորհուրդն երանելի միաբանելոցն, եւ ի գիւտ նշանագրաց Յայաստան ազգին հասանել:

Բազում հարցափորձի եւ քննութեան զանծինս պարապեցուցեալ եւ բազում աշխատութեանց համբերեալ, ազդ առնեին ապա եւ զկանխագոյն խնդրելին իւրեանց թագաւորին Յայոց, որոյ անուն կոչէր Վռամշապուհ:

Յայնժամ պատմեր նոցա արքայն վասն առն ուրումն ասորոյ եպիսկոպոսի ազնուականի՝ Դանիել անուն կոչեցելոյ, որոյ յանկարծ ուրեմն գտեալ նշանագիրս աղփաբետաց հայերէն լեզուի: Եւ իբրեւ պատմեցաւ նոցա յարքայէ վասն գտելոյն ի Դանիելէ, յաւժարեցին զարքայ՝ փոյթ առնել վասն պիտոյիցն այնոցիկ: Եւ նա առաքել զոմն Վահրիճ անուն հրովարտակաւք առ այր մի երէց, որոյ անուն Յաբել կոչեին, որ էր մերձաւոր Դանիելի ասորոյ եպիսկոպոսի:

Իսկ Յաբելին զայն լուեալ, փութանակի հասաներ առ Դանիելն, եւ նախ ինքն տեղեկանայր ի Դանիելէ նշանագրացն, եւ ապա առեալ ի նմանէ առաքել առ արքայն յերկիրն Յայոց: Ի հինգերորդի ամի թագաւորութեան նորա ի նա հասուցաներ: Իսկ արքային հանդերձ միաբան սրբովքն Սահակաւ եւ Մաշթոցի՝ ընկալեալ զնշանագիրսն ի Յաբելէն, ուրախ լինեին:

Իսկ իբրեւ ի վերայ հասեալ, թե չեն բաւական նշանագիրքն՝ ողջ ածել զսիւղոբայս զկապս հայերէն լեզուոյն, մանաւանդ զի եւ նշանագիրքն իսկ յայլոց դպրութեանց քաղեալք եւ յարուցեալք դիպեցան, յետ այնորիկ դարձեալ կրկին անգամ ի նոյն հոգս դառնային, եւ նմին ելս խնդրեին ժամանակս ինչ:

[Է]

Վասն որոյ առեալ երանելոյն Մաշթոցի դաս մի մանկտոյ հրամանաւ արքայի եւ միաբանութեամբ սրբոյն Սահակայ, եւ հրաժարեալք ի միմեանց համբուրիւ սրբութեանն՝ խաղայր զնայր ի հինգերորդ ամի Վառնշապիոյ արքային Յայոց, եւ երթեալ հասաներ ի կողմանս Արամի՝ ի քաղաքս Երկուս Ասորոց. որոց առաջինն Եղեսիա կոչի, եւ երկրորդին Ամիդ անուն: Ընդդէմ լինէր սուրբ եպիսկոպոսացն, որոց առաջնոյն Բաբիլաս անուն եւ երկրորդին Ակակիոս. հանդերձ կղերականաւքն եւ իշխանաւքն քաղաքաց պատահեալ, եւ բազում մեծարանս ցուցեալ հասելոցն ընդունեին հոգաբարձութեամբ ըստ Քրիստոսի անուանելոցն կարգի:

Իսկ աշակերտասէր վարդապետին զտարեալսն ընդ իւր յերկուս բաժանեալ, զոմանս յատորի դպրութիւնն կարգէր <ի քաղաքին Եղեսացոց>, եւ զոմանս ի յունական դպրութիւնն՝ անտի ի Սամուսատական քաղաքն գումարէր:

[Ը]

Եւ նորա իւրովք հաւասարաւք զսովորականն առաջի եղեալ զաղաւթս եւ զտքնութիւնս եւ զպաղատանս արտասուալից, զխստամբերութիւնս, զհոգս զաշխարհահեծս, յիշելով զասացեալսն մարգարէին, եթե՝ «Յորժամ հեծեծեսցես, յայնժամ կեցցես»:

Եւ այնպէս բազում աշխատութեանց համբերեալ վասն իւրոյ ազգին բարեաց ինչ աւճան գտանելոյ: Որում պարգեւէր իսկ վիճակ յամենաշնորհողէն Աստուածոյ. հայրական չափուն ծնեալ ծնունդս նորոգ եւ սքանչելի՝ սուրբ աջովն իւրով, նշանագիրս հայերէն լեզուին: Եւ անդ վաղվաղակի նշանակեալ, անուանեալ եւ կարգեալ, յարիմէր սիղոբայիւք կապաւք:

Եւ ապա հրաժարեալ յեպիսկոպոսէն սրբոյ, հանդերձ աւզնականաւք իւրովք իջանէր ի քաղաքն Սամոսատացոց, յորում մեծապատիւ իսկ յեպիսկոպոսէն եւ յեկեղեցոյն մեծարեալ լինէր:

Եւ անդէն ի նմին քաղաքի գրիչ ոմն հելլենական դպրութեան Յռոփանոս անուն գտեալ, որով զամենայն ընտրութիւնս նշանագրացն զմրբագոյնն եւ զլայնագոյնն, զկարճն եւ զերկայնն, զառանձինն եւ զկրկնաւորն, միանգամայն յարիմեալ եւ յանկուցեալ, ի թարգմանութիւն դառնային հանդերձ արամբք երկուք, աշակերտաւքն իւրովք. որոց առաջնոյն Յովիան անուն կոչեին, յեկեղեաց գաւառէն, եւ երկրորդին Յովսէփ անուն ի Պաղանական տանէն: Եւ եղեալ սկիզբն թարգմանելոյ զգիրս նախ յԱռական Սողոմոնի, որ ի սկզբանն իսկ ծանաւթս իմաստութեանն ընծայեցուցանէ լինել, ասելով՝ եթե՝ «Ճանաչել զիմաստութիւն եւ զխրատ, իմանալ զբանս հանճարոյ»: Որ եւ գրեցաւ ձեռամբն այնորիկ գրչի, հանդերձ ուսուցանելով զմանկունս գրիչս նմին դպրութեան:

VI

Maštoc', after having dealt with this [with the best way of carrying out missionary activity] for many days, went to the holy patriarch of Greater Armenia, whose name was Sahak, whom he found ready to help, since he [Sahak] too had the same concern. And they, meeting in full agreement, immediately made great prayers to God, in order to find a way to obtain, for all souls, Christ's redemption. And they did this for many days.

Then it was granted to them as a gift of a beautiful God, to gather together the assembly of their blessed helper which had the country in its care and to try to find writing signs [a script] for the Armenian nation.

After having dedicated themselves to long and profound searches and after having supported many difficulties, they informed the king of Armenia, whose name was Vramšapuh, too about what they had already looked for.

Then the king told them about a Syrian, an honorable bishop, named Daniël, who by chance had found alphabetical signs for Armenian. And when the king told them about Daniël's discovery, they exhorted him to care for these important things. He then sent a certain person, Vahrič by name, with a written order, to a priest named Habël, who was in contact with the Syrian bishop Daniël [or: "who was a relative of the Syrian bishop Daniël"].

Now Habël, having heard these things, went in haste to Daniël, after being instructed in the use of the letters, and then, having received them, he sent them to the king in the country of the Armenians. They arrived in the fifth year of the reign of Vramšapuh. And the king and the saints Sahak and Maštoc', when they received the alphabet from Habël, were filled with joy.

But when they realised that the alphabet was not suitable for rendering completely the syllabic links of Armenian, the more so because the letters had been gathered from the writing systems of other languages and so to speak resuscitated, they had the same worry again and for a while they tried to find a solution.

VII

Thus the blessed Maštoc', by order of the king and with the consent of Saint Sahak, took a group of children, bid goodbye to king and to the patriarch with a holy kiss and, having set forth in the fifth year of the reign of Vramšapuh, reached the country of the Armeans, in two cities of Syria, one called Edessa and the other Amid. He presented himself to the holy bishops, one named Babilas [Rabbulas Paqidis] and the other Akakios and they both came to meet him accompanied by the clergy and by the principal inhabitants of the city, and having greatly honoured the new arrivals, they greeted them with solicitude, according to Christian usage.

Now Maštoc', a master who loves his disciples, divided into two groups the persons whom he had brought with him, and he designated some to study Syriac literature <in the city of Edessa>, while he made the others gather in Samosata, to study the Greek literature.

VIII

And he, with his companions, went back to the usual prayers, the wakes and the supplications full of tears, the mortifications and the worries and the weeping for the world, remembering the saying of the prophet: "When you will weep, then you will live" [Isaiah XXX,15].

Thus he supported many difficulties, in order to find a beneficial help for his nation, and God, who gives all, gave him the fortune to generate, like a father, with his saintly right hand a new and marvellous birth, the alphabet of the Armenian language. And then, immediately, he traced, named, ordered the letters and adapted them in syllabic links.

Then, bidding goodbye to the holy bishop [of Edessa], he went down with his helpers towards the city of Samosata, where he received great honour from the local bishop and clergy.

In this same city there was a scribe, expert in Greek, by name Hróp'anos [Rufinus?], with whom he adapted and completed all types of letters, the thin and the broad, the short and the long, the single and the double. Then, he and two of his disciples, one named Yovhan, from the district of Ekeleac', the other named Yovsēp', of the house of Pañan, dedicated themselves to the translations. And thus they devoted themselves to the translation of the Bible, starting with the Proverbs of Solomon, which from the very beginning recommend to know wisdom, saying: "To know wisdom and instruction, to understand the words of prudence" [Proverbs 1,2]. This was written by the same scribe, when he was teaching the youth to write in the same script.

Koriwn, *Vark' Maštoc'i*, chap. VI-VIII [*Matenagirk' Hayoc', I*, 236-238]

[Մեսրոպ] յաղաւթս ապաւինի: Եւ տեսանէ ոչ ի քուն երագ եւ ոչ յարթնութեան տեսիլ, այլ ի սրտին գործարանի երեւութացեալ հոգւոյն աչաց թաթ ձեռին աջոյ գրելով ի վերայ վիմի. զի որպէս ի ձեան վերջք գօին կուտեալ ունէր քարն:

[Mesrop] took refuge in prayer. And he saw not a dream in sleep, not a vision while awake, but in the depths of his heart there appeared to the eyes of his soul a right hand writing on rock; for the stone retained the shapes as tracks are traced in snow [translation cited, p. 320].

Movsēs Xorenac'i, *Patmut'wn Hayoc', III*, 53, 6-7 [*Matenagirk' Hayoc', II*, 2081]