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Kirche Russlands nahe liegend, dass der Weg der Bewerbungen des Pera Johannes dann über die konfessionell lutherischen Werke führte.¹⁹ Der Brief des Bischofs lässt solch eine Zielgerichtetheit noch nicht erkennen. In ihm wird nur deutlich, dass der Weg zu Lutheranern führen sollte und dass dem Unternehmen das Wissen um die amerikanischen Missionsbemühungen Pate stand.

¹⁹ Vgl. St. Petersburgisches Ev. Sonntagsblatt, No. 16.(1860): 121–126 („Es ist natürlich, dass wir vor Allem die Leipziger und dann die Hermannsbürger Mission als die unseren ansehen, weil sie beide im Dienste unserer lieben lutherischen Kirche stehen“).

BETWEEN “NEW JERUSALEM” AND “THE BEAST IN HUMAN FORM”

The Picture of the Later Roman and Early Byzantine State
in the Armenian Historiography of the 5th to 8th century

by Johannes Preiser-Kapeller
Vienna

Since the invention of the Armenian alphabet at the beginning of the 5th century CE, a rich Armenian historiography began to emerge. As Armenia at this time was divided between the Roman and the Sasanian Empire, the rule of both neighbouring states over parts of Armenia and the interaction between the two Empires and the Armenians were prominent themes in the historiographical works from the 5th to the 8th century. This offers to a Byzantinologist the unique opportunity to analyze the image of the Later Roman and Early Byzantine State and the interpretation of its policy and role in world politics through the eyes of a Christian nation which stood for a long time in part and for shorter periods of time almost entirely under Byzantine rule, but was always at the periphery of the Empire.

Of course, this corpus of historiographical works raises a lot of questions; the information and interpretations we find there cannot be included in our reconstruction of events and mentalities without considering the background, the aims and the sources of the individual authors.¹ For example, the debate on the dating of the so-called “Father of Armenian history” Movsēs Xorenac'i fills up bookshelves; he personally claims to have been an author of the 5th century and a disciple of the inventor of the

¹ See generally Thomson, *Formation*; Mahé, *Moise et Mahomet*; Thomson, *Concept of History*; Thomson, *Armenian Ideology*; Greenwood, *Sebeos*; cf. also Bartikian, *Byzantium* 49–55; Arutjunova-Fidanjan, *L'image* 7–17; Martin-Hisard, *Lewond* 135–144; Arutyunova-Fidanjan, *Byzantium* 19–20; for the most recent overview on the historical period under consideration in this paper cf. Thomson, *Armenia*, also 156–157 for a short survey of the relevant sources and their background, and Greenwood, *Armenian Neighbours*.

Armenian alphabet Mesrob Maštoc', but there are strong indications alluding that his rewriting of the Armenian history for the benefit of his patrons, the Bagratuni family, took place in the later 8th century.² On the contrary, Agathangelos presents himself as an eyewitness of the events, which he describes, i.e. the Christianisation of Armenia under the king Trdat the Great and St. Gregory the Illuminator. But the simple fact that no Armenian alphabet and literature existed until one century after the above mentioned events proves the falseness of this claim.³

So it may seem incorrect to analyse the picture of the Later Roman and Early Byzantine state on the basis of these works, as if they were a coherent and homogeneous historiographical corpus. Nevertheless, as we will see, a number of traditions, interpretations and recurring themes exist enabling us to isolate some general perceptions of this mighty neighbouring Christian monarchy and its relationship with the Armenian people and their common history. Some of these *topoi* and interpretations are the result of the use of Greek sources. That is the case of Xorenac'i, who relied on the works of Eusebius, of the church-historian Socrates and on other Greek authors, and of Lazar P'arpec'i, for whom Sanspeur was able to identify several Greek sources for his passages on Byzantium.⁴ Similarly, it is important to bear in mind that the Armenian historians often tried to draw an idealistic picture of Armenia before the partition of the country in 387 CE and the abolition of the Aršakuni-monarchy – the picture of a single, unified and Christian Armenia. They also often ignored the existence of various Armenian regions, each of which had its own relationship with the Romans: the autonomous Satrapies of the Southwest, since 299 CE Roman vassal states; the Roman provincial territory of *Armenia minor* to the west of the Euphrates; and the Aršakuni-kingdom of Greater Armenia, where various powerful noble houses restrained the power of the monarchy.⁵

² Movs. Xor. (transl. Thomson) 1–61 (Introduction); Garsoian, *L'histoire* 29–48; Thomson, *Formation* 137–138. For an analogue study on Georgian historiography cf. Rapp, *From bumberazi to basileus* 101–116.

³ Thomson, *Formation* 141–142, also for his use of the work of Koriwn.

⁴ Movs. Xor. (transl. Thomson) 20–39; Thomson, *Formation* 138, 144–145; Thomson, *Concept of History* 93; Terian, *Xorenac'i* 101–141; Sanspeur, *Trois sources* 440–448, cf. also Lazar (transl. Thomson) 36.

⁵ Garsoian, *Armenia in the fourth Century* 342–345; Garsoian, *Politique ou Orthodoxie* 297–320; Seibt, *Hintergrund* 130.

Of course, it is impossible to discuss most of all the themes present in the Armenian histories from the 5th to the 8th century. Therefore, we will restrain our survey on two subjects: the Christian Roman Empire as a divinely-established power and model for the Armenians, and the "dark sides" of the (Eastern) Roman Empire. Questions of terminology will not be analysed here, as they deserve a further special study⁶, but I have tried to reproduce the terminology for the Roman state and the Roman Emperor as accurate as possible in the translation, if this had not already been done in the used translation.

1. The Christian Roman Empire as divinely-established power and model

1.1 Constantine, Trdat and the Christian Emperor

The Christianisation of Greater Armenia under the King Trdat the Great and Grigor Lusaworič (ca 314 CE) marked for the Armenian historiography not only the beginning of a new epoch in the history of the country,⁷ but also in the relationship between Armenia and the Roman Empire. The central figure in these events is the Emperor Constantine the Great himself; he is being described as the founder of a Christian Empire and a new Christian capital, Constantinople, as the first Christian Emperor and an archetype of all Emperors,⁸ as the history of Agathangelos clearly demonstrates.

And the firm order of the commandment of truth - to stand firmly in the faith which comes from the Lord - he (Constantine) spread throughout the world by his edicts, terrifying (everyone) by his victorious power to cleave to the true piety of the light of faith in the Lord. (...) Those who agreed to become worshipers of the truth he honoured and treated as his friends. In this fashion he became powerful and strengthened his rule over mankind, calling his kingdom a divinely-established kingdom (astwacakarg t'agaworut'iwn).⁹

⁶ Cf. Arutjunova-Fidanjan, *L'image* 8–9; Martin-Hisard, *L'Empire byzantin* 137.

⁷ Thomson, *Armenian Ideology* 388; on the circumstances and date of the Christianisation cf. Seibt, *Hintergrund*.

⁸ Cf. Lieu, *From History to Legend* 156–157; Garsoian, *Armenia in the fourth century* 348–349; cf. also Dagron, *Emperor and Priest* 127–157.

⁹ Agathangelos (armen.) § 870: 405 (Thomson; transl. 405); cf. also Agathangelos, Vers. gr. (Lafontaine) § 162: 333.

The Emperor Constantine established by God and honourable holder of the throne (astawacakarg t'agawor, patwakal at'or'oyñ), and the great Patriarch (hayrapet mec), archbishop of the imperial court (ark'episkopos ašxarhamut drann), who was called Eusebius (...).¹⁰

The famous legend about Constantine's vision of the Holy Cross is attested in Łazar P'arpec'i, who used one of the variations of this story traceable also in Greek sources.

Now when by God's command the blessed Constantine went to make war on the countless hosts of the Goths, he encamped his troops by the banks of the Lekovb river. Because he was worthy of divine providence he was clearly shown the luminous symbol of the life-giving Cross in the starry sky. Around it, in rays, was the motto "By this shall you conquer." (Constantine) arose, and, hoping to expel the enemies' armies by means of the aid of the blessed symbol which had appeared to him, he urgently sought for (the Cross), hurriedly sending his mother, the venerable Helen, to Jerusalem. Everyone knows, informed by his book, how there (in Jerusalem) because of a fervent search by a holy man the Cross of Life, our salvation, was discovered.¹¹

The divine origin of Constantine's power became manifest also in another very impressive way according to Agathangelos:

Thus he so consolidated his victorious position that all the days of his life an angel appeared from heaven continuously serving him every day: every morning he took the crown (marked) with Christ's sign and put it on his head. So the blessed and most wonderful of all kings, Constantine, saw the heavenly angel in his service. And he, the pious and all-victorious (astwacasērn ew yalt'oln i veray amenec'un), who established his kingdom in faith and confirmed the true faith in all churches, offered the purple of his royalty to Christ.¹²

Such an episode is to be expected in a work of hagiography like Agathangelos, who joins the rich hagiographic traditions on Emperor Con-

¹⁰ Agathangelos (armen.) § 875: 408 (Thomson; transl. 409); Agathangelos, Vers. gr. (Lafontaine) § 165: 336.

¹¹ Łazar P'arpec'i 3: 3-4 (Ter Mkrtč'ean - S. Malxaseanc'; transl. Bedrosian; cf. Thomson 36); P'arpec'i makes here use of a Greek source, cf. Sanspeur, *Trois sources* 441-444; see also Dagron, *Emperor and Priest* 132-133, on Constantine's visions.

¹² Agathangelos (armen.) § 871: 404-406 (Thomson; transl. 405-407).

stantine evolved in Eastern and Western Christianity.¹³ Though, a similar story can be found also in the now so-called Epic Histories, the Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk', in relation to the council of Nicaea; although Agathangelos describes in his history the events of the council, this legend was not included there.¹⁴

And he (Yakob = St. James of Nisibis) was present at the great synod of Nikia, which took place in the days of Constantine, the Emperor of the Romans, (and) at which three hundred and eighteen bishops gathered together to anathematize the heresy of Arianos von Alexandria, who was from the province of Egypt. All the bishops took their seats before Constantine; and Aristakēs, the son of the wondrous Grigor the first Katholikos of Greater Armenia, was present from Greater Armenia. And the wondrous secret deeds of the king began to be revealed to the (same) Yakob through the miraculous signs of the Holy Spirit. He saw that King Constantine was clad in a hair shirt under his purple robe, and that a guardian angel was serving him. Bishop Yakob was amazed and told the presence of the angel to the multitude of other assembled bishops, who did not believe this. But he argued insistently and said: "Because you know things that are hidden, reveal first what the Emperor wears under his robe." (Then), raising himself among them he revealed with the help of the Holy Spirit the humility that was the sign of King Constantine's pious love of God. He disclosed before all of them what he had observed, that (the Emperor) was clad in a hair shirt under the purple for the ardent love of the faith he had in Christ. Then King Constantine saw the angel who was serving the person of Yakob, he fell at his feet and magnified him with great honors and great gifts, and he raised his (Yakob's) throne above those of many who were at that synod.¹⁵

The holy Emperor Constantine, *isapostolos* and *christomimetes*, as the Byzantines would say¹⁶, became firmly established in the Armenian tradition; but the central legend developed around his person is the visit of King Trdat the Great and Gregory the Illuminator at his court in the Roman capital, where the two Christian kings had established an alliance in

¹³ Cf. Lieu, *From History to Legend*, esp. 151-169; Wilfong, *Constantine in Coptic* 183.

¹⁴ Also not in the Greek version, cf. Agathangelos, Vers. gr. (Lafontaine) § 168: 339.

¹⁵ Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk' III, 10 (transl. Garsoian 79).

¹⁶ Dagron, *Emperor and Priest* 135-143; Lieu, *From History to Legend* 152; Garsoian, *Armenia in the fourth century* 348-349; Garsoian, *Politique ou Orthodoxie* 300.

the spirit of Christian love and friendship.¹⁷ So we read in Agathangelos:

Similarly with great happiness he (Constantine) showed love for king Trdat as for a dear brother, especially because of his recognition of God. And furthermore he made an alliance (dašin) with him, holding their faith in the Lord Christ as an intermediary so that they might constantly and for ever keep faithful love between their kingdoms, and that he might confirm the Armenian king ever more and more in faith in the Trinity.¹⁸

This became the strongest tradition on the relationship between Armenia and the Empire, repeated and also adapted to the actual political needs through the centuries, as we can see in works from various periods:

At that time the Armenian nobility sent some of the great naxarars with gifts to the king of the Greeks (to say that) they gave him their hand (and that) they would serve him obediently were he to support them with aid to obtain revenge from their enemies. And so (they ...) set forth and came to the realm of the Greeks to the imperial palace (palatn) of the kings. They presented their letters-patents, set out the gifts they had brought, and laid before the king the message of united supplication of the realm. When the Emperor heard about these events he met with great eagerness and readiness their request to be of help and assistance to the realm of Armenia, all the more when he recalled the covenant and treaty of alliance reinforced by oaths that had been concluded between the Emperor Constantine and King Trdat.¹⁹

¹⁷ van Esbroeck, *Legends about Constantine* 79–101; Hultgard, *Armenia in Change and Crisis* 69; Thomson, *The Crusaders* 73, n. 13. Seibt, *Hintergrund*, esp. 125–126; Chaumont, *Une visite* 56–58 and 65–66 (Chaumont presumes a real covenant between Emperor Constantine and King Trdat, around which later the legend of the journey to Rome/Constantinople, which is based on the journey of King Trdat I to his coronation at the court of Emperor Nero in 66 CE evolved). The model for Agathangelos is here the description of Maštoc's journey to Constantinople in Koriwn (Akinian, long version) §96–108 (transl. Winkler 106–108).

¹⁸ Agathangelos (armen.) §877: 410 (Thomson; transl. 411); cf. Vg (Garitte) §174: 106, 5 (*pakta kai philia*) and § 190: 113, 9: *ta pakta*, cf. also p. 328–331. Cf. Agathangelos (armen.) § 152–156: 162–166 (Thomson; transl. 163–167): *hrovartak* of Diokletian to Trdat: „*The Emperor Caesar Diokletian* (Ink'nakal kaysr Diokletianos) *to our beloved brother* (sireli elbayr) *and colleague Trdat, greetings*“ (§152); Cf. also Agathangelos, Vers. gr. (Lafontaine) §67: 232, 5–7, and Vg (Garitte) §37: 35, 15–16

¹⁹ Buzandaran *Patmut'iwnk'* III, 21 (transl. Garsoian 98–99)

“Archbishop Vrt'anēs and the bishops under him and all the princes of Greater Armenia, to our lord the Emperor Caesar Constantius, greetings. Remember the sworn covenant (payman uxti) of your father Constantine with our King Trdat and do not give this country over to the godless Persians, but help us with an army to make Khosrov, Trdat's son, king. For God has made you lord not only of Europe but also of all the Mediterranean, and the awe of your power has reached the ends of the earth. And we desire that you rule over an ever-greater Empire. Be well.”²⁰

Then in the 41st year of the reign of Khosrov, son of Kawat, Vardan rebelled and rejected submission to Persian rule in unison with all the Armenians. They killed the marzpan Surēn, taking him by surprise in the city of Dvin, seized much booty, and turned their allegiance to the Greeks. (...) Then the Greek king (Justin II) made an oath with the Armenians and confirmed the same pact (uxt) which had been made between the two kings – the blessed Trdat and Constantine. He gave them an imperial army in support. When they had received the army, they attacked the city of Dvin; after a siege the destroyed it from top to bottom, and expelled the Persian troops who were stationed in it.²¹

The most important source for this tradition is the letter, “which the bishops of Armenia and the Catholicos Nersēs wrote with the nobles” to the Emperor Constans II. The letter has been saved in the history attributed to Sebēos, while his authenticity is not anymore under question²²; that means we have a proof of the official use of the Constantine-Trdat-legend in the diplomatic correspondence between Armenia and the Empire in the mid-7th century:

Again a third time (the faith was confirmed) when king Trdat made ready and took with him the holy bishop Grigorios, and his son bishop Rstakēs, and on the military side the four most senior-ranking of his palace, and with 70000 men, elite leaders from all his provinces, went to Rome to see Constantine. When they saw each other, he presented St Gregory to Constantine; and he prostrated himself at the feet of St Gregory in order to be blessed by him. Then they accepted as intermediary the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And with an oath the two kings joined together, keeping

²⁰ Movs. Xor. III, 5 (Abelean – Yarut'iwnian; transl. Thomson 257–258).

²¹ Sebēos 8: 67–68 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson – Howard-Johnston 6–7); cf. Preiser-Kapeller, *Kaysr* 189–190, on the circumstances of this alliance.

a sure mutual peace for ever between their two royal persons. They confirmed once more for us the truth of the faith which the Holy Spirit had founded in us.²³

Robert W. Thomson and others could trace this tradition of Constantine and Trdat throughout the Middle Ages; in the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia it would be re-interpreted in the late 12th century to support the alliance with the Holy Roman Empire of the Hohenstaufen.²⁴ This legend may be one of the main reasons for the prominent position of Emperor Constantine in the Armenian tradition in contrast for instance to the Coptic Sources, where Constantine's "role (...) is generally minimal".²⁵

Beginning with Constantine, the ideology of the Christian Empire and the motif of the Christian Emperor, who rules by divine grace over the whole *Oikumene*, were continuously present in the Armenian historiography. So we read in Eliše in the letter of the Armenian nobles to the Emperor Theodosius on the eve of the rebellion against the Persians in 450/451 CE:

This is a copy of the letter which they wrote to the Emperor Theodosius (T'ēodos kaysr):

"The bishop Joseph, with many of my cobishops and the whole Armenian army; Vasak the marzpan and Nershapuh Rmbosean, with the sparapet and all the greatest princes, to the illustrious Emperor Theodosius (mecanund T'ēodos kaysr) – may our greeting be upon you and all your troops, you who with your peaceful benevolence rule over land and sea; and there is no person on earth who can oppose your irresistible Empire (tērut'iwn). According to our infallible records concerning your courageous ancestors, having occupied Europe they crossed over and also rule the regions of Asia from the borders of Sēr (in Sinai) on to the limits of Gaderon (north of Media); and there was no one who rebelled or escaped their control (...).²⁶

Those ideas are also elaborated in the above-mentioned letter of the Armenians to Emperor Constans II from the history of Sebeos:

²² Greenwood, *Sebeos* 327.

²³ Sebeos 46: 155 (Abgarian; transl. Thomson – Howard-Johnston 123–124)

²⁴ Thomson, Constantine and Trdat 277–289; Thomson, *The Crusaders* 76–77; Thomson, *Concept of History* 98; Thomson, *Armenian Ideology* 388–389; Halfter, *Constantinus Novus* 399–428.

²⁵ Wilfong, *Constantine in Coptic* 177–188.

²⁶ Eliše III: 57 (Ter-Minasean; transl. Thomson 122).

So now,"because God has delivered us from servitude to the Empire of darkness"²⁷, and made us worthy of the rule of your heavenly city (erknak'alak'), how much more is it right for us to enjoy that peace regarding which we must request from Christ God for your pious and God-loving rule (t'agawrut'iwn) that it remain unmoved for ever, like the days of heaven upon earth with great victory ruling over the whole universe, sea and land. Although you are in the body from the human race, yet you hold the place of the divine throne. And the light of the glory of your God-loving rule has suffused everything below – you who are crowned from heaven, you the boast of all Christians by the power of the divine sign of the Cross, you who resemble the pious servant of God, the divinely gracious, the valiant and victorious, the blessed saviour Heraclius, your grandfather, who rescued from the cruel executioner the whole world – which may Christ God now bless through Your Piety.²⁸

May God grant our unworthiness to seek knowledge of the good from God worthily, and to bless your God-loving and beneficent lordship (t'agawrut'iwn), so that you may reign for ever over all the earth, sea and land, very victoriously.²⁹

Another such letter we find in Kałankatuac'i's History of the Albanians, where the addressee is once more the Emperor Constans II.; here we have tried to identify the Greek and Latin equivalents to the elements of the imperial titles given by Kałankatuac'i:

Juanšēr's letter to Constantine (Constans II), king of Greece "All-conquering lord, powerful and merciful king of the Romans, Constantine Augustus (Amenayałt' [victor, niketes] tēr [dominus, despotes], hzōr [kratistos] ew olormac [clementissimus, philanthropotatos] t'agawor Hořomoc' [basileus Romaion] Ogostos [Augustus] Kostandin), appointed by God ruler of land and sea (covu ew c'amak'i [ges kai thalasses despotes] astuacabar [ek Theu, theopsephistos] išxan), Juanšēr, sparapet and prince of Albania, together with his vassal land of the east, worships you with humble greetings. May it please you Christian lordship to accept this new offer of vassalage from a distant people that divine virtue may be bestowed from your great dignity and glory upon our humble se-

²⁷ Cf. Col. 1, 13.

²⁸ Sebeos 46: 151–152 (Abgarian; transl. Thomson – Howard-Johnston 118–119).

²⁹ Sebeos 46: 161 (Abgarian; transl. Thomson – Howard-Johnston 132).

ives who seek a crown (from you)." When the letter was brought to the most pious emperor, he was full of joy and exceeding glad, and he gave a great banquet that day.³⁰

An Emperor, whose reputation was especially high not only among the Armenian historians, but also in the majority of literature production of the Christian and even Muslim East, was Heraclius (610–641), as could be seen in the last text cited from Sebēos (see above), mainly due to his victory over the Persian Great King Xusro II (590–628), "the destructive and ruinous Khosrov, cursed by God", as he is been called in the history attributed to Sebēos, and his restitution of the Holy Cross, which had fallen in Persian hands after the conquest of Jerusalem in 614 CE.³¹ Sebēos also writes:

When the blessed, pious and late-lamented king Heraclius had received the Lord's holy Cross, he gathered his army with ardent and happy heart. He set out with all the royal retinue, honouring the holy, wonderful, and heavenly discovery, and brought it to the holy city, with all the vessels of the church which had been saved from the hands of the enemy in the city of Byzantium.³²

But, whereas Sebēos describes later also the events of the last years of Heraclius' reign, when the Arab expansion destroyed the fruits of his victory over the Sasanians, Lewond tells a different story:

In the eleventh year of reign of the god-crowned (astuacapsakeal) and pious king Heraclius of the Romans (Hořomac') (...) As long as the god-crowned Heraclius was living, (the Arabs) were unable to spread their raids over Palestine, since the well-known fame of his bravery was dominant and had frightened them. (Heraclius) reigned over Palestine and Syria until his death.³³

³⁰ Movses Kalankatuac'i II, 20: 181 (Arak'elyan; transl. Dowsett 116); on this letter cf. also Preiser-Kapeller, *Hrovertak* 303, with n. 14, and Röscher, *Onoma*, as well as Hunger, *Prooimion*, on the various imperial titles and the elements of the imperial ideology.

³¹ Howard-Johnston, *Armenian Historians* 41–62; Arutyunova-Fidanjan, *Byzantium* 20; cf. also Watt, *The Portrayal of Heraclius* 63–79, and Reinink, *Heraclius, the New Alexander* 81–94; El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* 39–54; see also Greenwood, *Armenian Neighbours* 340–341, on Heraclius' policy towards the Armenians.

³² Sebēos 41: 131 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson – Howard-Johnston 90).

³³ Lewond 1: 3 (Ezean; transl. Arzoumanian 48); cf. also Martin-Hisard, *L'Empire byzantin* 138, 140.

High reputation enjoys Heraclius also in the work of Kalankatuac'i, whose dating of the beginning of the Arab expansion is comparable to the one of Lewond.

When in the days of the godly Emperor Flavius (P'lawos) Heraclius the captivity of Jerusalem was ended, as formerly it ended after seventy years in the days of Cyrus of Persia, God visited and opposed the arrogant king of Persia, the mighty Xosrov, who had for a long time routed and defeated the House of Augustus (tun ḡostosakan) together with their great kingdom of Rome and the celebrated Palestinian city (...) The Emperor suddenly informed all the armies and generals who were fighting Xosrov that God was prospering their cause, and he immediately ordered them to assemble in one place with all the forces they disposed of.³⁴

The victorious Heraclius, king of Rome, won many battles and left after him the memory of his valour throughout the world. After him his son Constantine reigned as king of the Romans for three years. In his days the Arabs conquered Syria and exacted tribute from the churches of the holy city of Jerusalem.³⁵

The fall of Roman power in the East is attributed to Heraclius' successors by the two later authors, who make an effort to preserve a faultless image of the "god-crowned Heraclius". Connected with Heraclius is also a very interesting episode in the history of Sebēos, where an Armenian aristocrat is not willing to take part in a conspiracy against the Emperor because he honours some core elements of the Byzantine imperial ideology, mainly the concept of the divine origin of the Emperor's power:

They all conspired to kill Heraclius and set his son Athalarikos on the throne of the kingdom. Varaztiroc', son of Kosrov Shum Smbat, was involved in that plot, but he did not agree to the murder of the king and his sons. Rather he said: "You call them (= the Emperors) vicars (telapah) of God; so it is not right to participate in that act, and I will not join with you in that plot."³⁶

But the Armenian authors also knew that the Emperor was not an absolute autocrat and were aware of the existence of the Senate and other powers within the Roman and Byzantine Empire. These elements at the Emperor's court could potentially work for the benefit of the Armenians, as we read in the Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk':

³⁴ Movses Kalankatuac'i II, 10: 128–130 (Arak'elyan; transl. Dowsett 76–78).

³⁵ Movses Kalankatuac'i III, 15: 316 (Arak'elyan; transl. Dowsett 206).

³⁶ Sebēos 41: 133 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson – Howard-Johnston 93).

Then the king was enraged at these words and intended to put him (St. Nersēs) cruelly to death, but the nobles of his court and his counsellors came to the king and said to the Emperor: "These men have been sent from a foreign and distant land for (the affairs of) a powerful king, they are the envoys of a mighty lord, let no harm come to them from us, for otherwise a great war will break out between us and the great king of Armenia and there will be much hostility between us (...)." But although they spoke a great deal in this manner, they were not able to calm the anger and wrath of the king.³⁷

But for our authors, the Emperor's counsellors could also work to the detriment of the Armenians, as in the year of 450, when the Empire refused to help the Armenian rebels around Vahan Mamikonean against the Persians. Łazar P'arpec'i gives an account of the delegation to the imperial court:

Hmayeak had been delayed in the land of Byzantium, requesting troops from the Emperor, as was mentioned earlier. Those travelling with him went before the Emperor Theodosius (II), (The Emperor) heard the reason for their arrival, and then listened to it again from them, affectionately. He agreed to aid them with a brigade. But while this holy man was preparing to fulfil his promise, his end overtook him and he passed from this life. He was succeeded by Marcian, who, when informed about what was needed for matters in Armenia, asked the seniors at court: "What reply do you think we should give to the men who have come to us from Armenia?" (Two individuals), Anatolius (who was then the asparapet of Antioch) and a certain P'lorent (a man of Syrian nationality, who was chief of the Emperor's court) replied, saying: "It is not agreeable to us to scorn the covenant and stability which has for a long time existed among previous kings, a covenant both written and sealed, and to aggravate a peaceful situation with warfare, and to remove a land from the service of its king. Furthermore, we must think about what might happen, something no one knows for sure. Would such a (proposed) war be resolved easily or with extreme confusion?" With these words, they changed the Emperor's mind, and the hopes of the Armenians (which the delegation) was concerned with and the reason that it remained there, were injured and not realized. While the matter of the (Byzantine) response was being delayed thus, the war between the Armenians and the Iranians had begun.³⁸

³⁷ Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk' IV, 5 (transl. Garsoian 122).

³⁸ Łazar P'arpec'i 41: 73-74 (Ter Mkrtč'ean - S. Malxaseanc'; transl. Bedrosian; cf. Thomson 118).

More explicitly Eliše writes about the Emperor's "evil counsellors"³⁹:

While the blessed Theodosius was questioning the whole Senate (sin-kritos), anxious to find a peaceable solution to the matter and greatly concerned, lest the churches of the East be ravaged by the impious heathen, at that very time the end of his life suddenly befell him. This put a serious obstruction in the way of procuring help. In his stead the Emperor Marcian came to the throne. The king was influenced by his evil counsellors Anatolius, who was the commander-in-chief (sparapet), and Elp'arios the Syrian - both vile and wicked men, and ungodly to boot - so he was unwilling to heed the united pact of the Armenians, who with all their strength were opposing the wickedness of the heathens. But this ignoble man thought it better to preserve the pact with the heathen for the sake of terrestrial peace, than to join in war for the Christian covenant (u?t). Therefore he quickly despatched the same Elp'arios as ambassador to the Persian king and contracted a firm pact with him that he would not support the Armenian forces with troops, arms, or any form of assistance.⁴⁰

Kalankatuac'i on the contrary does not blame his counsellors, but "the lawless Emperor Marcian" himself:

The Armenian army wrote to the Emperor Theodosius (T'ēodos kaysr), asking him to help them in their great peril, but he died suddenly, and the lawless Emperor Marcian, succeeding to the throne, did not adhere to the alliance, but characteristically made common cause with the heathens.⁴¹

The role of the Senate is highlighted on several occasions in the history attributed to Sebēos, first in the context of the flight of the Persian King Xusro II after the coup d'état of General Vahram Čobin (590 CE). We read:

After they (Xusro II and his entourage) had crossed over, they carried in flight, deliberating on the road whether it would be better to go to the king of the Arabs or the king of the Greeks. Then they reckoned it best to take refuge with the king of the Greeks. "For although there is enmity between (us)," they said: "yet they are Christians and merciful; and when they take an oath they cannot be false to that oath."⁴²

So here according to Sebēos even the Persians acknowledge the special quality of the Byzantine state as a Christian Empire and make

³⁹ Eliše (transl. Thomson) 6-7.

⁴⁰ Eliše III: 58 (Ter-Minasean; transl. Thomson 124).

⁴¹ Movses Kalankatuac'i II, 2 (Arak'elyan; transl. Dowsett 66).

⁴² Sebēos 10: 75 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson - Howard-Johnston 18).

use of it. After the news of king Xusro's flight have arrived in Constantinople:

(...) the king (Maurice) gathered all the senate (snklitos)⁴³ and asked their advice. He said: "The Persians have killed their king Ormizd and installed his son as king. The royal army has installed someone else as king in the east. He came with a large army and seized the kingdom for himself. The former's young son has come to me in flight and seeks from us an army in support, and promises to act thus. Now what shall we do? Shall we agree? Is it proper to agree, or not?" Then they said: "It is not proper to agree, because they are an impious nation and altogether deceitful. In their distress they make promises, but when they emerge into calmer (times), the renege. We have suffered many evils from them. Let them slaughter each other, and we shall have relief." At that point king Khosrov was in great danger and saw death before his eyes; for he had escaped from the mouth of the lion but had fallen into the mouth of enemies from whom there was no flight. But the king rejected the advice of the senate. Of his own accord he sent his son-in-law P'ilipikos and had him bring a favourable response. He received an oath from him and gave him a royal army in support.⁴³

To the *sinklitos*, of course the Armenian transcription of the Greek *synkletos*, Sebēos refers also later in his work:

At that time Heraclius made his son Constantine king; he put him in the charge of the senate (s'nkltos), entrusted him to all the magnates of the palace, and confirmed him on the throne of his kingdom.⁴⁴ Heraclius and all the senators (ew amenayn sinklitosac'n) decided to install Constantine, son of Heraclius, on the throne of the kingdom; he was a young child. Heraclius made preparations to take his wife and go to the east. At that time they confirmed even more (securely) Constantine in the royal dignity according to the previous agreement.⁴⁵

As a further element in the power structure of the Empire, Sebēos also identifies the armed forces:

But the Greek king Constans (II), because he was young, did not have the authority to carry this out without the agreement of the army.⁴⁶

⁴³ Sebeos 11: 76 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson - Howard-Johnston 19).

⁴⁴ Sebeos 34: 114 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson - Howard-Johnston 68).

⁴⁵ Sebeos 38: 124 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson - Howard-Johnston 80-81).

⁴⁶ Sebeos 45: 147 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson - Howard-Johnston 112).

As we see, the Armenian historians were prepared to acknowledge the status of the Emperor as divinely established ruler of the Christian world, but some of them were also well aware of the limits of the imperial power, although we get the impression that on several occasions the description of the political system of the Empire is a reflection of the political structure of Armenia - for instance, Roman senators and noblemen are attributed with a position similar to the magnates (*naḫarars*) in Armenia, or the Empire is characterised as "House of Augustus" (*tun ogostosakan*) in analogy to the royal and noble houses of Armenia. This is a question which needs further research.

1.2 "Greece" as source of knowledge and as Christian model

Already in the earliest work of the Armenian literary production, Koriwn's *Life of Mesrob Maštoc'*, we read that the inventor of the Armenian alphabet "*in the years of his youth was educated in Greek literature*".⁴⁷ Maštoc' sent later his students to the centres of Christian Greek (and Syrian) learning in the Empire and to Constantinople, where Koriwn himself studied.⁴⁸ In the 6th and 7th century one can observe the development of the so-called "Hellenizing School" in Armenia, which carried out many translations from the Greek literature.⁴⁹ For the 7th century we read in the short autobiography of Ananias of Širak about his educational journeys to Theodosiopolis/Karin, Constantinople and Trebizond.⁵⁰ Therefore it is not surprising that Greek learning and literature were held in high esteem by many Armenian authors.⁵¹ Movsēs Xorenac'i, one of the greatest Philhellens among our authors, wrote:⁵² (...) *Therefore I do not hesitate to call all Greece the mother or nurse of the sciences*.⁵³

In another part of his work, Movsēs Xorenac'i contrasts the "absurd and incoherent Persian stories" of ancient Iranian mythology with the

⁴⁷ Koriwn (A kinean, long Version) § 20 (transl. Winkler 96-97); Thomson, *Formation* 140; cf. also Hultgard, *Armenia in Change and Crisis* 70.

⁴⁸ Koriwn (A kinean, long Version) § 46, § 136-140 (transl. Winkler 100, 111-112).

⁴⁹ Terian, *The Hellenizing School* 175-186.

⁵⁰ Thomson, *Formation* 144; Terian, *The Hellenizing School* 180-181.

⁵¹ For a comparison with Syriac sources cf. Brock, *From Antagonism to Assimilation* 17-34.

⁵² Movs. Xor. (transl. Thomson) 20-22; Garsoian, *The two Voices* 16-17; Thomson, *Armenian Ideology* 388.

⁵³ Movs. Xor. I, 2 (A belean - Yarut'iwnian; transl. Thomson 68).

"Greek fables, noble and polished and meaningful, which have hidden in themselves allegorically the meaning of events"; a comparable interpretation we find in the work of Gregory of Nazianz.⁵⁴ The attraction of Byzantium for students from Armenia is also made clear:

But they received seductive letters from some imposters to the effect that Sahak the Great and Mesrop were preparing to send others to Byzantium, so without the permission of their own teachers they straightway set out for Byzantium, being zealous for good learning. And as they were very competent in Greek letters they set to translating and writing. But jealous of them, their fellow pupils, whose names were Leontius and Koriun, departed of their own accord to them in Byzantium.⁵⁵

And from every place within the borders of Armenia and from the lands and provinces of his realm king Trdat commanded many young children to be introduced to the art of writing and faithful teachers to be put in charge. (...) These he divided into two groups, some being set to Syriac (yAsori dprut'iwn) and others to Greek (i Hellēn).⁵⁶

Also Łazar P'arpec'i studied in the Byzantine Empire, as he himself confesses:

He (Łazar) journeyed to the land of the Greeks and there, associating with noble and virtuous men, he assimilated completely the pearl – the divine word. Then he returned to his own country. (...) But since I am very versed in Greek studies and have improved my weak-mindedness by reading the books of holy men who were armed with the weapons of the holy Spirit (...). Regard the people of the Greeks. When a preacher holds forth and he who wishes to speak, they advance to the appointed spot, and arousing everyone raise their hearts to God. With outstretched arms they take on the form of a cross.⁵⁷

In his history, Łazar P'arpec'i praises Constantinople as the fountain of wisdom:

From that time (the reign of Constantine) on streams of wisdom have issued from that city (Constantinople), as from a royal residence, and prominent scholars have hastened to go there from all parts of the Byzantine

⁵⁴ Movs. Xor. I (Abelean – Yartut'iwn; transl. Thomson 126); Garsoian, *The two Voices* 15–16; Thomson, *Armenian Ideology* 375.

⁵⁵ Movs. Xor. III, 60 (Abelean – Yartut'iwn; transl. Thomson 334).

⁵⁶ Agathangelos (armen.) § 840: 374 (Thomson; transl. 375).

⁵⁷ Łazar P'arpec'i, Letter: 185, 192, 199 (Ter Mkrtč'ean – S. Malxaseanc'; transl. Thomson 247, 255, 262).

land. To this day those streams of knowledge have extended themselves and have flowed to all areas.⁵⁸

But for Xorenac'i, "the land of the Greeks" is not only the hoard of classical learning, but also the model of a Christian state:

Having returned from Byzantium (Biwzandion) to Caesarea, he (St. Nerses) came to Armenia and restored all the just administration of his fathers, and he went even further. For the good order that he had seen in the land of the Greeks (Yunac' ašxarh), especially in the royal city, he imitated here. (...) So he ordered in every province poorhouses to be built in remote and uninhabited places to offer relief to the suffering on the model of the Greek hospitals. (...) Thenceforth one could see that our country was not like uncivilized barbarians but like a well-mannered civilized nation.⁵⁹

The stay of Nersēs in Constantinople and his imitation of Byzantine institutions (poorhouses, hospitals) are not mentioned in Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk'. That means we have in front of us an interpretation of the events by Xorenac'i, who once more establishes Byzantium as standard for the height of civilization.⁶⁰

The Christian character of the Roman/Byzantine Empire is contrasted with the pagan rule of the Persians and of the Arabs on several occasions,

⁵⁸ Łazar P'arpec'i 3: 4 (Ter Mkrtč'ean – S. Malxaseanc'; transl. Bedrosian; cf. Thomson 37).

⁵⁹ Movs. Xor. III, 20 (Abelean – Yartut'iwn; transl. Thomson 274); interestingly, Agathangelos describes that King Trdat the Great used the Empire as model for his policy even before the Christianisation of both states, cf. Agathangelos (armen.) § 128: 138–140 (Thomson; transl. 139–141): "Let everyone know from this command of ours (= King Trdat) to you, that we are concerned for your prosperity. For when we were in the land of the Greeks (ašxarh Yunac) we saw there the solicitude of their kings in caring for the prosperity of their land, in honoring the altars of the gods with building and sacrifices and gifts of notable offerings, and all kinds of presents and fruits, offering them a share of everything, being most assiduous in worshipping, embellishing, adorning and magnifying the noble, magnificent and eternal gods. And this further we saw, how from the same gods in compensation they gained peaceful and populous prosperity, abundant and overflowing fertility, and were honored with every blessing and enjoyed peace and happiness."

⁶⁰ Movs. Xor. (transl. Thomson) 46–49; according to Movs. Xor. III, 36 (Abelean – Yartut'iwn; transl. Thomson 294–295), the Persians also "ordered that Greek letters should not be studied but only Persian, and that no one should speak or translate Greek on the pretext that it was to prevent the Armenians from having any acquaintance or friendly relations with the Greeks. But in reality it was to destroy the teaching of Christianity, for at that time the Armenians did not yet have a script and the church services were conducted in Greek".

especially in the context of cooperation with or emigration to the Empire.

And all the greatest Armenian princes assemble together, and the sparapet Mušel and the hayr-mardpet as well as all the other princes said: "What shall we do? How shall we act? Shall we avenge our king's (Pap, killed on order of the Emperor) death or not?" Then the following decision was taken at the council and they said: "We cannot become servants of the heathen Persians or be hostile to the king of the Greeks. Neither can we carry on hostilities with both of them. Nor can we maintain ourselves without the support of one of them." Consequently, this decision was taken at the council: "What has been, has been. Let us serve the king of the Greeks. Let us make our submission to the authority of the kingdom of the Greeks, and let the kingdom of the Greeks treat us at it wills."⁶¹

They were betrayed by the division of the great land of Armenia between the two kings of Persia and Greece who caused them to do service. Thus did Aršak, king of Armenia, quit the district of Ayrarat as if going into captivity. He considered it better to go to the much smaller sector (of Armenia) in a believing country, where he would be subject to the Greek king, than to remain in such a luxuriantly comfortable district (as Ayrarat) and witness daily the ridicule of the (Christian) religion, enmity directed against the holy Church, the insults born by clerics of the divine covenant from the impious mages and the scorn shown to his line and kingdom from the arrogant princes of the Iranian lordship. So he preferred to live out this inconsequential and measured life in peace as a Christian rather than remain dwelling there in false glory, as one who is scorned, and, not attaining eternal life, be betrayed to the inextinguishably burning eternal fire. Thinking all of this over, suddenly he made up his hesitant mind to leave the good inheritance of his ancestors, and to enter the service of the Greek king.⁶²

So Aršak left the native kingdom of his fathers, Ayrarat, and all the part of the Persian sector, and went to rule over the western regions of our country, in the Greek sector (i bažnin Yunac'), not only because of his mother who was in the imperial capital (i kayserakan k'alak'ēn), but because he thought that it was better to rule over a smaller region and serve a Christian king than to control most (of the country) and submit to the yoke of heathens. The princes of Šapuh's sector followed him with their wives and sons, abandoning each one's possessions and villages and estates.⁶³

⁶¹ Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk' V, 33 (transl. Garsoian 214).

⁶² Lazar P'arpec'i 8: 11–12 (Tēr Mkrtč'ean – S. Malxaseanc'; transl. Bedrosian, cf. Thomson 44–45).

⁶³ Movs. Xor. III, 42 (Abelean – Yarut'iwnean; transl. Thomson 304).

"Having secured permission from (Emperor Constantine V [741–775], the inhabitants of the Armenian districts) prepared themselves, packed their belongings and moved, placing their trust in the power of the dominical cross and in the glory of the King (ark'ay). They separated themselves (from the rest), left their homeland, and went to the country of the pious king."⁶⁴

As expected, the cause for an alliance with Byzantium or for emigrating to the Empire is sought once more in the common Christian faith (which could legitimize also defection from the actual overlord). But the Christian character of the Empire could be depicted in even more spectacular ways.

1.3 Constantinople as New Jerusalem and the Empire as apocalyptic beast

"The influence of the Bible was all-pervasive in Armenian literature", as Robert W. Thomson has stated, and: "Armenian historians saw parallels between the fortunes of Israel and the fate of their own country."⁶⁵ The same can be said of course for the Byzantine historians; the Empire was equated with the chosen people, Constantinople became not only the New Rome⁶⁶, but since the beginning of the 6th century also the New Jerusalem.⁶⁷

It was in the 7th century in the face of the Sasanian attacks, which culminated in the conquest of Jerusalem 614, and later of the threatening Islamic expansion, that biblical and apocalyptic interpretations of history became even more prevalent.⁶⁸ Sebēos used biblical motives "to give extra depth to his narrative and to signal the providential framework of contemporary history", as Howard-Johnston has stated.⁶⁹ The march of a Persian army against the Bosphorus and Constantinople gives Sebēos the opportunity to do so:

⁶⁴ Lewond c. 29: 12 (transl. Arzoumanian 123–124).

⁶⁵ Movs. Xor. (transl. Thomson) 17–20; Thomson, *Concept of History* 96; cf. also Greenwood, *Photius* 126, 129–130.

⁶⁶ For this concept see also Movs. Xor. II, 88 (Abelean – Yarut'iwnean; transl. Thomson 243).

⁶⁷ Cf. Brandes, *Anastasios* 38–39; Dagron, *Emperor and Priest* 4 and 97; Magdalino, *The Year 1000*, 243 and 255, also on the "apocalyptic" relevance of Constantinople.

⁶⁸ Reinink, *Heraclius, the New Alexander*; Thomson, *The Crusaders* 74–79; Watt, *The Portrayal of Heraclius* 73.

⁶⁹ Howard-Johnston, *Armenian Historians* 49.

In the 34th year of king Khosrov he wrote a letter to Heraclius a follows: "Khosrov, honoured among the gods, lord and king of all the earth, and offspring of the great Aramazd, to Heraclius our senseless and insignificant servant. You have not wished to submit yourself to us, but you call yourself lord and king. My treasure which is with you, you spend. (...) So did I not destroy the Greeks? But you claim to trust in your God. Why did he not save Caesarea and Jerusalem and the great Alexandria from my hands. Do you not know that I have subjected to myself the sea and the dry land? So is it only Constantinople that I shall not be able to erase? (...) Let not your vain hope deceive you. For that Christ who was not able to save himself from the Jews – but they killed him by hanging him on a cross – how can the same save you from my hand? (...) When the Emperor Heraclius received this epistle, he ordered it to be read before the patriarch (hayrapet) and the magnates (ew mecamecac'n). Entering the house of God, they spread the letter before the holy altar. They fell on their faces to the ground before the Lord and wept bitterly, so that he might see the insults which his enemies had inflicted upon him."⁷⁰

Later, of course, the imperial city and the Empire are saved from the Persians and their outrageous king by the Lord. As Thomson, Greenwood and others have observed, this passage is based foremost on the description of the ultimatum by the Assyrian king Sennacharib to the king Hezekiah of Judah and the king's reaction to this ultimatum and his letter, which we find in the book of Isaiah.⁷¹ In the same way the compiler of the history attributed to Sebēos describes the attack on Constantinople under the command of the Arab general and later Caliph Mu'āwiyā in 654 – and once more the Lord saves Constantinople.⁷²

Letter from Muawiyā to Constans II: "Abandon that vain cult which you learned from childhood. Deny that Jesus and turn to the great God whom I worship, the God of our father Abraham. (...) That Jesus whom you call Christ, since he was unable to save himself from the Jews, how can he save you from my hands?" (...) The king (Constans II) received the letter, went into the House of God, fell on his face and said (...) He lifted the crown from his head, stripped of his purple (robes) and put on sackcloth, sat on ashes, and ordered a fast to be proclaimed in Constantinople in the manner of Nineveh."⁷³

⁷⁰ Sebēos 38: 123–124 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson – Howard-Johnston 79–80).

⁷¹ Greenwood, *Sebēos* 335.

⁷² Cf. also Greenwood, *Sebēos* 369–371.

⁷³ Sebēos 50: 169–170 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson – Howard-Johnston 144–145).

Afterwards the fleet of the Arabs is destroyed in a tempest sent by God. It is certain that Sebēos did not use this biblical story only as a literary model, but as a modus of interpretation; his readers would recognize this parallel position of Jerusalem and Constantinople, and this was his intention.⁷⁴

And also Lewond made use of the story of Sennacharib's letter to king Hezekiah, whom he even names as precursor of the king in his story.⁷⁵ Again the Arabs try to conquer Constantinople (in 717/718 CE), ruled at that time by Emperor Leo III (717–741):

The following year (caliph Suleiman) assembled an army once again, this time much larger than the previous one, put it under the command of Maslama and sent it to the country of the Greeks. (Maslama) took a solemn oath, vowing to his brother not to return to him until he fulfilled his own wishes. (Maslama) had made a vow to take away the kingdom by destroying the city of Constantinople from its foundations, as well as the various buildings of Saint Sophia which was built as the house of God on earth by (the power) of the heavenly wisdom. (Maslama) wanted to build a place of profane idolatry in its place.

[Maslama sends a letter to Emperor Leo III.]

He addressed all these and many more insults of the worst nature to the Emperor Leo (III). (The Emperor) having read the mocking missive, immediately gave orders to the Patriarch, the senate, and the entire population of the city, to say prayers of exaltation at St. Sophia incessantly for three days. The whole city was stirred and the entire population surrounded the place of worship in response to the Emperor's order. Then the king himself arrived at the holy sanctuary, took the missive of insults and spread it out before the Lord in the manner of Hezekiah, recalling the careful indulgence of our Saviour who had reserved mercy to his loved ones from the beginning. In tears, (the Emperor) beseeched the God of all to be his helper in gaining revenge from the wicked enemy.⁷⁶

Of course, the Arabs are defeated, as Maslama must confess: "I was unable to fight against God". To Leo III, who during the defence of Constantinople "himself carried the triumphant and invincible victory, that is the standard of the cross, on his shoulders", as Lewond writes, is also

⁷⁴ See above n. 67 for literature on Byzantine interpretations of Constantinople as New Jerusalem.

⁷⁵ Martin-Hisard, *L'Empire byzantin* 143–144.

⁷⁶ Lewond c. 20: 105–112 (Ezean; transl. Arzoumanian 109–113).

ascribed the long letter to Caliph 'Unar regarding the defence of the Christian faith, which is integrated in the work of Lewond.⁷⁷ In his work Leo III and his son Constantine V, both condemned as initiators of Iconoclasm in the Byzantine historiography and hagiography, are the great champions of Christendom, rulers over the New Jerusalem, like in several other texts of this time from the *Oriens Christianus*.⁷⁸

But the role of the Roman/Byzantine Empire in the divine order of the world is even more far reaching. Sebēos writes:

However, the blessed Daniel⁷⁹ had earlier prophesied such a disaster (the attacks of the Arabs) which befell the land. Through four beasts he indicated the four kingdoms which would arise on earth. First of all the kingdom of the West, the beast in human form, which is that of the Greeks. This is clear from his saying: "The thick wings were plucked, and it was exterminated from the earth." He speaks about the extermination of devilish idolatry: "And it stood as on the feet of a man, and the heart of a man was given it." [The second beast stands for the Sasanian kingdom "of the East"; it, like to a bear, has three ribs, representing the Persians, Medes and Parthians. The third beast is God and Magog, the kingdom "of the North". The fourth beast is the new force of Ishmael, the Arabic kingdom "of the South"].⁸⁰

Sebēos' apocalyptic interpretation of the events of the 7th century has been analyzed by Tim Greenwood in every detail in his paper published in *Le Museon* in 2002.⁸¹ The identification of the Roman Empire with one of the beasts of Daniel's vision has, of course, a long tradition. But within the Byzantine "Reichseschatologie", as Podskalsky has called it, the Roman Empire was normally identified with the fourth beast and equated with the *katechon*, "the withholding power" from the second letter to the Thessalonians (2 Thess 2, 7); accordingly, the Imperium Romanum would be the only Empire which would exist until the Last Judgement. As it became clear that for the time being Constantinople and the Empire would not fall into the hands of the Muslims, this interpretation again became

⁷⁷ Cf. Martin-Hisard, *L'Empire byzantin* 138–139; for Muslim eschatological concepts in connection with Constantinople and its conquest cf. El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* 60–71.

⁷⁸ On the image of the iconoclastic Emperors in oriental sources see esp. Gero, *Leo III*, and idem, *Constantine V*; cf. also Dagron, *Emperor and Priest* 158–191, esp. 184–185.

⁷⁹ Cf. Dan 7.

⁸⁰ Sebēos 44: 141 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson – Howard-Johnston 105).

⁸¹ Greenwood, *Sebeos* 375–388; cf. also Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 124–132.

popular, as we can see in the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, composed in Syriac in the last decade of the 7th century. In that text this apocalyptic interpretation was combined with the hope that a Roman Emperor from the West ("the King of the Greeks" as he is also called in the Syriac text of Pseudo-Methodius⁸²) would defeat the Muslims and liberate the Christians of the East.⁸³ This interpretation was also integrated in the Armenian tradition, as is documented by an apocalyptic work with the title "The Vision of Enoch the Just", preserved only in Armenian, but most likely a translation from Greek. This work is obviously a reaction to the Arabic siege of Constantinople in 717/718, which ended with a Byzantine victory, and underlines the essential role of the Roman Empire, represented by an "eagle with eight wings and four heads" in the events the Last Judgement and the second appearance of the Lord. In this version Byzantium was the "Christian Empire to which the Armenians looked for eschatological victory, at least for the next centuries".⁸⁴ In the 12th century the liberators from the West would be identified with the Crusaders.⁸⁵

But "Sebēos (...) has no (such) optimistic forecast of deliverance from these new disasters", as Thomson stated and we have seen.⁸⁶ We can also find this rather pessimistic interpretation in some passages of Lewond⁸⁷:

In the first year of (Muawiyah's) reign, and in the twenty-fifth year of that of Emperor Constans (II), the grandson of Heraclius, the caliph of the Tachiks (= Arabs) began to send troops to Armenia. (...) Since that day the King of the Greeks lost courage and confidence for he knew that the

⁸² Brandes, *Die Belagerung Konstantinopels* 72–73; Greenwood, *Sebeos* 383–384.

⁸³ Cf. in general Podskalsky, *Reichseschatologie*, esp. 4–76; Brandes, *Anastasios* 24–25; Reinink, *Heraclius, the New Alexander* 82–83; Watt, *The Portrayal of Heraclius* 71–72. On the Ps.-Methodius apocalypse see: Möhring, *Weltkaiser* 58–92 (also on the circumstances of the genesis of the Ps.-Methodius apocalypse); Magdalino, *The Year 1000*, 240 and 253 (also on apocalyptic interpretations in the first reign of Justinian II, 685–695 CE); Brandes, *Anastasios* 50–52, and idem, *Die Belagerung Konstantinopels* 81; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 263–267, 294–299; cf. also Greenwood, *Photius* 136, for the same vision in a letter written by Patriarch Photius to the Armenians.

⁸⁴ Hultgard, *Armenia in Change and Crisis* 71–74; cf. also Thomson, *Armenian Ideology* 382, 385; Möhring, *Weltkaiser* 347; Brandes, *Die Belagerung Konstantinopels* 86; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 299–302.

⁸⁵ Thomson, *Concept of History* 91 u. 97–98; Thomson, *The Crusaders* 75–78.

⁸⁶ Thomson, *The Crusaders* 75; Thomson, *Concept of History* 91; Howard-Johnston, *Armenian Historians* 44–46; Thomson, *Armenian Ideology* 381–382; Brandes, *Die Belagerung Konstantinopels* 68–69.

⁸⁷ Martin-Hisard, *L'Empire byzantin* 140.

failure of his power had been caused by the Lord. He no longer attempted any attack against the Arabs.⁸⁸

A similar opinion we find in a speech attributed to prince Ašot Bagra-tuni:⁸⁹

"Even the Roman Empire was unable to raise its hand against it (the dragon = the Caliphate), and it still continues to tremble before it and has not dared to act against the dominical command. I do not think you are unaware of the full power, the personal courage of the Emperor of the Greeks (arkay Yunac'), as well as the great number of his troops and ammunition. And yet even he did not think of delivering the land of Armenia from its (the dragon's) hands. (I am referring to) Constantine (V), son of Leo (III), who in one day, while wrestling with fierce beasts, killed the lion as if he were killing goats. If (Constantine) himself, being so powerful, was obviously subdued by the presence of the pernicious beast which ravages the world, on whom are you relying? (...) you will be forced to flee from your land with your entire households (...) and live under the foreign yoke of the king of Greeks."⁹⁰

And also Kalankatuac'i gives an apocalyptic meaning to the events of the 7th century in a similar pessimistic manner as Sebēos:

(...) for as the multitude of waters flood the earth with their furious waves, so the kings of the Romans with their massed armies spread their multitudes thickly over the entire world. Now, however, the exalted power of that throne, thus dissipated, passed away, so that the forests of men in its control were caught in the shadow of that which choked like Gideon's briers and which the scions of the tyrants, stifled among them, could not shift the least degree. When the ram of the west saw that the Lord had withdrawn his aid from his sword and that the savage wild boar grew fierce and ground his horn, he interpreted this to be the fulfilment of the time foretold by the prophecy and promise to Abraham: "the hands of Ishmael will be against all men, and the hand of all men against him" (Gen 16, 12) and "before him, a devouring flame, and behind him, a burning flame" (Joel 2, 3). Then the Emperor of the Romans (kayser Hořomac') took the remnants of his army and hastened across sea and passed within the borders of the distant isles of the west. (...) Seeing the Emperor of the Romans rendered powerless and weak by the king of the south, who con-

⁸⁸ Lewond c. 4: 12–13 (Ezean; transl. Arzoumanian 53).

⁸⁹ Cf. also Greenwood, *Armenian Neighbours* 347.

⁹⁰ Lewond c. 34: 142–143 (Ezean; transl. Arzoumanian 132–133).

sumed his populous markets and towns like a flame, the great prince of the east Juanšēr was greatly concerned for his kingdom.⁹¹

This vision can even be connected with a concrete event, namely the year 662, when Constans II transferred his residence from Constantinople to the West and took personal charge of the territories in Sicily and Italy.⁹² Seeing "the ram of the West" a fugitive, the submission of the Albanian prince Juanšēr to the Arabs made perfect sense in political and apocalyptic terms.

As we have seen, the picture of Byzantium within this apocalyptic interpretation can be ambivalent – inducement of hope as well as of fear; but there is also an undoubted "dark side" of the Eastern Roman Empire to be found in the early Armenian historiography.

II The "dark side" of the (Eastern) Roman Empire

II.1 Byzantium and its Emperors as sources of heresy

Since the 6th century, the controversy over the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) became the main contentious issue between Byzantium and Armenia and eventually led to a schism between the two churches.⁹³ Under the impression of this debate, the Roman Empire even before the time of Chalcedon could be regarded as source of heresies. Such we read in the Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk':

Because of the existence of a covenant of peace and alliance between the realm of Armenia and the Emperor of the Greeks, it then seemed good to the king of Armenia (Aršak II) to send with great pomp the great Katholikos of Armenia, Nersēs in person, together with ten of the greatest Armenian satraps to the Emperor in order to renew the covenant of accord and peace. And so they set out and came to the imperial palace (palat) of the kings of the Greeks. (Now) at about that time, the great king of the Greeks, Valēs, had strayed from the faith into the heretical sect of the Arians.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Movses Kalankatuac'i II, 27: 192–193 (Arak'elyan; transl. Dowsett 124–125).

⁹² Howard-Johnston, *Armenian Historians* 56–57 u. 59–60; Greenwood, *Armenian Neighbours* 343.

⁹³ Cf. esp. Garsoian, *Grand schisme*.

⁹⁴ Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk' IV, 5 (transl. Garsoian 116); for the influence of the pro-Arian policy of the Emperors on the Armenian kingdom cf. Garsoian, *Politique ou Orthodoxie* 303–310; for the mission of St. Nerses see Garsoian, *Quidam Narseus* 148–164.

Now (...) King Valēs grew angry, inflicting persecutions on the holy churches throughout all the regions of his dominion, separating and removing all bishops from their flock and sending them into alien lands. (Also Nersēs is sent to exile.)⁹⁵

Although the respective Emperor erroneously is being called Valens instead of Constantius, the statement is clear: the Emperor could abuse his powers to threaten the true faith and its adherents. Also Movsēs Xorenac'i tells the same story about Nersēs' exile; but after Valens has suffered his well-deserved punishment (his death in the battle of Adrianople against the Goths in 378 CE – here Xorenac'i's informations come from Socrates), his pious successor Theodosius restores the orthodox faith and the order of the Christian Empire⁹⁶:

At that time the episcopal throne of Byzantium was occupied by Macedonius, the Pneumatomachos. And when the order came from the palace to exile Nerses the Great as a deceiver and traitor to the Emperor (...).⁹⁷

Emperor Valens, according to the deserts of his intentions, suffering here the example of eternal hell, was consumed by fire at Adrianople and perished, and Theodosius received the crown. He tore down to the ground the temples of the idols, which had only been closed by Saint Constantine, those dedicated to the sun and to Artemis and to Aphrodite in Byzantium. He likewise destroyed the temple of Damascus and made it into a church, and did the same to the temple of Heliopolis, the great and famous trithion of Lebanon. He restored all the holy fathers who had been exiled to the mines for their orthodoxy. Among these was Nersēs the Great, whom he brought to see him at Byzantium and kept with great honour until the true faith was confirmed with regard to the blasphemies of the impious Macedonius.⁹⁸

But the "world-destroying" Council of Chalcedon, as Movsēs Kalankatuac'i calls it, on the contrary, would lead to a permanent breach between Armenia and the Empire, although the *henotikon* of Emperor Zeno (in 482 CE) restored orthodoxy in the eyes of the Armenians for a certain amount of time once more:

⁹⁵ Buzandaran Patmut' iwnk' IV, 6 (transl. Garsoian 124); cf. also Movs. Xor. III, 13–15 (Abelean – Yarut' iwnean; transl. Thomson 266–268) on the reign of Julian Apostata.

⁹⁶ Movs. Xor. (transl. Thomson) 37.

⁹⁷ Movs. Xor. III, 30 (Abelean – Yarut' iwnean; transl. Thomson 287).

⁹⁸ Movs. Xor. III, 33 (Abelean – Yarut' iwnean; transl. Thomson 290).

One hundred and eighty years after the conversion of Armenia, in the days of Babgen, catholicos of Armenia, a council was convened concerning the world-destroying Council of Chalcedon. Greece, Italy, Armenia, Albania, and Georgia unanimously cursed the infamous Council of Chalcedon and the tome of Leo at the command of the pious kings Zeno and Anastasius. Eighty-seven years later, in the days of Abraham, catholicos of Armenia, the Georgians separated from the Armenians through the accursed Kiwrion, and Greece and Italy with them.⁹⁹

In Movsēs Kalankatuac'i it is the Emperor Marcian, already in bad reputation for his decline of the Armenian appeal for help, who destroyed the orthodox faith. Here the contrast to the Byzantine sources, which praise Marcianus as *Novus Constantinus*, *Novus Paulus* and *Novus David* and his wife Pulcheria as *Nova Helena* on the occasion of the Council of Chalcedon, is evident:¹⁰⁰

During the reign of the malevolent Marcian over the Romans he, being misled by his wife, the filthy Pulcheria, a renegade Nestorian, shattered and destroyed the articles of orthodox faith by means of the Council of Chalcedon. Hereafter those who accepted it strove on many occasions to make Armenia conform with them by writing letters and convening several councils. They assembled once in Constantinople and twice in Theodosiopolis. They attempted to win them over as men in error, but although by command of the king they relied upon their most erudite Greek orators to prevail by their subtle tongues and Hellenic eloquence, they were answered in the same vein; for learning had been revived in the churches of Armenia and there were experts in the Greek tongue.¹⁰¹

Interestingly, the high standard of Greek civilization and philosophy, highly praised, as we have seen, by Xorenaci or Łazar P'arpec'i, is being here presented as source of danger for the salvation of the Armenians.¹⁰² In this context of the dangers from the Greek education in the time after Chalcedon one can also read a passage in Sebēos:

(Catholicos Nerses) was raised from his youth in the territory of the Greeks, had studied the language and literature of the Romans, and travelled through those lands with the army in a military capacity. (...) But he kept the bitter poison hidden in his heart, and he planned to convert Arme-

⁹⁹ Movsēs Kalankatuac'i II, 47: 269–270 (Arak' elyan; transl. Dowsett 173–174).

¹⁰⁰ Lieu, *From History to Legend* 157; Arutjunova-Fidanjan, *L'image* 10.

¹⁰¹ Movsēs Kalankatuac'i II, 48: 271–272 (Arak' elyan; transl. Dowsett 174–175).

¹⁰² Cf. also Brock, *From Antagonism to Assimilation* 17 and 19.

nia to the council of Chalcedon.”¹⁰³

The creed of Chalcedon did not only separate the two Churches, the pro-Chalcedon Roman Emperors also divided the Armenian country in the same way as the political boundaries between Byzantium and Persia:

Yet another command came from the Emperor (Maurice), to preach the council of Chalcedon in all the churches of the land of Armenia, and to unite them in communion through his army. But the clerics of the Armenian churches fled to a foreign land. Many, disregarding the command, stood their ground and remained unmoved. But many others, swayed by ambition, united by joining in communion. Then the see of the Catholicosate was divided into two: one named Movsēs and the other Yovhan – Movsēs in the Persian sector and Yovhan in the Greek.¹⁰⁴

And so also the troops of the Christian Empire become an instrument of the Devil, as we can read in another passage:

But that rebellious dragon (= Satan) did not delay. Desiring through his deceit to fight with God, he travailed to raise persecutions in the churches of the land of Armenia. For in the years of king Constans, grandson of Heraclius, he brought into play his wicked guile, making the Greek troops (zzors Yunac‘) in Armenia his accomplices, since the Armenians never did receive the Romans (zHor‘omn; also a synonym for the adherents of Chalcedon) in communion in the body and blood of the Lord. So they wrote a complaint to Constans, the Greek king and to the patriarch: “We are considered as impious in this country, because they reckon the council of Chalcedon and the Tome of Leo to be an insult to Jesus Christ, and they anathematize them.” Then the king, with the patriarch, gave a command, and they wrote an edict to the Armenians that they should effect a union of faith with Rome and should not scorn the council and that Tome.¹⁰⁵

In reaction to the imperial edict mentioned in text cited above, the Armenian bishops and nobles write the already mentioned letter to Emperor Constans II; and there they declare:

So we hold our faith, not as being defined by very recent people, but as we have received it from the holy apostles through our patriarch St Gregory,

¹⁰³ Sebeos 49: 166–167 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson – Howard-Johnston 140).

¹⁰⁴ Sebeos 19: 91 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson – Howard-Johnston 37).

¹⁰⁵ Sebeos 45: 147–148 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson – Howard-Johnston 113).

ry, who instructed king Trdat and the princes of Armenia almost 30 years before Constantine.¹⁰⁶

We received (this faith) from St Gregory and the God-loving kings Constantine and Trdat; and afterwards the light of Nicaea was established for us through the same blessed Constantine. On that same tradition we stand firm, and we shall not deviate from it, neither to the right nor to the left.¹⁰⁷

Obviously, the Armenians are the ones who preserve the real and orthodox creed as it was established by Constantine and Trdat – and not the Byzantines. This can be compared with Eastern Syriac sources from Persia, which also claim, that they have been preserved from the errors of the Byzantine church.¹⁰⁸ But in this letter the Armenians also “emphasize a common doctrinal and historical inheritance with the Greek Church”, as Tim Greenwood noticed.¹⁰⁹ A renewal of the pact between Constantine and Trdat – in political and theological terms – could still bring the Empire back on the orthodox path; but this did not happen, as Sebēos describes later.

II.2 Roman power and “imperialism”

This tradition on the pact of friendship between Constantine and Trdat suggested an almost equal status of the two great kings, which would call each other “brother”, an appellation the Byzantines did not grant easily within the framework of their “family of kings”, as Franz Dölger has called it. But, to cite Nina Garsoian: “For Rome, at least, the inequality of status was self-evident.”¹¹⁰

That the Romans expected “complete subjection to the Roman Empire”, as we read in Movsēs Xorenac‘i, is clear also in several passages on what one may call “Roman imperialism”.

¹⁰⁶ Sebeos 46: 155 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson – Howard-Johnston 122–123).

¹⁰⁷ Sebeos 46: 160 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson – Howard-Johnston 130).

¹⁰⁸ Watt, *The Portrayal of Heraclius* 72–73.

¹⁰⁹ Greenwood, *Sebeos* 368.

¹¹⁰ Garsoian, *Armenia in the fourth century* 345–346; cf. also for a later Byzantine interpretation of the relationship between the renewed Armenian kingdom and the Empire: De administrando imperio c. 44, 45–49: 200 (Moravcsik – Jenkins): *Since the prince of princes is the servant of the Emperor of the Romans, being appointed by him and receiving this rank from him, it is obvious that the cities and townships and territories of which he is lord also belong to the Emperor of the Romans.*

"The Emperor Valentinian Augustus, with our colleague and coEmperor the Caesar Valens, to Aršak, king of Armenia, greetings. (...) Be well in complete subjection to the Roman Empire."¹¹¹

The Emperors appointed and deposed Armenian kings and treated them as they pleased; according to Xorenac'i even the pious Emperor Theodosius acted in that way:

The Emperor Theodosius ordered him (King Varazdat) to be arrested if he did not come on his own will at the Emperor's summons. Therefore, under pressure, he went of his own will, hoping to deceive the Augustus. But the Emperor did not even honour him with an audience, but had him taken in iron bonds to T'ul'i, an island in the Ocean. He had reigned for four years.¹¹²

Then in succession to Varazdat, Theodosius the Great made Pap's two sons Aršak and Val'arshak kings of Armenia on the assumption that they would not both unite in revolt. Keeping there (in Byzantium) the mother of these youths, he sent them off with governors (appointed) by himself, faithful men, and with an army. (...) ¹¹³

Later, the armies of the Byzantine Emperor damaged not only the souls of the people of the Caucasus, as we have seen above (II.1), but also their bodies:

Now while such confusion was embroiling the land of Persia, Yovhan patrik (the Byzantine general John Mystakon in the year 590 CE) and a Greek army were keeping the city of Dvin besieged, attacking it with catapults, and were close to destroying the wall. But when this news arrived, they abandoned it and went off, making their way to Atrpatakan. They seized control of the whole country, and put all men and women to the sword. Taking all the plunder and captives and booty, they returned to their own land.¹¹⁴

King Constans (II), when he heard this, desired the multitude of his army to engage in plunder and go to winter in Armenia, so that he might destroy the country. Then the Catholicos and Mušel with all the Armenian princes fell on their faces, and with great supplications and tearful entreaties requested mercy, lest on account of their trespasses he be totally angered and ruin the country. The king heeded their entreaties and sent away the larger part of his army.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Movs. Xor. III, 19 (Abelean - Yarut'iwnean; transl. Thomson 273).

¹¹² Movs. Xor. III, 40 (Abelean - Yarut'iwnean; transl. Thomson 302).

¹¹³ Movs. Xor. III, 41 (Abelean - Yarut'iwnean; transl. Thomson 303).

¹¹⁴ Sebeos 10: 74 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson - Howard-Johnston 16).

¹¹⁵ Sebeos 48: 166 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson - Howard-Johnston 139).

In the second year of Emperor (kayser) Justiian's (Justinian II) reign, and during the rule of Ašot the patrician, (the Emperor) sent large forces into Armenia. (The imperial troops) ravaged and plundered our country, set fire to many magnificent buildings and destroyed them before they returned to their country.¹¹⁶

This last passage can be compared to one of the Syriac historian Barhebraeus, who writes that the defeated Roman troops by leaving Syria after 636 CE "have plundered the native Christians, and these Romans were far worse than the Arabs".¹¹⁷ A topic which we also find in other Eastern Christian and Arabic sources is the arrogance of Byzantine imperial officers and commanders; for instance, we read in Lewond:¹¹⁸

But (Procopius), trusting in the number of forces rather than in God who alone ordains success in war, despised the words of the prince of the Armenians. (...) (Procopius) became so angry at the prince that he threw the scepter which he held in his hand at him.¹¹⁹

Shortly after this, Procopius' army of 60,000 men is defeated by 10,000 Arabs, a sign that the Roman general had incurred the wrath of God.

The Roman Empire did not only menace the independence of Armenia, we also find Armenian territorial claims over areas long fallen under the Roman rule in our sources:

(...) there was no one to help Aršam resist the Romans. He parleyed with them for a peace treaty, giving tribute from Mešopotamia and the regions of Caesarea through Herod. This was the beginning for part of Armenia to become tributary to the Romans." (As Xorenac'i claims, Caesarea was founded by the Armenian king Aram).¹²⁰

He (King Aršak) raged in great fury against the Emperor (Valens) (...) attacked and devastated the region of Gamirk' (= Cappadocia) as far as the city of Ankyra. For six years one after the other he ravaged the realm of the Greek territory.¹²¹

And then the Epic Histories (Buzandaran Patmut'iwnean) become even more explicit:

¹¹⁶ Lewond c. 5: 17 (Ezean; transl. Arzoumanian 55).

¹¹⁷ Cited after Watt, *The Portrayal of Heraclius* 77.

¹¹⁸ Garsoian, *Armenia in the fourth century* 345; Martin-Hisard, *L'Empire byzantin* 139; El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* 34-39.

¹¹⁹ Lewond c. 2: 7-8 (transl. Arzoumanian 50).

¹²⁰ Movs. Xor. II, 24 (Abelean - Yarut'iwnean; transl. Thomson 161).

¹²¹ Buzandaran Patmut'iwnean IV, 11 (transl. Garsoian 132-133).

King Pap changed his mind and turned his heart away from the king of the Greeks, and he wished to unite in love and alliance with the king of Persia. And so he began to rely on the king of Persia and he then sent him envoys concerning an alliance. He also sent envoys to the king of the Greeks (to say): "Ten cities together with Caesarea belong to me, therefore return them (to me). The city of Urhay (= Edessa) was also built by my ancestors; consequently, if you do not wish to initiate a conflict, give it back, otherwise we will fight a great war." But Mušel and all the Armenian princes urgently sought to persuade the king not to break the covenant with the kingdom of the Greeks. He, however, would not listen to them and openly manifested his hostility to the king of the Greeks."¹²²

And even in the 7th century history of Sebēos we find this concept of a much Greater Armenia, when the Persian usurper Vahram tries to bring the Armenian nobles around Mušel Mamikonean over in his side in the year 591:

Then Vahram wrote a letter to Mušel (Mamikonean) and the other Armenian nobles, which ran as follows: "(...) I swear (...), that I will give you the kingdom (t'agaworut'iwn) of Armenia, and whoever you wish you may make king for yourselves. I shall give up for you all the land of Armenia as far as the Caucasus and the Pass of the Aluank'; and on the side of Syria, Aruastan, Nisibis, and Nor Širakan as far as the borders of the Arabs, because that was yours in the time of your ancestors; in the west, as far as Caesarea of Cappadocia."¹²³

As Thomson and Greenwood have observed, this "definition of the Armenian territory (...) bears (...) resemblance" to a passage in Agathangelos, where is being described the area which was converted by St. Gregory.¹²⁴

But this of course were vain dreams; Armenia was divided between the two neighbouring Great Powers, its monarchy was abolished. And behind these repeated divisions Armenian historians suspected the darkest plots of the two Empires. We read in Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk' about the treaty between the Emperor Iovian and the Great King Šapuh II in 363:

But when peace came between the Greek king (Iovian) and Šapuh king of Persia, the Greek king wrote a letter of covenant, sealed it, and

¹²² Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk' V, 32 (transl. Garsoian 213).

¹²³ Sebeos 11: 78 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson - Howard-Johnston 20-21); on this letter see also Preiser-Kapeller, *Kaysr* 190.

¹²⁴ Greenwood, *Sebeos* 335.

sent it to the king of Persia. And this is what was written in the letter of covenant: "I give you," he said: "the city of Mchin (Nisibis), which is in Aruestan and Syrian Mesopotamia. And I am withdrawing from the Armenian Midlands. If you are able to attack and subject them, I shall not support them." The king of the Greeks was then in a difficult situation, and in these straits he was compelled to seal such words and send them to the king of Persia and free himself from him (by these means).¹²⁵

While Iovian, as the Epic Histories concede, "was in a difficult situation", they discover a diabolic plan behind the division of Greater Armenia in 387 between Theodosius I and the Persians:

Then a joint consultation for union and agreement was held between the two kings of the Greeks and the Persians, and they determined that first it would be good to divide the realm of Armenia in two between themselves. "For" they said, "this powerful and wealthy kingdom is set between us. It will be good if we are able to perturb and ruin this kingdom. First (let us) divide it in two with the Aršakuni kings whom we have installed, then (let us) strive to impinge on and impoverish them (and) drive them into subjection so that they should not be able to raise their head between us." They confirmed this plan and divided the realm in two.¹²⁶

Xorenac'i was not prepared to blame the pious Emperor Theodosius for this evil measure; therefore he ascribes the division of Armenia to his weak successor Arcadius:

When Shapuh realized that Arcadius was a deceitful man, he made overtures for peace to him since he had been defeated and beaten by his father Theodosius the Great. Arcadius agreed to make a treaty, especially (at the urging) of his generals. For although God had granted them victory in the years when the blessed Theodosius was alive, nonetheless the generals were weary and exhausted from the effort of continuous warfare. Therefore they came to terms and willingly agreed to divide Mesopotamia and Armenia by a new boundary.¹²⁷

But it is in Sebēos where we find on the occasion of the treaty between the Emperor Maurice and the Great King Xusro II in 591 another imperial letter comparable to the interpretation of the events of 387 given in the Epic Histories:

¹²⁵ Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk' IV, 21 (transl. Garsoian 154).

¹²⁶ Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk' VI, 1: (transl. Garsoian 233-234); cf. also Blockley, *Division*, and Greatrex, *Partition*, on the background of this partition.

¹²⁷ Movs. Xor. III, 42 (Abelean - Yarut'iwnēan; transl. Thomson 304).

At that time the king of the Greeks (t'agawor Yunac'), Maurice, ordered a letter of accusation (gir ambastanut'iwn) to be written to the Persian king concerning all the Armenian princes and their troops: "They are a perverse and disobedient race," he said: "they are between us and cause trouble. Now come, I shall gather mine and send them to Thrace; you gather yours and order them to be taken to the east. If they die, our enemies die; if they kill, they kill our enemies; but we shall live in peace. For if they remain in their own land, we shall have no rest." They both agreed.¹²⁸

According to the Epic Histories and Sebēos, the final aim of the neighbouring imperial powers in their agreements on the partition of Armenia was the destruction of the country and its noble houses – in this respect, the Christian Empire does not come off better than the heathen Persians.

III Conclusio

It may be characteristic for the works we have examined that the same compilation attributed to Sebēos provides the most impressive documentary evidence for the tradition of the covenant between Constantine the Great and King Trdat as well as a suspicion of the darkest motives behind the Roman imperial policy. The Roman/Byzantine Empire could be an object of deepest admiration as well as a reason for the most horrible fears for the early Armenian historians. The image of the Roman Empire was as variable as the Roman-Armenian political and religious relations, often within the same work. As Robert Thomson has stated "Armenian historians were capable of sophisticated interpretations of events and could adapt foreign sources to the Armenian situation with considerable finesse."¹²⁹ What we do not find is a "pronounced anti-Chalcedonian" and often anti-Byzantine spin as strong as in some works of the later historiography beginning from the 10th century, when the breach of Chalcedon had deepened;¹³⁰ then the Byzantines were also identified with the forces of Satan and the Anti-Christ.¹³¹ But the image of the Roman/Byzantine

¹²⁸ Sebēos 15: 86 (Abgaryan; transl. Thomson – Howard-Johnston 31); for a further interpretation of the letter see Preiser-Kapeller, *Kaysr* 190–191.

¹²⁹ Thomson, *Formation* 139.

¹³⁰ Garsoian, *Grand schisme* 241–282; idem, *Armenien* 1211–1214; Greenwood, *Sebeos* 363; Arutjunova-Fidanjan, *L'image* 12–13; Arutyunova-Fidanjan, *The image of Byzantium* 20.

¹³¹ Thomson, *Armenian Ideology* 386–387; Thomson, *The Crusaders* 79; Halfter, *Constantinus Novus* 412–413.

Empire was still being developed as was the Armenian historiography in these first centuries of indigenous Christian literature in the Caucasus-region. That Armenian historiography as well as policy preserved this flexibility in its dealing of this powerful neighbouring state becomes evident from the history of Catholicos Yohannēs Drasxanakertc'i (899–929), who wrote a letter to Emperor Constantine VII and cited this piece of diplomatic correspondence in his work:

Sublime Autocrat and Emperor of the Romans, Augustus Constantine, who are crowned and glorified by God, Great and Victorious King of the Universe, who are God-loving and pious, overseers of the public enlightenment during the course of this life, true peace-makers for all of us that exists, Images of the nine heavenly orders (of angels), Breeders of spiritual instruction, Genuine Leaders of so many nations and races, and indeed Godly Palm Trees planted in the house of the Lord. (...).¹³²

In their letters to the Emperor, leading men of Armenian of course had to acknowledge his rule over the Christian world at large and over Armenia in particular. That Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i himself had a rather pragmatic approach to the relationship with the "*Great and Victorious King of the Universe*" becomes clear by the justification of his decline of an invitation to the imperial court in Constantinople shortly afterwards:

I decided not to go, thinking that there might be people who might look askance at my going there, and assume that I sought communion with the Chalcedonians. It was for this reason that I did not wish to go, lest I might scandalize the minds of the weak.¹³³

Within a few pages, the picture of Byzantium once more alternates between heavenly protected Christian Empire and hoard of heresy, between "New Jerusalem" and "the Beast in Human Form".

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¹³³ Yovh. Drasx. 55, § 7 (transl. Maksoudian 198).

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