

# The Rebirth of Kingdoms in Armenia and its Literary Consequences (ca. 850–1070)

Jesse S. Arlen

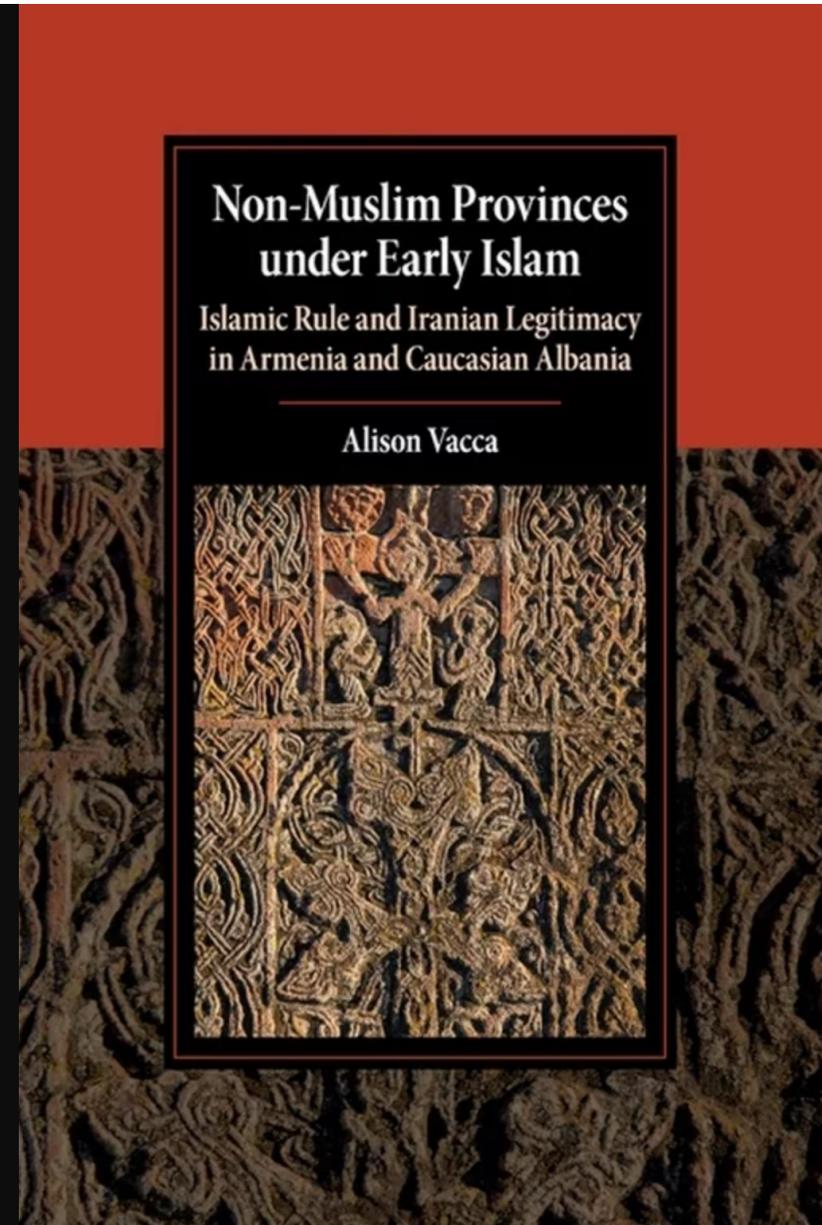
Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center;

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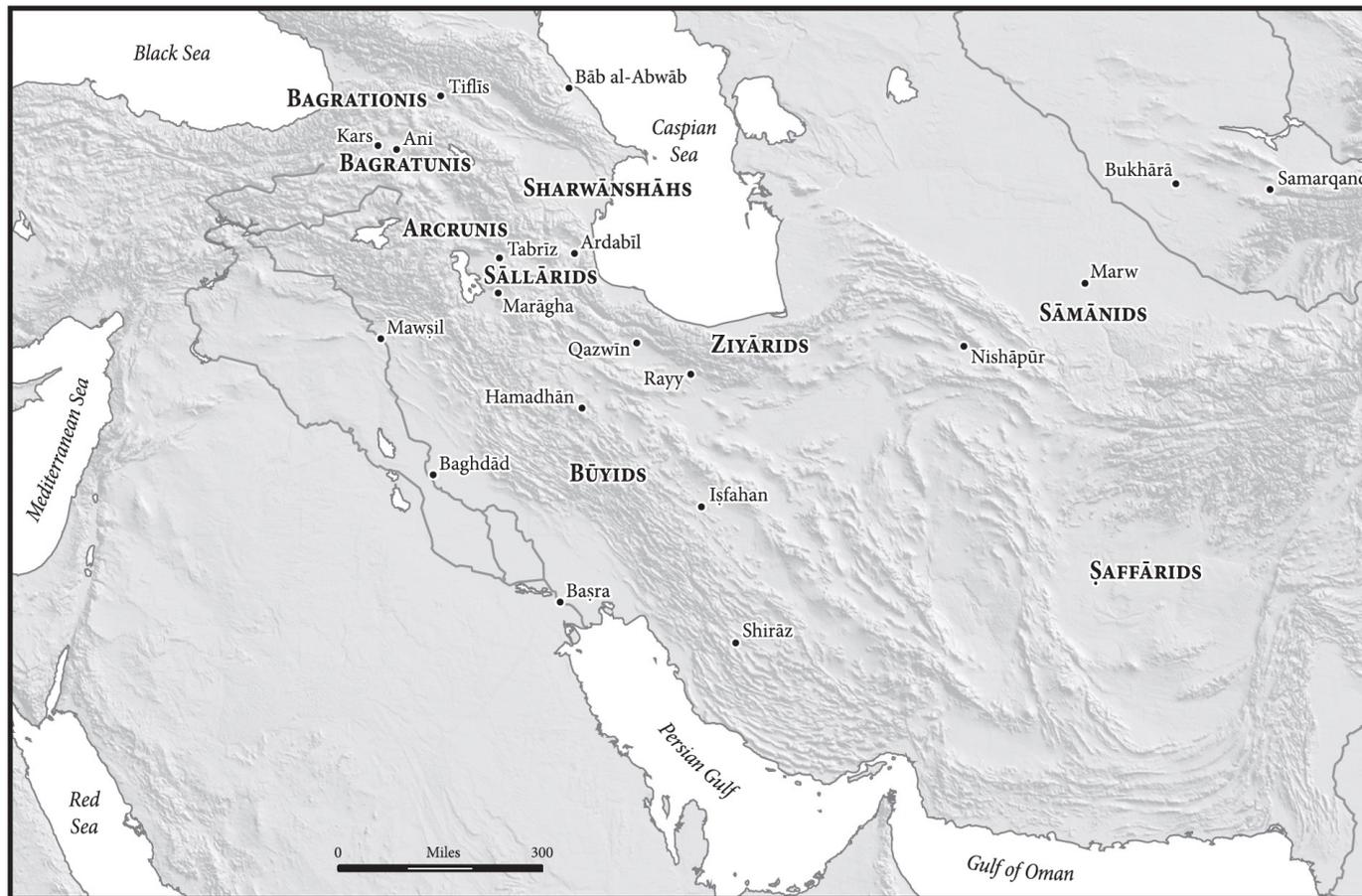
# Centrifugal Movement in the Caliphate

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- 9<sup>th</sup> c. begins a period of decentralization across the caliphate
  - local rulers establish autonomous (mostly Iranian) polities
  - Establishment of Armenian Bagratid (880s), Artsrunid (908), and Georgian Bagrationi (888) kingdoms part of this larger trend within the Islamic world
  - Counterbalance to increasing autonomy of the caliphal governor (*ostikan*; *amīr*) of the North
- 



# Map of the Iranian *oikoumene* in the 10<sup>th</sup> c.



From Vacca, *Non-Muslim Provinces under Early Islam*, p. 6

# Medieval Armenian kingdoms of the 9<sup>th</sup> / 10<sup>th</sup> centuries





# Eastern Byzantine Expansion and Ecclesiastical Diplomacy (then Polemics)

- Byzantine resurgence and expansion under the Macedonian dynasty (867–1056)
- Attempt to court favor with Armenians
  - portrayal of Basil I (867–886) as descended from the line of Arsacid kings
  - ecclesiastical diplomacy used to advance Byzantine foreign policy in the Caucasus
    - synod of Shirakawan (862), with Ashot Bagratuni and Catholicos Zak'aria Dzagets'i (sed. 855–877)
    - attempt to downplay Christological/ecclesiological differences so as to garner support of local Christian rulers against the “common enemy” (Islam)
    - Likewise in letter of Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos (sed. 901–907, 912–925) addressed to Catholicos Yovhannēs Draskhanakertts'i (sed. 898–924) written in 913/4 and preserved in the latter's *History of Armenia*.

105. The Third Byzantine Expansion into Armenia, 966–1064



Robert Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas*, map 87

# The Making of Christian Kingdoms in the Caliphate

- 884: crown sent by caliph Caliph al-Mu'tamid (870 – 892) and brought to Ašot by the ostikan in order for him to be crowned king of Armenia by the catholicos
- Then Byzantine Emperor Basil I (867 – 886), competing for Bagratuni loyalty, offered gestures of friendship, honor, and peace, referring to Ašot in a letter as his “beloved son (որդի սիրելի).”
- 888: Iberian Bagrationis declare independence
- 908: Gagik Artsruni makes alliance with the Sājid governor (*ostikan*) of Armīniya and Ādharbayjān, Yūsuf b. Abi 'l Sāj Dīwdād (r. 901 – 919, 922 – 929); in return, *ostikan* Yūsuf recognized Gagik as “king of Armenia.”
  - set out on campaign **against Bagratids**; leads to capture, imprisonment, and then death of Bagratid king Smbat

# Instability (and Mobility) of the Ecclesiastical Center

- Catholicate moves around during this time
  - 450s–920s: Duin
  - 920s–940s: Aghtamar (Artsrunid)
  - 940s–990s: Argina (Bagratid)
  - 990s–1050s: Ani (Bagratid)
  - 1050s–1440s: difference places in Cilicia (esp. Dzovk, Hromkla, Sis)

# Autonomy, Economic Flourishing, and Royal Patronage

- Economic flourishing across the caliphate and Mediterranean world in this period (9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> c.)
- Autonomy of local rulers means they have more wealth at their disposal
- Some of this wealth is funneled into public works projects and patronage, including churches, monasteries, manuscripts, literary works, etc.

the era of large  
monastic foundations

- most founded between 9<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries
  - **Sewan** (874)
  - **Tat'ew** (enlarged/expanded throughout the ninth–tenth centuries)
  - **Hořomos** (ca. 930s–940s)
  - **Sanahin** (965)
  - **Hařbat** (966)
  - **Narek** (ca. 930s–940s)



# Narek Monastery



- founded ca. 930s–940s
- Anania, first abbot





# Literary Consequences

Royal Patronage and the Commissioning  
of (Monastic) Writers:

**The Case of Narek Monastery**

Armenia  
operator



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## Anania of Narek (ca. 910–ca. 990)

- first abbot of Narek monastery
- Commissioned Works
  - **Refutation of the T'ondrakians** (Հակաճատութիւն ընդդէմ Թոնդրակեցւոց)
    - commissioned by Catholicos Anania Mokac'i
  - **Book of Instruction** (Խրատագիրք)
    - commissioned by Bishop Xaç'ik, future Catholicos Xaç'ik I Aršaruni
  - **Root of Faith** (Հաւատարմարտ)
    - commissioned by Catholicos Xaç'ik

# Literary Consequences

Royal Patronage and the Commissioning of Histories

# The Royal Patronage of Histories & the Rise of Regional Histories

- **Bagratid** perspective
  - \*Łewond Vardapet (8<sup>th</sup> c.)
  - \*Movses Khorenats'ı (?)
  - Stepanos Tarōnets'ı, *Universal History* (completed 1004/5)
- **Artsrunid** perspective
  - T'ovma Artsruni and the Anonymous Continuator, *History of the House of the Artsrunik'*
- **Aghuank' (Caucasian Albania)** perspective
  - Movsēs Daskhurants'ı [Kaghankatuats'ı], *History of Caucasian Albania*
- **Siwnik'** perspective
  - Step'anos Orbelean, *History of Siwnik'*

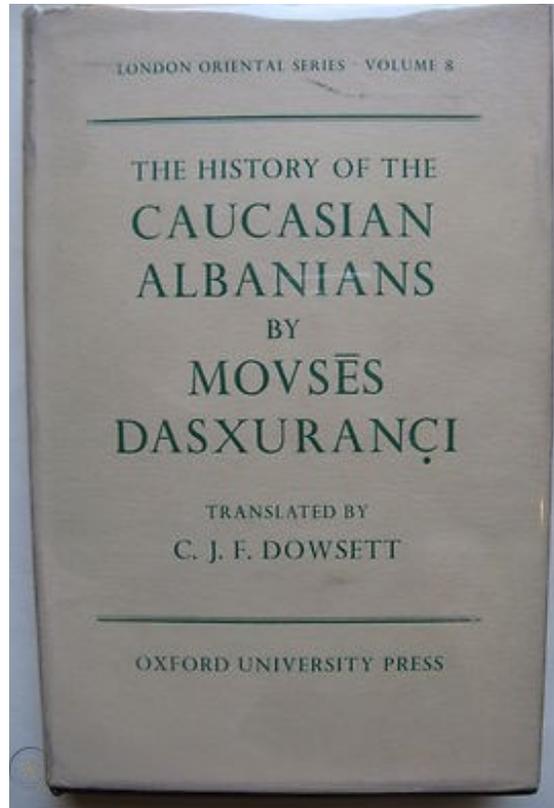


Ghewond/Bagratuni Perspective:

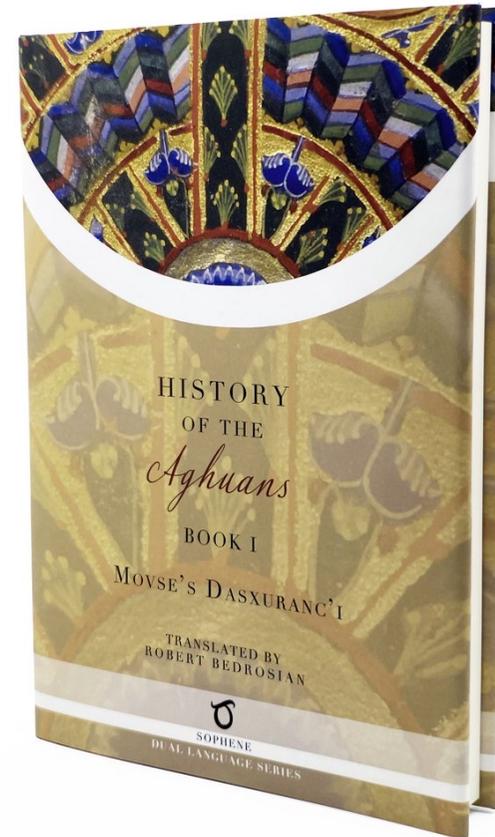
Quiescence & Submission to the Caliphate

is in the best interest of Armenia(ns)

## Պատմութիւն Աղուանից աշխարհի



*The History of the Caucasian Albanians* by Movsēs Daskhurants'i. Translated by C. J. F. Dowsett. London Oriental Series 8. London: Oxford University Press, 1961.



Movses Daskhurants'i, *History of the Aghuans*, Book 1 and II. Translated by Robert Bedrosian. Sophene, 2020–2021.

Աղուանք

*Aghuank*

Caucasian Albania

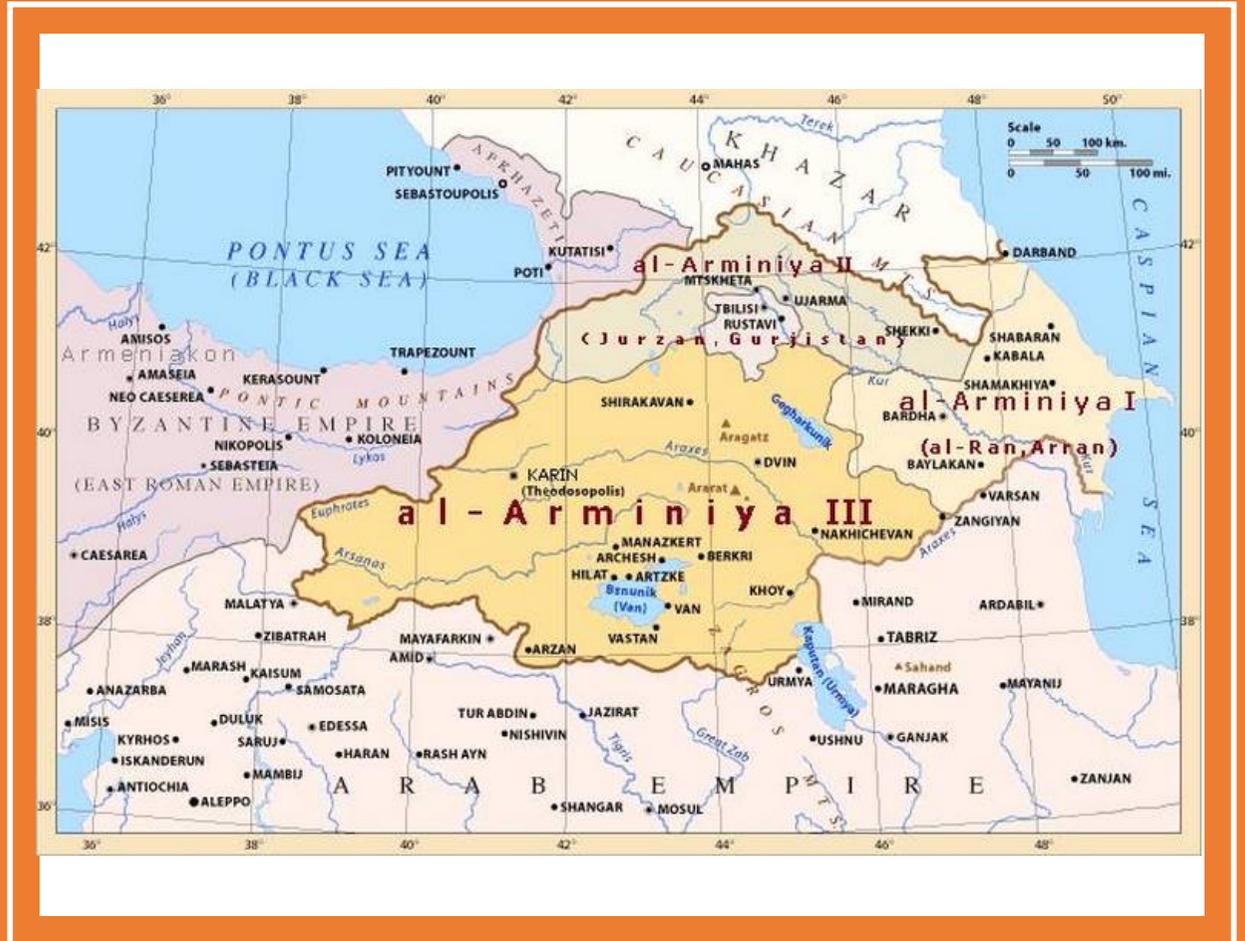
Ἀλβανία (Gk)

աղու (aghu, 'sweet')



الأرمينيا

al-armīniya



AZERBAIJAN, ARMENIA, CAUCASUS, NAGORNO KARABAKH



# Perspectives | Who were the Caucasian Albanians?

Both in Azerbaijan and Armenia, the history of these medieval people is misunderstood and is being manipulated for political ends.

Javid Agha Jun 7, 2021



## Popular

- 1 Uzbekistan: People no longer about power shortages
- 2 Kazakhstan: Owners of Russia protest steep registration fee
- 3 Kyrgyzstan: President's allies parliamentary race  
Bermet Talant

# Albanian-Udi Preacher Appointed to Newly Liberated Monastery in Azerbaijan's Karabakh Region

By Gunay Hajiyeva December 10, 2020

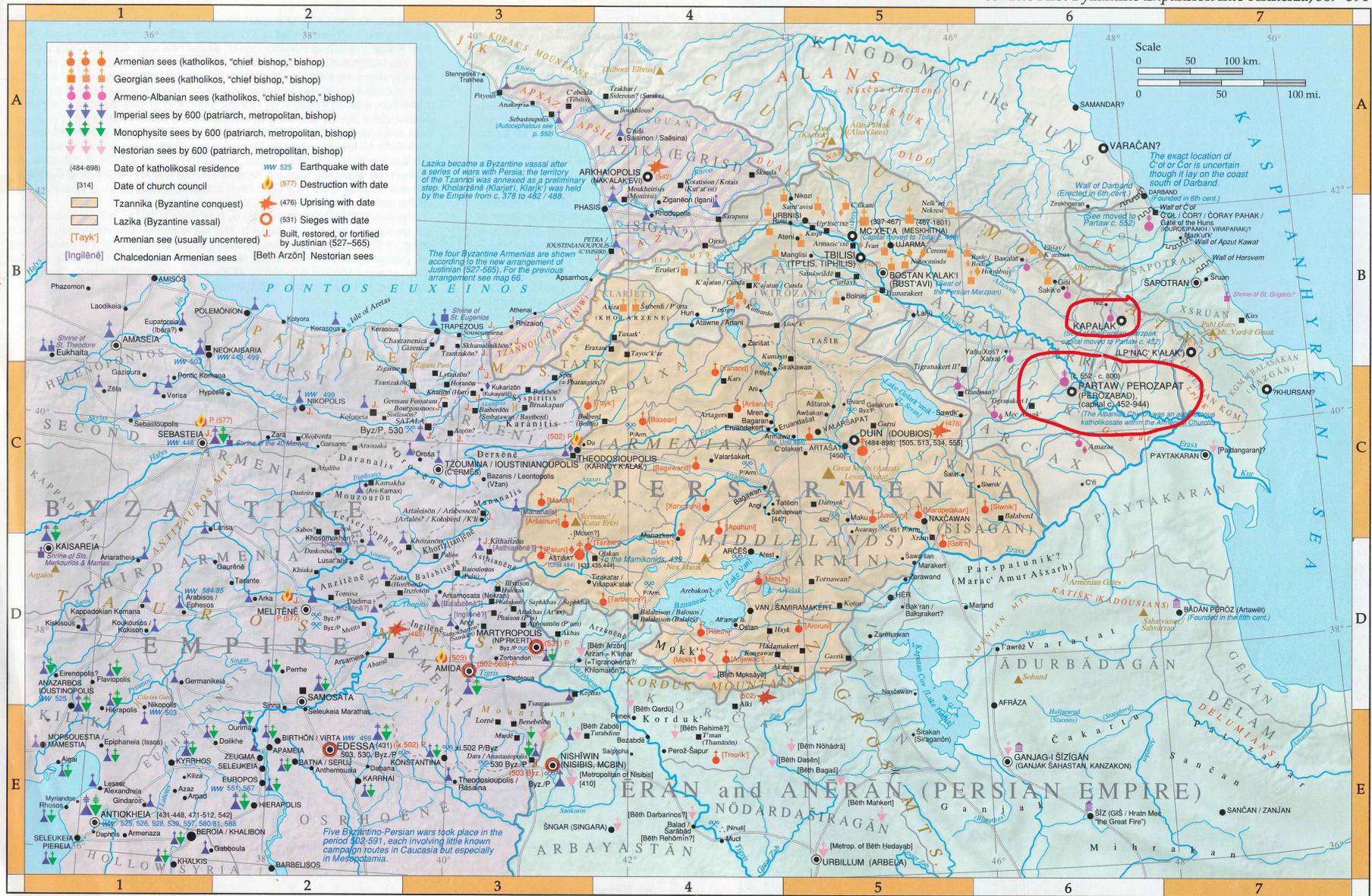


Khudavang monastery complex in the Kalbajar district of Azerbaijan / *Wikipedia*



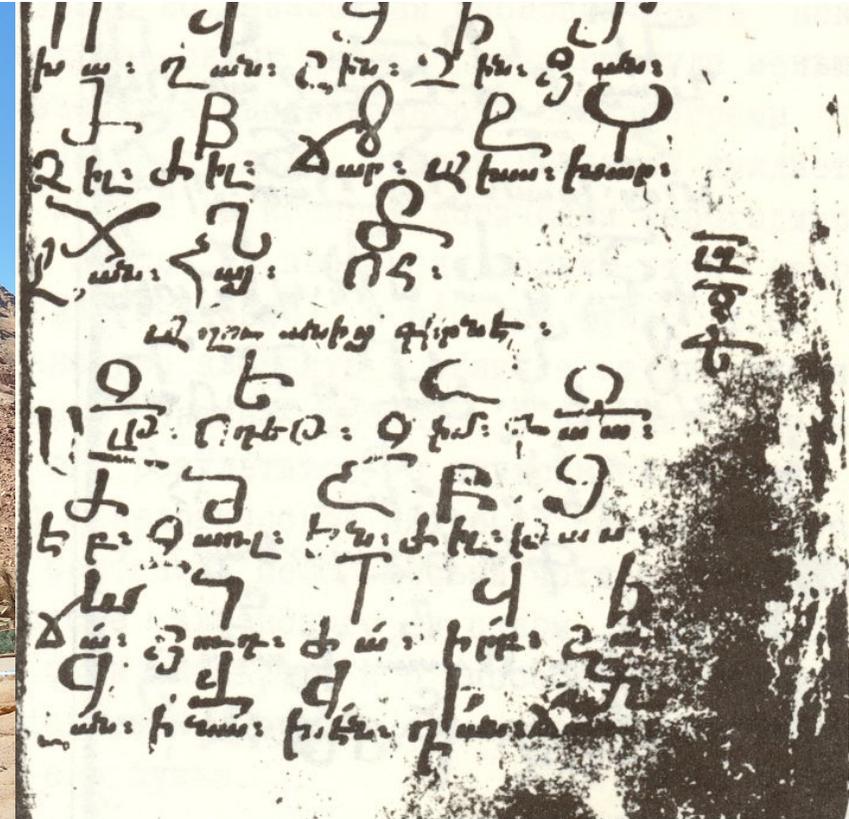


65. The First Byzantine Expansion into Armenia, 387–591





ST. CATHERINE'S MONASTERY  
ON MOUNT SINAI, EGYPT

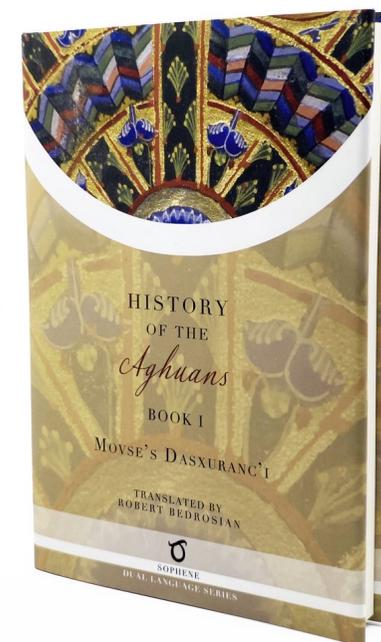


CAUCASIAN ALBANIAN  
ALPHABET



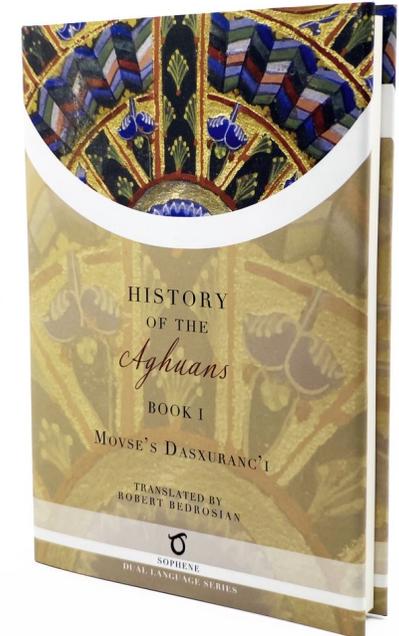
# history of Caucasian Albania

“This *History* is the sole-surviving written account of a culture now extinct. It is the only literary artifact—aside from incidental notices in Armenian and Georgian historical sources—which describes events of note from the socio-economic, ecclesiastical, political, and military history of the Aghuan people. The *History of the Aghuans* contains a wide range of invaluable and unique historical and ethnographical information: from an astounding description of a pagan cult's ritual, to the Christian cult of relics, from the Aghuan king at table, to a description of the royal court on the move, from descriptions of Sasanian presents, dress, and court protocols to a priceless interview with a Khazar Qaqan (Khagan). Indeed, the *History* is a primary, but under-utilized, source for the history of the Turkic Khazar kingdom (7-10th centuries). Additionally, it provides otherwise unknown information on Caucasian tribes and peoples, resident and nomadic, and supplements and enhances our information on Aghuania's neighbors.” – Robert Bedrosian



# history of Caucasian Albania

- three books
- independent but related
- compiled from different sources/authors
- from creation to 10<sup>th</sup> c. (with later notices to 12<sup>th</sup> c.)
- local and international



“Situated among the towering mountains of the Caucasus, the land of Albania is fair and alluring, with many natural advantages. The great river Kur flows gently through it bearing fish great and small, and it throws itself into the Caspian Sea. In the plains round about there is to be found much bread and wine, naphtha and salt, silk and cotton, and innumerable olive-trees. Gold, silver, copper, and ochre are found in the mountains. As for wild animals, there are the lion, the leopard, the panther, and the wild ass, and among the many birds, the eagle, the hawk, &c. And it has the great Partaw as its capital.”

– translated by Charles Dowsett



# origin of Caucasian Albania(ns)

“Here begins the [history of the] government of the Albanians. We cannot say anything definite for the benefit of our readers about the people who inhabited the great Mount Caucasus from the creation of the world down to **Vagharshak, king of Armenia**. On the establishment of his rule over the northerners, he summoned to him the **wild, foreign tribes in the northern plain** and round the foot of the Caucasus and in the valleys and ravines south thereof down to the entrance to the plain, and **commanded them to cease their plundering and murdering and to pay tribute to the king**. He appointed over them governors and prefects of whom the chief, by order of Vagharshak, was a certain **Arian** of the Sisakan family, descended from **Japheth**, who received the plains and mountains of Albania from the river Araxes to the fortress of Hnarakert. And they called the country **Aghuank'** on account of the sweetness of his ways, for they called him **aghu** ['sweet'] on account of his agreeable disposition. And from among his descendants, they say, famous and valiant men, many governors were appointed by Vagharshak the Parthian; and from his son, they say, descended the inhabitants of the principalities of **Uti, Gardman, (Covdk , and Gargark')**. Up to here we have shown the [various] genealogies.”

– translated by Charles Dowsett

## St. Eliseus “the illuminator of the east”

“In the days of the appearance of the Sun of Justice and the advent of our salvation, the Inscrutable Being, the Light of Glory, the Emanation of His Father's Being, who, having completed His ministry to all men, dwelt again in the glory of His being from which He was never separated, He sent his holy and beloved disciples as preachers throughout the world, and the holy apostle **Thaddaeus** was appointed for us easterners. He came to the Armenian canton of Artaz and there suffered martyrdom at the hands of **Sanatruk, king of Armenia**, and his disciple **St. Eliseus** returned to Jerusalem and related the enviable martyrdom of his fellow apostle. Thereupon he was ordained in the Holy Spirit by St. James, the brother of Our Lord, who was the first patriarch of Jerusalem. He received the east as his diocese, travelled from Jerusalem via Persia, and escaping from the Armenians, penetrated among the Mask'ut'k'...

– translated by Charles Dowsett

## St. Eliseus “the illuminator of the east”

“He commenced his preaching in Choghay and attracting many disciples in many different places, announced the Salvation. From there he arrived at the town of Srharn in the province of Uti with three disciples, some of whose wicked brothers had pursued them. One of the disciples was martyred by them and the other two deserted the blessed **Eliseus** and followed the murderers, but the holy patriarch came to **Gis**. he founded a church there and offered up bloodless sacrifices. This place was the original source of all the churches and cities and the conversion of us easterners. From there he crossed the plain of Zargun to the site of the sacrificial altars of the heathen idolaters and there he received the martyr's crown. It is not clear who did the deed. The murderers threw the holy remains into a ditch in the place called Homenk', where they lay hidden for a long time.”

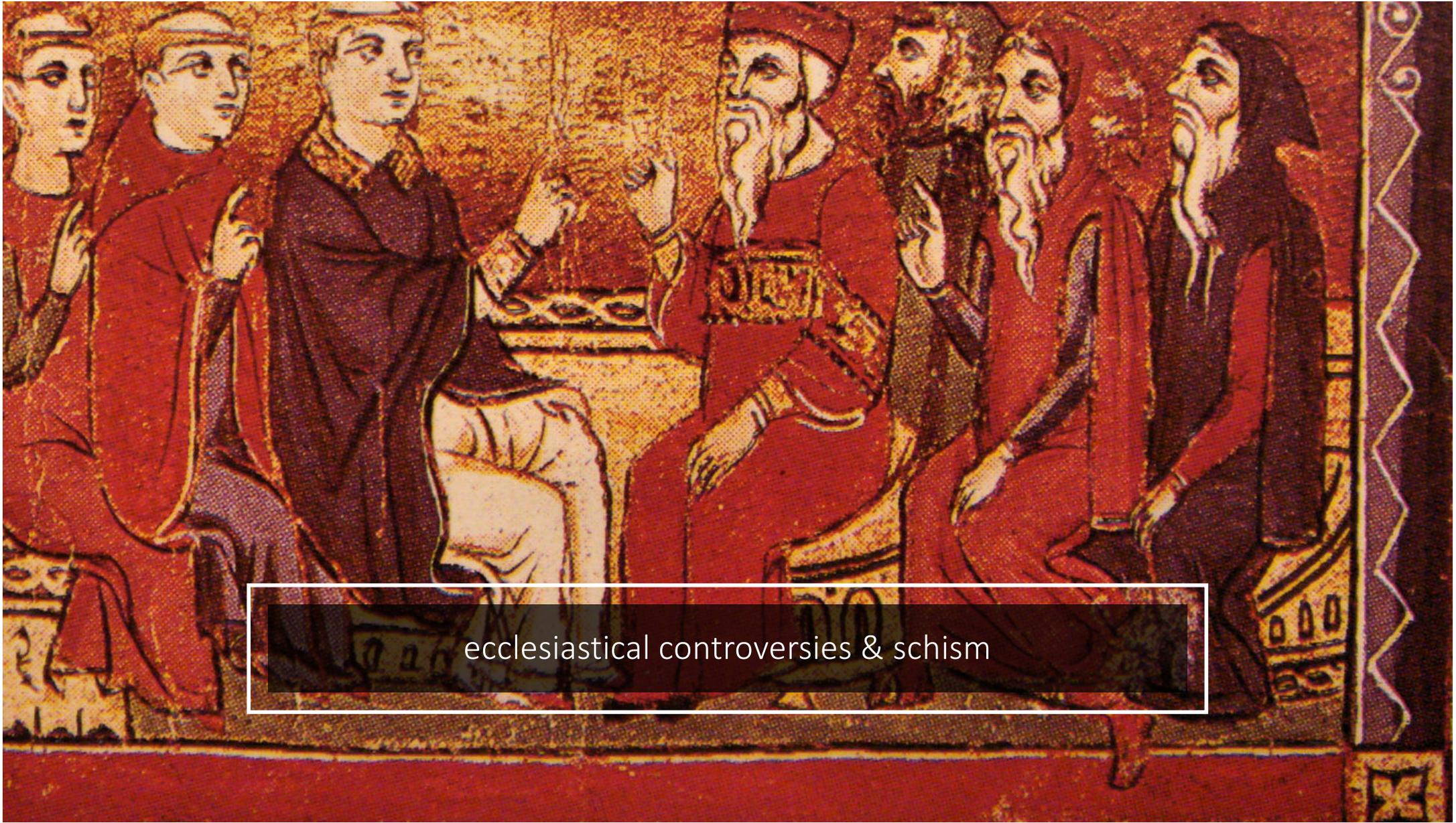
– translated by Charles Dowsett

វិសាមញ្ញវិសាមញ្ញ

finger-cutters

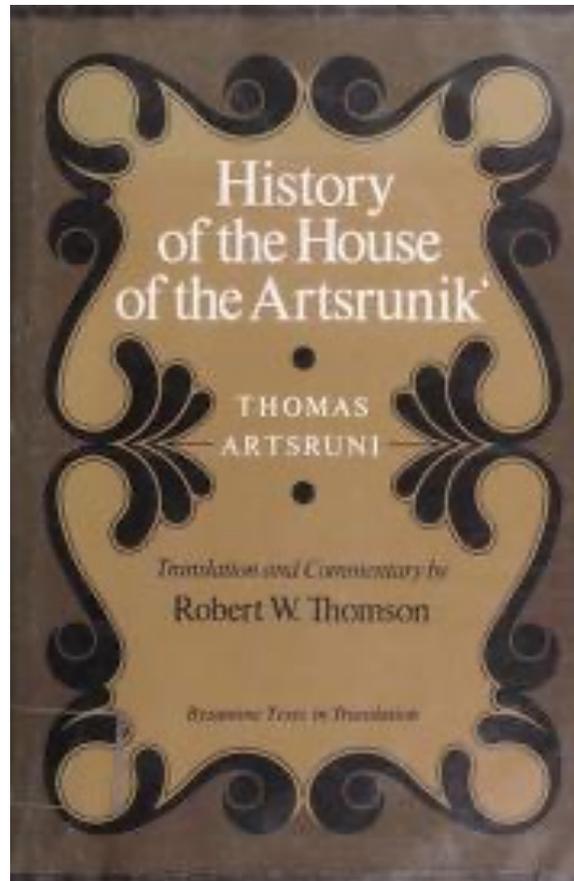
Book I, chapter 18





ecclesiastical controversies & schism

Thomas Arstruni.  
*History of the House  
of the Artsrunik*.  
Translation and  
commentary by  
Robert W.  
Thomson. Detroit:  
Wayne State  
University Press,  
1985.



THOMAS ARTSRUNI  
.  
**History of the  
House of the Artsrunik**  
.

*Translation and Commentary by*  
Robert W. Thomson

*Wayne State University Press  
Detroit  
1985*

# Thomas Arstruni and an anonymous continuators | *History of the house of the Artsrunik*

- Tovma, cleric of Artsruni house
- commissioned by:
  - prince Grigor-Derenik (r. 857–868, 874–887)
  - Gagik (r. prince 903/4 – 908; king 908 – ca. 943/4)
- anonymous continuators
  - panegyric account of King Gagik

The Kingdom of Vaspourakan, 908-1021



# Preface

“...I, who received the request to compose this work from you, **Grigor, lord of the Artsrunik’ and prince of Vaspurakan**, have accepted your command which your fond desires imposed on you. In the narrative of this book I shall indicate the **genealogy and nature of your ancestors**; I shall set out in order the dates according to the birth of each one of them, bringing the account down in full to our own time. Concerning events in Armenia wrought by the rule of the Muslims, with diligent obedience following your command I shall set to work. To the best of my ability I shall set out in this history in summary form the most important events and what are the appropriate ones. I shall indicate in this history the least and smallest remnants of records relative to events and places from the earlier and previous historians of our native lords of **the Artsruni family, so that their valour and virtue may be clearly revealed by name, place, and time...**

# Preface

“...And I shall seek out the most important ideas as inspiration for this account: who they were, and when, [descended] from whom, where, how, how many, what sort they were, the **manner of their reigns**, and the ways in which they distinguished themselves; **also concerning their wars and victories**, whether they were victorious or were defeated, and how some of them for various reasons provided help and advantage to themselves or their comrades. Whatever descriptive information under these topics is included in [previous] accounts we shall abbreviate in this book, using to the best of our ability **the writings of the ancient prophetic histories and the newer teachers of Christ’s church, and the secular tales of industrious and ingenious men**, who provided like nurses to us their followers the wholesome and unadulterated food of sweet and valuable nourishment, bringing us to mature and perfect knowledge in love of science and fear of God— intelligent and wise, zealous for his excellent and enduring riches and those here in this world.”  
– translated by Robert Thomson

## opening of book i

“It is [only] with great effort that one can discover the **genealogy of the house of the Artsrunik’** because of the far-off times and the **disappearance of archives** in Armenia. But the pressing command of your lordship obliges us to pursue rapidly this search and to set down in proper style and to register in this book your desire in eloquent words. **Great labour have I expended in the search for what is reliable, perusing the written works of antiquarians and many historical accounts; and I have written down whatever I was able to discover, beginning from Adam down to our own time.**”

– translated by Robert Thomson

Thomas Arstruni and anonymous continuators | *History of the house of the Artsrunik*

- three books
- from creation to tenth century
  - later additions take it to twelfth c.
- claims Artsruni descended from Sennacherib, King of Assyria (r. 705–681 BC)





south  
Caucasus /  
armenia



# mountain-dwellers

“Here I shall expound in brief the nature of the **inhabitants of the mountain**: what sort and manner of people they are, how they manage to live and supply their needs at great labour and enormous trouble. They  **dwell in deep gorges, in clefts in the mountains, in deep forests, and on mountaintops**. They live separately by families, so distant from each other that if one of their strong men were to shout from a very high place he would hardly be able to make his voice carry anywhere; you would think it a mere echo from the rocks. Half of them lose their native tongue from living so far apart and never greeting each other, and their mutual speech is a patchwork of borrowed words. They are so profoundly ignorant of each other that **they even need interpreters**. For food they use certain seeds, especially that known as millet, which some call bread at time of famine. This they sow in the middle of the forests and irrigate by means of their feet or with double-pronged hoes. They hide their nakedness with clothes of wool. For footwear they use a form of boot made from goatskin. And one food and one garment suffice them both winter and summer. **As weapons they have pikes, which they carry with them continuously in readiness against the beasts that live on the mountain...**

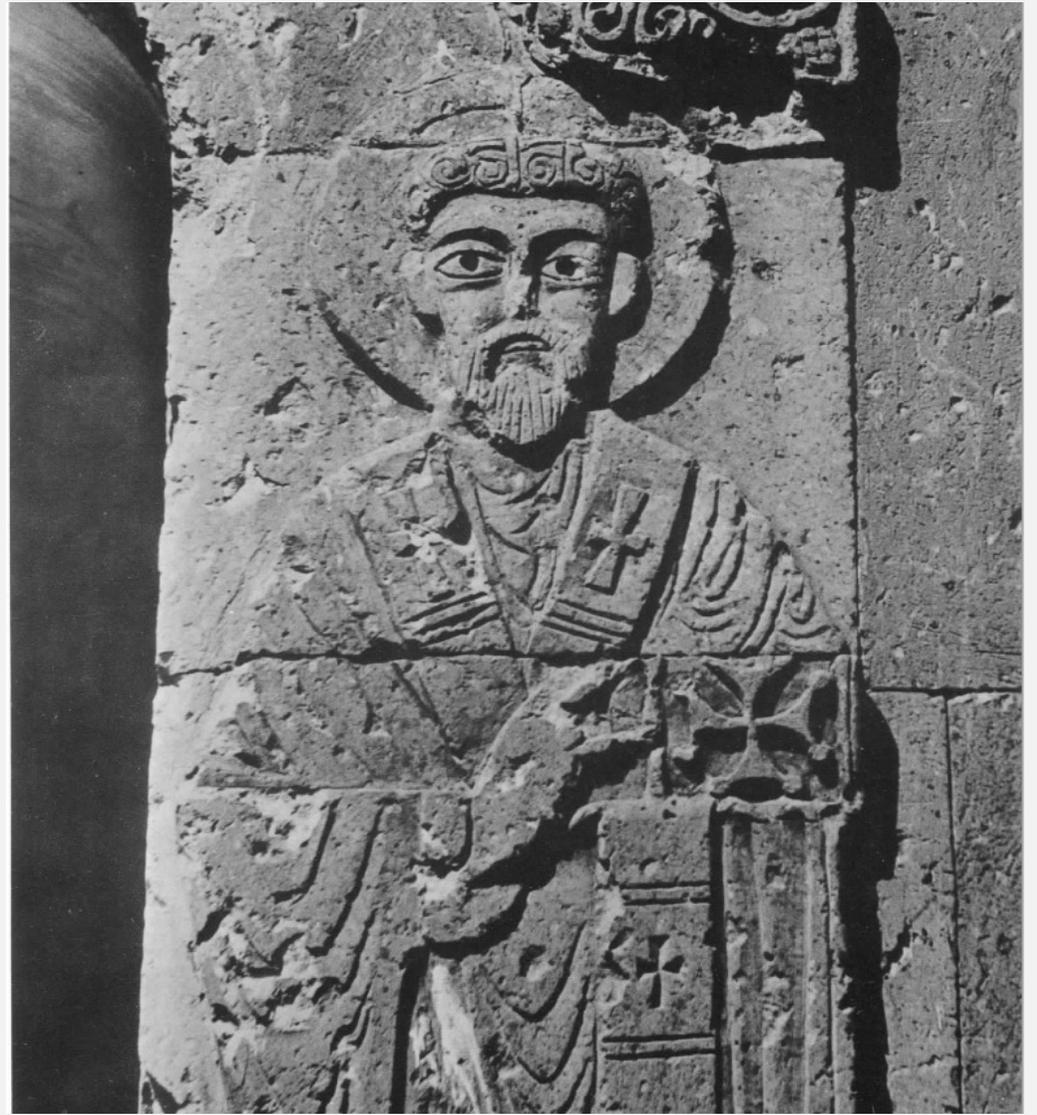
# mountain-dwellers

“But when enemies reach their land, the mountain peoples unite to aid their princes, for **they are loyal**. Now as for the snow of unstable solidity which flows down from the clouds, they have invented for themselves wooden [shoes] wound around their feet with ring-like thongs, so they easily run over the snow as if over dry land. They are savage in their habits, drinkers of blood, who regard as naught the killing of their own brothers and even of themselves. They are called light-armed and couriers, and dwell in the mountain that divides Aghdznik and Taron. Because of their **obscure and inscrutable speech** and way of life they are called Khut’, from which name the mountain is also called Khoyt’. **They know the psalms in the old translation of the Armenian teachers, which they have continually in their mouths.** They are the **peasants of Syria who followed [to Armenia] Adramelek<sup>1</sup> and Sanasar, sons of Senek’erim king of Assyria and Nineveh, from whose name they call themselves Sanasnayk.** They are hospitable and respectful to strangers.” – translated by Robert Thomson

church of the  
holy cross at  
aghtamar







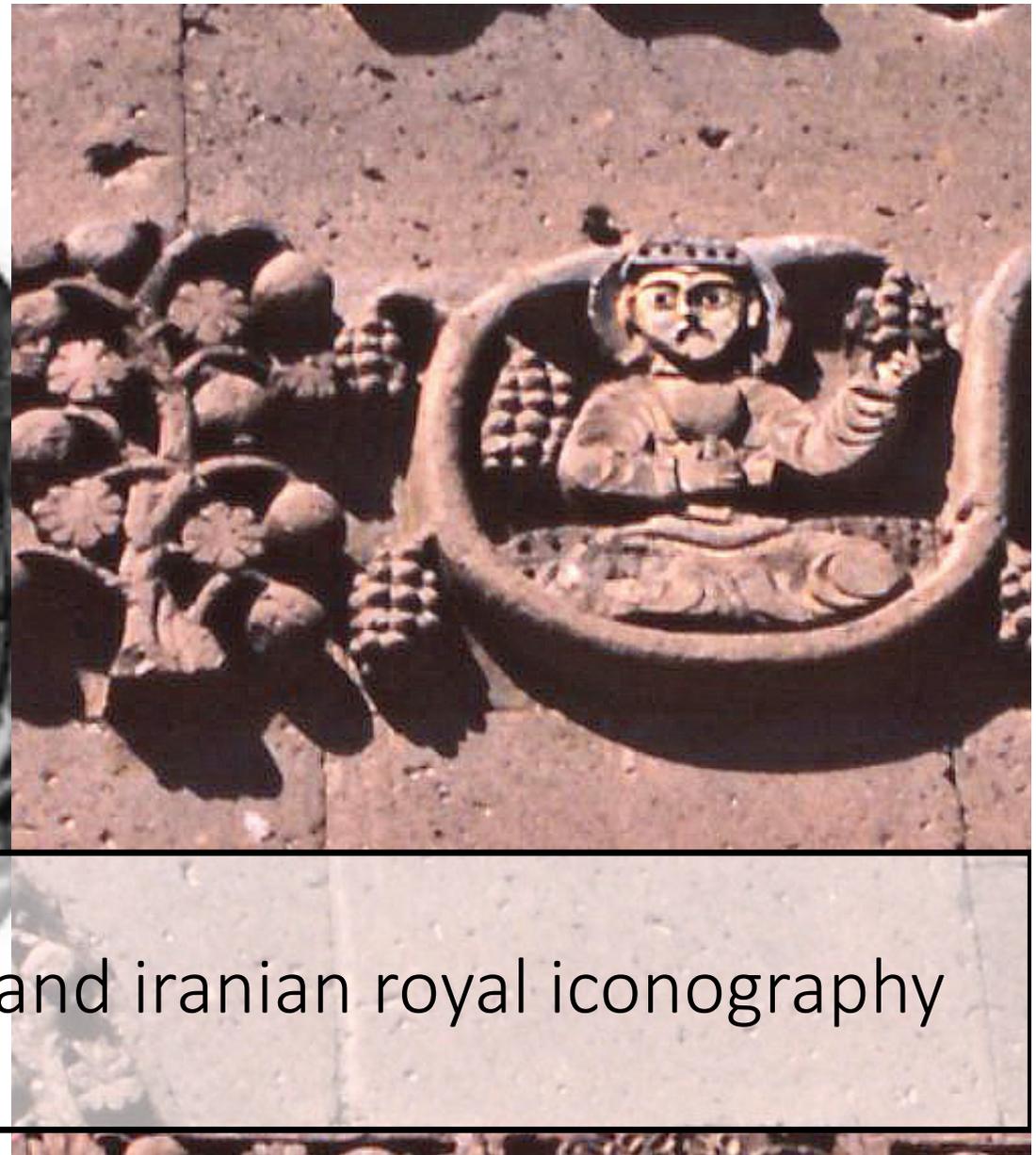












KING Gagik and iranian royal iconography

# King Gagik and Iranian courtly culture

“At that time the oppression of the Muslims against the Christians waxed more severe. By royal command a certain great *ostikan* gained the ascendancy over Persia and Armenia; he was named **Yusup, son of Apusach**, a proud and notable man, more fearsome than the many who had preceded him. He was moved to great wrath against **Smbat** because of his holding back the royal tribute. Not a few envoys with messages passed between them, but no peaceful solution was agreeable to them. Since the **emir Yusuf** had heard of the **repute and the valiant deeds and also of the wise intelligence of the prudent and renowned prince Gagik**, he had desired for a long time to see him. So he then suddenly sent messengers with letters and many promises to summon the prince with many entreaties to meet him. He heeded the summons promptly in peaceable friendship. And when they encountered each other, he honoured the prince with great éclat...

# King Gagik and Iranian courtly culture

“When the tyrant beheld his glorious youthful figure and the wondrous beauty of his lovely face, he was amazed. On questioning him in profound and inscrutable terms, he received **replies of vast erudition** that were at the same time profound and enigmatic, whereby he liberally and freely explained his obscure questions, and opened before him gates that were locked and inexplicable to mankind, becoming for him a **mother of understanding and a nurse of wisdom**. Since the **Persian ruler Yusup’** was a man of powerful mind, but the most disagreeable among all the sons of men, he therefore submitted the splendid and blessed prince to an arduous investigation. Raising his eyes, he observed him and **measured his deportment on sitting and rising. In every aspect of royalty he found him refined and endowed with charming modesty like gold tested in many furnaces**. He opened before him royal edicts, revealed to him uncertain plans and deeds, asking him for a solution; and he was assisted by him in gaining the wisdom that flowed copiously from him...

# King Gagik and Iranian courtly culture

“He showed him in royal fashion precious stones and beautiful luminous pearls derived from land and sea. He related to him the **tales of ancient kings from century to century, and the wars that had occurred in their times**. He questioned him on the dynasties and thrones of kings and pre-eminent families, and the borders of each one’s lands, beginning with the **Medes and Persians, Judaea and Jerusalem, the Assyrians and Egyptians, the Greeks and Indians, all Armenia as far as the Gates of the Alans and the Caspians**—which [information] is very pertinent for kings. He found him versed in everything and exceedingly learned. He interrogated the undefeated champion and splendid prince on the battles he had fought, and surrounded him with warriors to observe him. He found him like a high mountain, immovable by the blasts and shouts of war. In all this and even more did the **Persian ruler Yusup** observe the grace of God manifested in the **valiant and divine prince Gagik**, and he greatly rejoiced at his visit to him...

# King Gagik and Iranian courtly culture

“But when the news reached the ears of **Smbat that Gagik, prince of Vaspurakan, had made an alliance with the Persian ruler Yusup’**, in his jealousy he raged against him with profoundly evil intent. **Smbat himself did not seek the pursuit of peace or the giving of royal tribute**, as the Lord commanded through Peter to pay the tax of the firstborn to those who demanded the didram, saying: “Give what is Caesar’s to Caesar, and what is God’s to God.” He thus worthily indicated [that one should pay] royal taxes. He even sent Peter to the sea to pluck the *sater* from the teeth of the fish cast up from the deep, [thus] satisfying those who had asked him. This he gave for the chief of creation and the head [apostle] Peter. But Smbat, disregarding the Lord’s command, brought many evils on the holy church and the Lord’s people.”

– translated by Robert Thomson