

The Representation of Women in Early Christian Literature

Armenian Texts of the Fifth Century

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Abstract

In recent decades there has been a growing scholarly interest in the representation of women in early Christian texts, with the works of Greek and Latin authors being the primary focus. This dissertation makes an important contribution to the existing scholarship by examining the representation of Armenian women in the fifth-century Christian narratives, which have been instrumental in forging the Christian identity and worldview of the Armenian people. The texts that are discussed here were written exclusively by clerics whose way of thinking was considerably influenced by the religious teachings of the Greek and Syriac Church Fathers. However, as far as the representation of women is concerned, the Greek Fathers' largely misogynistic discourse did not have discernible effect on the Armenian authors. On the contrary, the approach developed in early Christian Armenian literature was congruous with the more liberal way of thinking of the Syriac clerics, with a marked tendency towards empowering women ideologically and providing them with prominent roles in the male-centred society. I argue that such a representation of women was primarily prompted by the ideology of the pre-Christian religion of the Armenians.

This research discusses the main historical and cultural factors that prompted a positive depiction of women, and highlights the rhetorical and moralising strategies that the authors deployed to construct an "ideal woman". It further explores the representation of women's agency, experience, discourse, and identity. In particular, women's pivotal role in Armenia's conversion to Christianity and female asceticism in fourth–fifth century Armenia are extensively investigated. It is also argued that women's status in the extended family determined the social spaces they could enter and the extent of power they could exercise. It appears that Iranian matrimonial practice, including polygyny and consanguineous marriages, was common among the Armenian elite, whereas the lower classes mainly practised marriage by bride purchase or abduction. Special attention is devoted to the institution of queenship in Arsacid Armenia and the position of the queen within the framework of power relationships. Finally, this study examines the instances of violence towards women during wars and how the female body was exploited to achieve desirable political goals.

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Abbreviations

Bibliographical Abbreviations

<i>Aa</i>	The Armenian text and English translation of Agat'angelos's <i>History</i> including the <i>Teaching of Saint Gregory</i> . The standardised reference system to various recensions of Agat'angelos's work by Gérard Garitte (1946, pp. 1–19) is used here: the main two groups are identified as the <i>A</i> recension to which the most well known Armenian text (<i>Aa</i>) belongs, and the <i>V</i> recension (<i>Va</i> , <i>Vg</i> , <i>Vs</i>), from French <i>Vie</i> (Life [of St Gregory]). Armenian text – Agat'angelos 1979 [1909]; English translation of <i>Aa</i> along with references to and translations of the Greek, Arabic and Syriac recensions (both <i>A</i> and <i>V</i> , but with the exclusion of the <i>Teaching of Saint Gregory</i>) – Thomson 2010; English translation of the <i>Teaching</i> – Thomson 2001
<i>AM</i>	Ammianus Marcellinus 1986
<i>APGL</i>	Lampe 1961, <i>A Patristic Greek Lexicon</i>
<i>Asolik</i>	Step'anos Taronec'i (Asolik) 1885
<i>EH</i>	<i>The Epic Histories (Buzandaran Patmut'iwnek')</i> : Armenian text – P'awstos Buzandac'i 1889; English translation and Nina Garsoïan's introduction with appendices – Garsoïan 1989
<i>Elišē</i>	Elišē's <i>History</i> : Armenian text – Elišē 1865; English translation – Elišē 1982. For the sake of convenience both texts are referred to as <i>Elišē</i> , followed by the page number of the English translation and in square brackets by the page number of the Armenian original. Wherever Thomson's <i>Introduction</i> to the 1982 translation is quoted, the format ' <i>Elišē</i> , page number' will be applied.
<i>Eznik</i>	Armenian text – Eznik 1994; English translation – Eznik 1998.
<i>HZ I</i>	Boyce 1975, <i>A History of Zoroastrianism</i> , vol. 1
<i>HZ II</i>	Boyce 1982, <i>A History of Zoroastrianism</i> , vol. 2
<i>LP</i>	Łazar P'arpec'i's <i>History</i> : Armenian text – Łazar P'arpec'i. 1904; English translation – Łazar P'arpec'i 1991. For the sake of convenience both texts are referred to as <i>LP</i> , followed by the page number of the English translation and in square brackets by the page number of the Armenian original. Wherever Thomson's <i>Introduction</i> to the 1991 translation is

quoted, the format ‘*LP*, page number’ will be applied.

<i>MX</i>	Movsēs Xorenac‘i’s <i>History</i> ; Armenian text – Movsēs Xorenac‘i 1981 and 1991; English translation – Movsēs Xorenac‘i 2006. For the sake of convenience both texts are referred to as <i>MX</i> .
<i>NBHL</i>	<i>Nor Baṙgirk‘ Haykazea Lezui</i> , 2 vols., 1979–1981
<i>NRSV</i>	<i>The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha</i> 2010; all quotes from the Bible in English come from this edition. The Armenian text is taken from Y. Zohrapean’s <i>Astuacašunč: Matean Hin ew Nor Ktakaranac‘</i> , 1805
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca</i> ; ed. J. P. Migne (individual volumes)
<i>The Martyrdom of St Thaddeus and Sanduxt</i>	<i>Vkayabanut‘iwn ew Giwt Nšxarac‘ S. T‘adēi Aṙak‘eloy ew Sandxtoy Kusi</i> (The Martyrdom and the Discovery of Relics of St Thaddeus the Apostle and of the Virgin Sanduxt) 1853
<i>The Martyrdom of St Šušanik</i>	<i>Surb Šušaniki Vkayabanut‘iwnə: Bnagrēr ew Hetazotut‘iwn</i> (The Martyrdom of Saint Šušanik: The Original Texts and Study); Muradyan 1996
<i>Life of St Nersēs</i>	<i>Patmut‘iwn Srboyn Nersisi Part‘ewi Hayoc‘ Hayrapeti</i> (The Life of the Armenian Patriarch St Nersēs the Parthian) 1853

Languages

<i>Arm.</i>	Armenian	<i>Mid. Pers.</i>	Middle Persian
<i>Av.</i>	Avestan	<i>OP.</i>	Old Persian
<i>Bctr.</i>	Bactrian	<i>Parth.</i>	Parthian
<i>Gk.</i>	Greek	<i>Phl.</i>	Pahlavi
<i>Khot.</i>	Khotanese	<i>Sogd.</i>	Sogdian
<i>Krd.</i>	Kurdish		

Transliteration

In the present study Armenian words and names are transliterated according to the “Hübschmann–Meillet–Benveniste” system of transliteration as used in the *Revue des études arméniennes*. “Modified Library of Congress” system is used for Russian. When quoting, translators’ original spelling of proper names and toponyms in English has been preserved.

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Introduction

1. Prolegomena

With the rise of women's studies in recent decades there has been, *inter alia*, a growing scholarly interest in the representation of women in early Christian texts. The primary focus of scholars has predictably been on the works of Greek and Latin authors, whereas a large number of texts written in Armenian,¹ Georgian, and Syriac have so far attracted scant attention. The present study aims at partially filling this lacuna, and contributes to the existing scholarship by examining the representation of women² in the literary texts composed in the Armenian language in the fifth century.

There have already been several studies dedicated to various aspects of women's history in the Armenian tradition. In 1936 Vardan Hac'uni in his *Hayuhin Patmut'ean Arĵew* (The Armenian Woman Facing History) discussed the role of Armenian women throughout history by referring to a variety of historical sources. The main objective of his study was, however, to educate "new" Armenian women and to define their roles within contemporary communities,³ rather than to provide a scholarly evaluation of the available evidence. In the 1960s three articles examining the legal status of women in medieval Armenian law appeared in *Patma-Banasirakan Handes* (Historical–Philological Journal). They all agreed that medieval Armenian

¹ In the present work by "Armenia" I shall refer to Persarmenia, where all the discussed texts were originally written. For the locations mentioned in the present work, see map in the appendix.

² Here the word "women" will be used only to refer to the sex of the protagonists including (un)married women, widows, nuns, and girls.

³ Hac'uni 1936, p. 5.

law books conferred on women basic rights, which were remarkably liberal in a given historical period.⁴

The development of novel approaches to studying history in the 70s and 80s, prompted by the theoretical paradigms of structuralism, post-structuralism, feminism, anthropology, and so on, are to a certain degree reflected in most recent studies. Leonardo Alishan, for instance, deployed the methods of cultural anthropology and certain concepts of psychoanalysis to discuss the feminine archetypes in the long history of the Armenian people.⁵ Moreover, at the turn of the century a collection of scholarly articles exploring the role which Armenian women played in the country's history from ancient times until the modern period was published.⁶ Finally, in recent years Valentina Calzolari and Zaroui Pogossian have addressed various aspects of the representation of women in medieval Armenian texts.⁷

What the present research offers differs from the aforementioned studies in its primary objective. It attempts to develop a systematised approach to exploring the representation of women in the Armenian historical narratives specifically focusing on the outset of the Armenian historiographical tradition. The fifth-century authors, being the pioneers in the field, set the dominant tone and pattern of thought which the subsequent generations of Armenians would attempt to imitate. It is therefore crucial to examine the discourse of these authors and to explore the ways they choose to represent women's agency, discourse, identity, and experience.⁸ Not only will this study allow us to obtain remarkable insights into the role and position of women in

⁴ Adoyan 1965; Barxudaryan 1966; Mamyan 1967.

⁵ Alishan 1988–1989.

⁶ Merguerian and Renjilian-Burgy 2000.

⁷ See, for instance, Calzolari 1997 and 2011, and Pogossian 2003 and 2012.

⁸ The definitions of these notions and their importance for investigating women's history are discussed in Canning 1994.

early Christian Armenian society as perceived and described by the Armenian clergy, but it will also provide a sound basis for further research.

2. Why the Fifth Century?

The importance of the fifth century CE in the intellectual and political history of the Armenians cannot be overemphasised.⁹ The creation of the Armenian alphabet by St Maštoc⁶ in *ca* 405 CE, which was prompted primarily by the need to make the language of the Bible more accessible to the wider public, heralded a new era of cultural and intellectual transformation in society.¹⁰ Soon it became imperative, alongside translations from Greek and Syriac, to write original texts in Armenian, which would focus on the evaluation of historical and contemporary events, as well as on forging a new Christian identity of the Armenians. Owing to the fact that this process was taking place mainly in religious circles, the literature of this period was imbued with numerous allusions to the scriptures¹¹ and the works of the Greek and Syriac Church Fathers. The Church acquired effective control of the discourse, for all

⁹ Some scholars following the nineteenth-century characterisation of the Mekhitarist scholars refer to this century as “the Golden Age” (see, e.g., Hacikyan 2000, pp. 93–105). However, as it has been argued by Nina Garsoïan (2009, pp. 81–82), this definition “basée principalement sur des sources littéraires était, comme telle, parfaitement légitime puisque le développement rapide d’une littérature historique nationale ...”, but “sur un plan proprement historique, cette définition est difficilement recevable ...” mainly because of the political and religious fragmentation of the country.

¹⁰ This is how the author of the first known literary piece in Armenian, Koriwn (XI), apprehended it: «Անդ էր այնուհետև սրտալիր ուրախութիւն եւ ականալայել տեսիլ հայելոյն: Քանզի երկիր, որ համբաւուցն անգամ աւտար էր կողմանցն այնոցիկ, յորում ամենայն աստուածագործ սփռնչեղագործութիւնքն գործեցան, առժամայն վաղվադակի ամենայն իրացն եղելոց խելամուտ լինէր. ոչ միայն ժամանակաւ պաշտեցելոցն, այլ եւ յառաջագոյն յախտենիցն, եւ ապա եկելոցն, սկզբանն եւ կտտարածի, եւ ամենայն աստուածատուր աւանդութեանցն»; “What heart-warming joy existed there thenceforward, and what a pleasant scene for the eyes! For a land which had not known even the name of the regions where all those wonderful divine acts had been performed, soon learned all the things that were, not only those that had transpired in time, but that of the eternity which had preceded, and those that had come later, the beginning and the end and all the divine traditions.”

¹¹ As Thomson (1976, p. lxxx) mentions, “Whatever the subject of the narrative, biblical images and parallels would be foremost in the minds of Armenian authors.”

the early Armenian literary works were composed by clerics who would build their narrative around a specific biblical model or motif which was appropriate for the occasion. This intertextual approach implied an interpretation of historical events and legends by means of religious terms and parallels, an approach already conspicuous in Koriwn's *Life of Maštoc*.¹²

The century was also marked by several significant events that had a long-lasting effect on the socio-political life of the country. In 428 CE the Arsacid rule and the institution of kingship in Armenia was abolished. The major part of the former Armenian kingdom came under the suzerainty of Sasanian Iran, whereas the remaining territory was annexed by the Roman Empire. Among other things, the absence of a central governing body precipitated the increase of the Church's importance, which is indicated by the surviving texts and documents of ecclesiastical synods. The Armenian Church began to serve the function of a legislative body which formulated rules regulating the social relationships of people of all ranks.¹³

Despite centuries-long political and cultural ties, the gradual strengthening of Christian institutions in Armenia was conducive to the alienation of the Armenians from the Iranian social milieu. As a consequence, the Sasanians made several attempts to extend their influence over the powerful Armenian nobles (*naxarars*), to re-introduce Armenia into the Iranian *oekoumene*, and to eliminate Armenia's status as a buffer state between Persia and the Byzantine Empire. However, as the early Christian authors present it, the customary law of the Armenians, already imbued with

¹² Terian 2005, pp. 13–21; Mahé 1992, pp. 123–131.

¹³ For instance, *Canons III–VI* ratified by the Šahapivan Council in 444 established rules regulating relationships between a husband and wife (adultery, divorce); *Canon VII* formulated the punishment for abducting a maiden; *Canons VIII–X* forbade witchcraft; *Canon XI* referred to behaviour during funerals, especially criticising wailing over the dead (Hakobyan 1964, pp. 432–444; Akinean 1949, pp. 148–155; see also below *Chapter III*, 3 and *Chapter V*, 2–4, 6).

Christian ideals, proved to be a major stumbling block to the plans of the Persians. The influential *naxarars* vehemently opposed the “reforms” implemented by the Persian officials, for these interferences into the internal structure of the *naxarar* society aimed at weakening the authority and revoking some of the privileges which the Armenian nobility possessed in accordance with the customary law.¹⁴

The tension heightened in 450–451, when the Persians endeavoured to coerce some leading Armenian magnates to apostatise and return to Zoroastrianism. It led to a split of Armenian society into two parties: as the Armenian historians Elišē and Łazar P‘arpec‘i relate, several *naxarars* alongside a large number of the country’s population representing all social classes chose to oppose the plans of the Persian court, while many others bowed to pressure or were enticed away from Christianity by the Persians’ promises of honour, glory, and, possibly, by their lingering beliefs and customs. The former rose up in rebellion, but at the Battle of Avarayr (26 May, 451) the Armenian troops were crushed by a much larger Persian army. The repercussions of this defeat were twofold: on the one hand, it had a disastrous demographic effect: some noble families were wiped out, while others lost both their senior and junior male members in the battlefield, or they were taken to Persia as captives.¹⁵ On the other hand, “the great battle”¹⁶ became a significant milestone in the development of Christian Armenian identity and a potent ideological weapon of the Armenian Church. It was interpreted and conceptualised as a moral victory of Christian faith, for “[m]en who were armed with the love of God for a weapon shrank

¹⁴ See Thomson’s Introduction in *Elišē*, p. 10. For a fuller discussion of the reasons for the first rebellion of the Armenian nobility against the policies of the Persian court (450–451), see Yuzbashyan 1985, pp. 48–52.

¹⁵ For more details, see Hewsén 2001, pp. 87–88.

¹⁶ *Elišē*, pp. 130 [78], 171 [119], and 176 [124]: «մեծ պատերազմ».

at nothing in dread, as would cowards who are feeble-hearted.”¹⁷ A generation later the representatives of the Armenian nobility who perished in the struggle to protect the “patrimonial and natural religion” of the Armenians¹⁸ were to be glorified as saints and martyrs.¹⁹

In the aftermath of these events the Persians did not pursue an immediate implementation of their plans, which resulted in a period of uneasy peace. The mounting tension, however, erupted into a new rebellion in 482, details about which are supplied only in “Section III” of Łazar’s *History*.²⁰ At the time the nephew of Vardan Mamikonean, Vahan, emboldened by the Georgian rebellion of King Vaxt‘ang, led the Armenian contingents against the Persians. Being considerably outnumbered by the Persian forces, the Armenians tried to avoid pitched battles. Instead, they deployed the tactics of guerrilla warfare, which enabled them to prolong the struggle for about two years until the Persian King Peroz perished in the campaign against the Hephthalites. This unexpected development urged the new Persian King Valarš to seek a peaceful settlement of the rebellion, which was eventually achieved in 484 at the village of Nuarsak, in the province of Her.²¹ The hereditary privileges and honours were restored to the *naxarars*, the Armenians were allowed to practise

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 150 [98]: «[ւ]արդիկ, որ սիրովն Աստուծոյ իբրեւ գինու վառեալք էին, ոչ ինչ խնայեցին զանգիտելով իբրեւ զանարի՝ գուլով վատասիրտք». Regrettably, only the perspective of the supporters of Christianity has survived, for our knowledge of the revolt of 450–451 comes from the narratives of Łazar and Elišē, whose interpretation of the situation in the country and of the main impetus behind the rebellion betrays their firm adherence to the Armenian Church and to their Christian patrons. Even though there are apparent discrepancies between their accounts (see ŁP, pp. 12–14, *Elišē*, pp. 3–9, 14, 26–27, and Ananean 1991), both authors foreground the religious aspect of the conflict and the leading role of the Mamikonean family in the political life of the country.

¹⁸ ŁP, p. 221 [161]: «զհայրենի եւ զբնիկ օրէնս». For more details on *awrēnk’*, see below *Chapter I*, 3.

¹⁹ See Sargsyan et al. 2007.

²⁰ For the discussion of the reasons for this rebellion, see Yuzbashyan 1985, pp. 52–57.

²¹ For the discussion of the dates of the 482–484 rebellion, see Yuzbashyan 1984.

the Christian religion without impediment, and a period of political stability commenced.

To summarise, the socio-cultural and political changes of the fifth century were conducive to the development of a new Christian identity of the Armenian people and contributed to the formation of national Christian ideology directly reflected in and reinforced by the works of the first Armenian authors.

3. Methodology

The first methodological challenge that the present undertaking poses is my own identity. A certain bias and wishful thinking may unwittingly creep into one's investigation of the representation of women of a specific ethnic group, when one is a male researcher belonging to the same ethnicity. I was raised in 'atheist' Soviet Armenia by a liberal Greek mother and a traditionalist Armenian father, and witnessed the problems of women in a community where patriarchy was, and still is, in a clash with more liberal values fostered by the socio-political transformation of society that began in the 1990s with the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, the awareness that my background might interfere with my scholarly research has urged me to challenge and reassess my findings and interpretations throughout the study in order to minimise the possible shortcomings. Systematic use of the most rigorous research methods appropriate for the present undertaking has been another crucial factor in ensuring that this problem is circumvented.

For the analysis of all aspects of the representation of women in fifth-century Armenian literature the present study adopts a variety of approaches from different disciplines. Besides the traditional historical research method and content analysis,

the theoretical frameworks and concepts of social sciences, gender studies, post-structuralism, and of intellectual history are deployed here. Such an interdisciplinary approach has been prompted primarily but not exclusively by Elizabeth A. Clark's extensive research into what she calls "late ancient Christian" sources,²² and it has proved to be an effective way of studying issues of gender in the works of early Christian authors. Here, I will limit myself to discussing the most important concepts and mechanisms of this method, as well as highlight the use of other techniques which enable us to address the peculiarities of early Christian Armenian literary tradition.

To begin with, instead of regarding the primary sources as repositories of retrievable facts that can provide concrete details about the life of women in early Christian Armenia, the present study treats them as literary creations which offer "an index of socially construable meaning rather than an image of reality"²³. These texts are perceived "both as products of the social world of authors and as textual agents at work in that world", and as such they "both mirror *and* generate social realities, are constituted by *and* constitute the social and discursive formations which they may sustain, resist, contest, or seek to transform, depending on the case at hand."²⁴ Moreover, all references to women found in these texts are treated as the male author's rhetorically structured representation of female experience and agency, which serves a particular, albeit not always readily recognisable and often irrecoverable, intention and ideological purpose.

A slightly different approach is adopted regarding the canons of church councils, for they were promulgated by the ecclesiastical authorities to address burning issues that were present in the contemporary society. These are therefore

²² For the theoretical part of this method and specific examples, see Clark 2004, pp. 156–192, as well as Clark 1994 and 1991.

²³ Spiegel 1990, p. 61.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

treated as documents which reflect the ideology of the Church, but simultaneously reveal certain aspects of the social and cultural mores of Armenian society.

Furthermore, for the purposes of this study I adopt three out of four “mental tools” for historical analysis that Clark has proposed: “an examination of ‘authorial function’ that calls into question attributions of intention and context,” “symptomatic and Derridean readings that attend to the gaps, absences, and aporias in texts,” and “ideology critique, especially helpful in unpacking the early Christian writers’ representations of various ‘Others,’ including women.”²⁵ These imply not only questioning the authors’ intention and programme of writing, but also the ideological meaning and function of their narratives within the given social and historical context, yet construing context as supplementary, rather than main, element of interpretation. Over and above this approach it is important to examine both women’s absence from specific contexts, and their presence and representation in others.

Social anthropology, on the other hand, provides an appropriate theoretical framework and vocabulary to interpret the asymmetrical representation of men and women in the fifth-century sources. Relying on the findings of other scholars, as well as her personal research of various cultures, Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo suggested differentiating between “domestic” and “public” spheres of activity within human societies – an opposition that “does not *determine* cultural stereotypes or asymmetries in the evaluation of the sexes, but rather underlies them, to support a very general (and, for women, often demeaning) identification of women with domestic life and of men with public life.”²⁶ This asymmetry is perceived as constructed socially through

²⁵ Clark 2004, p. 170. The fourth tool that Clark mentions, namely “postcolonial discourse theory that helps to illuminate the ways in which Christianity and Empire intertwined”, is not applicable to the historical reality of fifth-century Armenia.

²⁶ Rosaldo 1974, pp. 23–24.

discourse and implies distribution of roles based on the factor of gender,²⁷ which, as we shall see below, is clearly present in the sources under scrutiny. Still, the social interactions vary from one society to another, and we can very often observe overlaps of the two spaces, which prompt a confusion of socially defined roles, especially in modern times.²⁸ Unsurprisingly, in early Christian Armenian sources women are depicted mainly in the domestic sphere within the confines of their house/castle, whereas men occupy and fully control the “public” space.

Special note should be made regarding the ideological function of the primary sources discussed here. One of the fifth-century authors, Łazar P‘arpec‘i, does not hide behind rhetorically elaborate speeches and readily explains the aim of his *History*, which, to a large extent, can be applied to all Armenian texts of the period:

when people heard of the virtuous life of spiritual men, they might desire to imitate their asceticism; and when valiant men heard of the deeds of other earlier valiant men, they might increase their own valour and leave a noble memory behind them, both of their own selves and of the nation. But that the lazy and base, on looking at themselves and hearing the censure of others, emulating virtue might strive to better themselves.²⁹

In other words, the primary objective of the Armenian author is to moralise the events he recounts and to provide role models and new ideals which the members of the audience should attempt to emulate. Moralising judgements are pronounced in relation to all characters of the narrative, including women, which make it reasonable to assume that the representations of women are ideologically biased, and invariably reflect a male-centred view of women’s identity.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 18–24.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.

²⁹ *ŁP*, p. 38 [5]: «Որպէս զի զիողեւորացն զբարիվարսն լուեալ բազմութեան ժողովրդոցն՝ նմանով լինել ցանկացին մարդիկ հզնութեանց նոցա, եւ քաջին լսելով զայլոց զգործսն յառաջագոյն քաջացելոցն՝ յաւելեալ յանձանց քաջութիւն՝ անուանի յիշատակ թողցեն զկնի իւրեանց՝ անձանց եւ ազգի: Իսկ ծոյլին եւ վատին հայելով յանձինս եւ լսելով զայլոց զպարսաւանս՝ ի բարի նախանձն կրթեալ քանասցին լաւանալ».

The moralising effect is often achieved through allusions to female characters of various sacred Christian texts. By allusion I here understand “a reference that is indirect in the sense that it calls for associations that go beyond mere substitution of a referent. An author must intend this indirect reference, and it must be in principle possible that the intended audience could detect it.”³⁰ A representative example of such an allusion in Agat‘angelos’s *History* has been discussed by Nina Garsoïan, who convincingly demonstrates that the account of the metamorphosis of King Trdat into a wild boar is a clear allusion to the Zoroastrian deity Vahagn (Vərəθraγna), intended to demonstrate the feebleness of Zoroastrian religion and the omnipotence of the Christian god.³¹ However, as we shall see below, explicit references to a particular character or event that serve their purpose are also made by the Armenian authors.

4. Primary Sources

4.1 Preliminary Remarks

The sources that have been used in the present study primarily focus on events related to fourth- and fifth-century Armenia. They can be divided into two types: literary texts (Agat‘angelos’s *History*, *The Martyrdom of St Thaddeus and St Sanduxt*,³² *The Epic Histories*, Elišē’s *History*, Lazar’s *History*, *The Martyrdom of Šušānik*), and one historical document (*Canons of the Council of Šahapivan*). The main difference between these two types of sources lies in the fact that the former are essentially subjective accounts most often expressing the perspective of a small circle of people,

³⁰ Irwin 2001, p. 293.

³¹ See Garsoïan 1982, and below *Chapter II*, 2.1.

³² The text was first published anonymously in Sop‘erk’ Haykakank’ 8 (1853) with the title V kayabanuṭ’iwn ew Giwt Nšxarac’ S. T’adēi Arak’eloy ew Sandxtoy Kusi (The Martyrdom and the Discovery of the Relics of St Thaddeus the Apostle and of the Virgin Sanduxt), hereinafter referred to as *The Martyrdom of St Thaddeus and Sanduxt*.

whereas the latter contains relatively objective evidence, for it is based on a fairly accurate description of the current situation, which, however, must be rectified in order to make people comply with the demands of the dominant ideology.

The literary texts were composed by religious men who relied upon the support and patronage of a noble family, and who strived to express the aspirations of the circles to which they belong. With the exception of the *Martyrdom of St Šušānik* and a part of Agat'angelos's *History*, these texts are about men, whereas women appear in them only occasionally. Although each writer has a specific project in mind, there are several ideologically important concepts – for instance, the customary law (*awrēnk*'), the covenant of the Church (*uxt ekelec* 'woy), hereditary rights, masculine valour (*k'ajut* 'iwn) and so on – with which all these works, to some extent, are concerned. They also reveal a similarity in the technique deployed to present these ideas: the representation of historical events, various social groups, and individuals is invariably accompanied by an evaluation of their ethical value for society.

What is more, in order to facilitate the process of transition from the old religion to the new one, the leaders of the Armenian Church would often appropriate certain pagan traditions, cults and concepts which did not contradict Christian tenets.³³ Writing texts was one of the means of spreading knowledge of the new

³³ A good example of this strategy is found in Agat'angelos: §§809–836 describe how St Gregory embarks on his mission of building churches and baptising people, and, as it appears from his narrative, the first Armenian churches were built on the places of former pagan sanctuaries, and St Gregory «գլխատակս վկայիցն բերելոց ժամադրեաց ի տօն մեծ հռչակել, սնտեացն պաշտաման ի ժամանակի՝ դիցն Ամանորայ ամենաբեր հոր պտղոց տօնին, Հիւրընկալ դիցն Վանատրի, զոր յառաջագոյն իսկ ի նմին տեղոջ պաշտէին յուրախութեան Նաւասարդ աւուր: Զի ժողովեալ ի յիւստակ մեծի երանելոյն Յովհաննու եւ սրբոյ վկային Աստուծոյ Արամազինէի՝ աւուր խմբեալ ի նմին յաւանին տօնեացեն»; “fixed the date for celebrating the commemoration of the martyrs that he had brought as a major festival, at the time of the festival of the vain cults of the god Amanor, the bringer of new fruits, and of the god Hiwrēnkā Vanatur, which they previously used to celebrate in that same place on the feast of New Year's Day. [He commanded] that they should gather for the commemoration of the great and blessed John and the holy martyr of God Athenogenes, and celebrate their festival on that day in the same town” (§836). See also *Chapter I*, n. 70.

religion, and, as we shall see below, they were not immune to the influence of pagan ideas; neither was the representation of female characters. Through their moralising narratives Armenian authors attempted to present a reinterpreted image of women placed within the framework of Christian faith and the ideological background of pre-Christian Armenian society.

Due to space limitations, I was selective in choosing the primary sources for the present study. The texts have been selected according to three criteria: they were originally composed in Armenian,³⁴ contain references to women, and were (most probably) written in the fifth century. On the basis of these criteria a number of texts which are translations from other languages,³⁵ or which cannot be put safely in the fifth century have not been given much consideration here. The most important among these texts is undoubtedly the *History of Armenia* by Movsēs Xorenac‘i, which covers the period from the birth of the Armenian nation to the abolition of the Arsacid rule in Armenia. Opinions are divided concerning the date when Xorenac‘i created his *History*. Some scholars accept Xorenac‘i’s claim that he was St Maštoc’s disciple and lived in the fifth century,³⁶ but several recent studies have maintained, and rightfully so, that the text that has reached us is an eighth-century edition, for it

³⁴ In the case of the *Martyrdom of St Šušānik*, this criterion cannot be satisfied with absolute certainty, for there is also a Georgian text from the same period, which some scholars claim to be the original account of the martyrdom, and the Armenian one as a translation from it. However, P. Muradyan’s extensive comparative study of both the Armenian and Georgian texts concludes that with extant evidence it is impossible to establish the original language of the *Martyrdom*, for the milieu in which it appeared was bilingual, and the possibility that it was composed in either of the languages should not be overlooked (Muradyan 1996, pp. 181–182).

³⁵ Some of the translated texts contain creative and adaptive elements that may provide invaluable information about various issues related to the topic of this study (see, for instance, *Chapter III*, 3.). However, including the discussion of all translated texts would go beyond the scope of the present research, for, *inter alia*, it would involve a comparative study of the original texts and their translation, which is a separate research project in itself.

³⁶ See, for instance, Sargsyan 1973; Muradyan 1990; Topchyan 2006.

contains a large number of interpolations and discrepancies.³⁷ The latter assertion, however, does not rule out the possibility that Xorenac'i lived in the fifth century, and that his oeuvre was extensively edited at a later period. This is why Xorenac'i's references to fourth- and fifth-century Armenia are still used in comparative perspective to expand where possible on what other sources present.

Other important fifth-century texts, such as Eznik of Kolb's *On God* and Koriwn's *Life of Maštoc*, contain few or no references to women. These texts are therefore deployed to provide valuable information about the historical context of the period and the socio-cultural practices of Armenian people.

4.2 Overview of the Main Primary Sources

This section provides a brief overview of the texts that have been used in this research, followed by a summary of the main themes and the plot.

4.2.1 *Agat'angelos's History of Armenia*

The author of the *History of Armenia* is an enigmatic figure who calls himself Agat'angelos (Gk. "the one who brings good tidings"). He claims to be an eyewitness to the events that he recounts, but there is sufficient evidence to place him in 460s,³⁸ when the orally transmitted stories of Armenia's conversion were collected and edited, though some written sources in other languages might also have been deployed by the author.

Who is hidden behind the name of Agat'angelos is unknown, but there is no doubt that he was a cleric of great erudition, for his text is full of references and

³⁷ See Thomson's introduction in *MX*, pp. 58–60, and Garsoïan 2003–2004, p. 44.

³⁸ Thomson 1976, p. xc; Winkler 1980, p. 125.

allusions to various works of Greek and Syriac Fathers narrated in beautiful, at some points poetic and rhetorically sophisticated language. Most scholars agree that the extant two recensions of the text, from which the others derived, were originally written in Armenian and were later edited and adapted to the needs of the times and circumstances. The Armenian version (*Aa*) became the main text of the tradition that was supported and propagated by the Armenian Church, and my analysis will be based on that text because of its tremendous influence on the Armenian mentality of subsequent centuries.

Agat'angelos begins his narrative in 224 CE, when the Sasanian dynasty seizes the throne of Persia from the Parthian Arsacid dynasty, whose junior branch was ruling over Armenia. In retaliation, the King of Armenia Xosrov attempts to take revenge on the usurper but is himself assassinated at the hands of a Persian noble called Anak. In their turn, the Armenian nobles kill Anak and all the members of his family except for his two sons who manage to escape. One of them is taken to Cappadocia, where he is raised as a Christian and receives the name Gregory. When Xosrov's son Trdat becomes the king of Armenia, Gregory secretly enters his service thus wishing to expiate the crime of his father. During a Zoroastrian ceremony attended by the king, Gregory refuses to worship the goddess Anahit and reveals the fact that he is a Christian, for which he is brutally tortured but remains steadfast in his faith. The king is then informed that Gregory is the son of Anak, who caused his father's death, and Trdat orders that Gregory be thrown into a deep pit full of poisonous snakes so that he will meet his end there.

The narrative continues with the story of the martyrdom of the Roman nun Hrip'simē and her companions. After seeing the portrait of Hrip'simē, Emperor Diocletian falls in love with her and wishes to marry her, but the virgin encouraged by

the abbess of the monastery Gayianē rejects the marriage proposal and, escorted by other nuns, flees to Armenia. Here, it is King Trdat's turn to become infatuated with Hrip'simē, but she spurns the expression of his passion, too. Then the infuriated king orders Hrip'simē and her companions to be tortured to death. Afterwards, divine punishment befalls the whole of Armenia: the king turns into a boar and many people lose their mind. At this point an angel of the Lord appears to the king's sister Xosroviduxt in her dream and tells her that only Gregory, who has been in the pit for 13 years already, can redeem the country from the sin of killing the servants of God. Thus, Gregory is brought back and cures the afflicted king and people by converting them to Christianity. With the support of the king and the nobility Gregory has martyria erected in three locations where the virgins were martyred. The pagan shrines are destroyed and churches are built throughout the country. Gregory is consecrated in Caesarea and, accompanied by King Trdat himself, visits Constantinople. In 325 Gregory delegates his son, Aristakēs, who will later ascend the throne of his father, to represent the Armenian Church at the council of Nicaea.

Some remarks should also be made about the genre of Agat'angelos's work. Since the *History* is a composite work in which several narratives, most likely independent of each other, were merged into one cohesive account,³⁹ conventions of various literary genres are discernible in it. According to Thomson, for instance, the *Teaching* belongs to the "genre of catechetical instruction";⁴⁰ Garsoïan⁴¹ and, following her, Pogossian⁴² have identified the *Martyrdom* with the hagiographic genre

³⁹ Thomson 1976, p. lviii.

⁴⁰ Thomson 2010, pp. 13–15.

⁴¹ Garsoïan 1982, p. 152.

⁴² Pogossian 2003, pp. 361–362.

of “la passion épique” as defined by Hippolyte Delehaye.⁴³ Although the latter dismissed the historical value of the works of this genre by referring to them as “productions artificielles,”⁴⁴ these works undoubtedly contain important information about the milieu of their production if studied within the historical context which prompted their creation at that specific place and time.⁴⁵ Moreover, in Agat’angelos’s *History* the superiority of the new religion is unveiled by means of direct criticism of the old religion, which provides remarkable insights into how the religious beliefs of the Zoroastrian Armenians were perceived in Christian circles.

A detailed analysis of the representation of women in Agat’angelos’s *History* is made in *Chapter I*, which is why here it will suffice to remark that this work is crucial for understanding the development of Christian Armenian ideology and the attitude of the ecclesiastical authorities towards women’s functions and roles in society.

⁴³ Delehaye 1921, pp. 236–315. Garsoïan (1982, pp. 151–152) has pointed out the following characteristics of *la passion épique*, according to Delehaye, in Agat’angelos’s *History*: “the persecuting emperor—preferably Diocletian—and his edicts; the solemn and lengthy trial before the ruler in person—if possible; the dialogue between the judge and the martyr alternating the blandishments and threats of the one and the rhetorical homilies and fulsome prayers composed of a tissue of scriptural quotations of the other; the almost ludicrously horrifying torments inflicted on the martyr, and his miraculous survival; the punishment of the persecutors; the supernatural voices and visions; and, most important, the faithful secretary taking down his eyewitness account ...”

⁴⁴ Delehaye 1921, p. 236.

⁴⁵ Strangely enough, Garsoïan (1982, pp. 151–152) also refers to this type of narration as “the most formulaic and unhistorical hagiographic form” which was deployed by Agat’angelos in the *Vitae* of St Gregory and the Hrip’simian virgins, even though in her article she makes an important discovery that concerns the target audience of Agat’angelos’s work.

4.2.2 The Martyrdom and the Discovery of Relics of St Thaddeus the Apostle and of the Virgin Sanduxt

The surviving evidence does not permit us to date with certainty *The Martyrdom of St Thaddeus and Sanduxt*. The possible dates of composition that have been suggested vary from the fifth to seventh century, though the fifth-century hypothesis seems to be the most plausible one.⁴⁶ Not only does this hagiographic text create a link between the establishment of the Armenian Church and the mission of Christ's Apostles, but it also promotes the Syriac strand of Armenian Christianity. As it has been shown by Calzolari, the Armenian narrative is neatly interwoven with the Syriac *Doctrine of Addai*, translated into Armenian in the fifth century,⁴⁷ and it contains a number of passages "qui affichent clairement un sentiment national arménien".⁴⁸

The Martyrdom of St Thaddeus and Sanduxt draws heavily on earlier hagiographic and apocryphal textual patterns, especially on the acts of the apostles.⁴⁹ The Armenian author readily adapts the narratives, with which he is well acquainted, to accomplish his objective of granting the Armenian Church an Apostolic status. At the same time his portrayal of the female protagonist, Sanduxt, most revealingly contains fine details that set her apart from other heroines of early Christian texts.

The Armenian narrative begins in Urha (Edessa), where St Thaddeus travels after Christ's ascension into heaven, and where he cures and converts King Abgar and many of his subjects. The apostle then crosses the border with Armenia and arrives at the court of King Sanatruk in the town of Šawaršan in the province of Artaz, where he begins preaching and working miracles. Multitudes of people are converted and

⁴⁶ See Akinean's (1969–1970) discussion of each hypothesis, though Akinean himself was the proponent of a later date.

⁴⁷ Calzolari 2011a, pp. 32–38.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴⁹ See the discussion in Calzolari 2011a, pp. 27–49, 171–172, and Akinean 1970, pp. 1–34, in particular pp. 3–10.

baptised. Sanatruk's daughter Sanduxt becomes the most ardent follower of the apostle among them. The king, however, implacably opposes Christianity and persecutes all Christians, including his daughter and St Thaddeus. Needless to say neither threats, nor imprisonment daunt Sanduxt, who is eventually martyred by order of the king. Her death is followed by the manifestation of the divine presence, which leads to the conversion of two thousand people. The story ends with the martyrdom of St Thaddeus, and the conversion of 3433 men and women.

The Martyrdom of St Thaddeus and Sanduxt, like Agat'angelos's account of the martyrdom of the Hrip'simian virgins, belongs to the genre of epic passion. Despite the fact that it contains no factual information, it still reflects the mentality of the Armenian clergy. The agency they provide Sanduxt with in the narrative is quite revealing, for she is allowed to do things, such as teaching in public and converting people, which are not commonly described in contemporary works.

4.2.3 *The Epic Histories*

The *Epic Histories* attributed to P'awstos Buzand, otherwise known as *Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk'* or *P'awstosi Buzandac'woy Patmut'iwn Hayoc'*, is our most valuable source for the social, political, and cultural history of fourth-century Arsacid Armenia. It is a rich compilation of epic stories⁵⁰ which was orally transmitted from generation to generation by *gusans* (bards), and which was put together in writing in *ca* 470s.⁵¹ As highlighted by Garsoïan, the *Epic Histories* was most likely composed by an anonymous "cleric familiar with the Armenian version of the Basilian liturgy and

⁵⁰ *EH*, p. 14.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

deeply concerned with ecclesiastical affairs”,⁵² probably “a native of the southwestern district of Tarōn because of his unreserved devotion to the Mamikonean lords of the district and to its holy site of Aštišat, which he invariably presents as the original center of Armenian Christianity”.⁵³ It also reflects “the manners and values of an aristocratic and military society” of fifth-century Armenia.⁵⁴

The *Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk'* covers the period between the rule of King Xosrov Kotak in *ca* 330 CE and the partition of Armenia between the Roman Empire and Sasanian Iran in 387 CE. The *Epic Histories* makes it clear that in the fourth century Armenia was in a precarious position between the two great empires of the time and often had to endure their aggressive policies. The king and the leading nobles would normally vacillate between remaining largely autonomous and giving their allegiance to the Romans or the Persians, the latter option being directly linked to choosing between Christianity and Zoroastrianism. After the peace treaty of 363 CE between the Emperor Jovian and King of Kings Šāpuh, most of Greater Armenia was left to the mercy of the Persians and was soon ravaged.⁵⁵ However, a relatively less turbulent period of several decades emerged after the country was divided in 387 CE.

Garsoïan has accurately identified three main parallel narrative threads in the histories: “*The Royal History*, covering the reigns of the last Aršakuni kings”, “*The Ecclesiastical History* providing the only detailed account of the hereditary succession, with brief interruptions, of the patriarchs from the house of St Gregory the Illuminator”, and “*The Mamikonean History*” glorifying the valour and dedication of

⁵² Ibid., p. 15.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 32.

⁵⁵ See *ibid.*, IV.lv–lix.

this clan to the Armenian realm.⁵⁶ These threads evince the compiler's preoccupation with the public space. It is therefore crucial, as well as extremely compelling, to examine representations of noblewomen who enter this space and modify it with their agency.

Among the numerous accounts of men's acts of bravery and cowardice, righteousness and inequity, holiness and wickedness, loyalty and betrayal, the anonymous compiler of the histories also includes references to three noblewomen: Queen P'āranjem, Hamazaspuhi Mamikonean, and Queen Zarmanduxt. Their representations are discussed in detail below.⁵⁷

4.2.4 *Elišē's History of Vardan and the Armenian War*

Although Robert Thomson believes that Elišē's text is "an extensive adaptation" of Łazar's *History*, most likely composed "in the last decade of the sixth century or later,"⁵⁸ the existing arguments placing Elišē in the second half of the fifth century seem to me more convincing.⁵⁹ I shall therefore refer to his work as an account of an eyewitness, a claim which Elišē himself makes on several occasions.⁶⁰ What can be considered as factual information about Elišē's life is found in his *History*, though some anecdotal evidence has also been preserved in later tradition. On the basis of this material Manuk Abelyan suggested that Elišē was born in *ca* 420⁶¹ and was

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 2–3.

⁵⁷ For P'āranjem, see *Chapter V*, 4.2 and *Chapter VI*, 4; for Zarmanduxt, see *Chapter VI*, 5; for Hamazaspuhi, see *Chapter VII*, 2.3.

⁵⁸ See *Elišē*, p. 27, as well as pp. 22–26 for the discussion of the arguments of Babken Kiwleserean and Nerses Akinean, who also support a later date of composition.

⁵⁹ For a detailed study of these arguments and the critique of the sixth-century (and later) hypothesis, see Pane 2009, pp. 12–17; Zekiyan 1997; Ananean 1991; Ter-Minasyan 1971, pp. 128–194, and Abelyan 1968, pp. 325–328.

⁶⁰ See, for instance, *Elišē*, pp. 59 [5], 69 [15], 150 [99], and 244 [199–200].

⁶¹ Pane (2009, p. 13) and Ter-Minasyan (1971, p. 122) suggest the date 410/415.

initially a soldier of the Armenian regiment serving Yazkert, and after the revolt of 451 he became a cleric.⁶² He was one of St Maštoc's and St Sahak's disciples well versed in the scriptures and languages.⁶³ The strikingly beautiful images which he created reveal a genuine literary talent second to none of his contemporaries.

The significance of Elišē's *History* for the study of the representation of women in early Armenian literature is two-fold: firstly, it contains a large number of references to the agency and experience of fifth-century women, and, secondly, it has preserved an exquisite encomium to women, which extols their untiring perseverance and nobleness of self.

As far as the storyline is concerned, Elišē's main focus is on the Armenian revolt of 450–451 against the repressive religious policy of the Persian King Yazkert II, and on its bleak aftermath. According to Elišē, Yazkert, on his magi's advice, adopts a policy of uniting the peoples of his empire under the Zoroastrian religion. In order to implement his plan, the king introduces new taxes, intimidates, tortures, and bribes the Christians nobles under his jurisdiction, but most importantly he makes an attempt to subvert the existing strict hierarchical order within society, a policy which eventually backfires. He summons the prominent Armenian *naxarars* to the court and forces them to convert, though Elišē stresses that in their hearts they remain steadfast in their Christian faith. On their return home, most of the *naxarars* rise in rebellion and attack the Persian contingents located in Armenia and Caucasian Albania (Aḥuank'), inflicting a heavy defeat on them. The enraged Yazkert sends a large army to suppress the rebellion and the decisive battle takes place on 26 May 451 on the plain of Avarayr, in the Vaspurakan region, in which the Armenian army led by the

⁶² Abelyan 1968, p. 324. This career path resembles that of St Maštoc' (ca 362–440), the inventor of the Armenian alphabet, and might have been a common practice at the time.

⁶³ Ter-Minasyan 1971, p. 121.

sparapet Vardan Mamikonean is defeated, and 1036 Armenian soldiers, amongst whom there were several leading magnates of the country, including the *sparapet*, perish.⁶⁴ The country is subsequently devastated, and the remaining Christian princes and the leaders of the Armenian Church are imprisoned in Persia, where they stay until *ca* 463. Nevertheless, the loss of a large number of Persian and Armenian elect soldiers and nobles urges Yazkert to abandon his plans of conversion.

Thomson rightfully considers Elišē's narrative "a carefully constructed piece of literary work"⁶⁵ which is an "interpretation"⁶⁶ of the historical events of the mid fifth century. Furthermore, he has convincingly shown that Elišē heavily relies on certain biblical models in his attempt to conceptualise and contextualise the revolt of Armenian princes and their martyrdom on the plain of Avarayr. In particular, Elišē draws clear parallels between the situation in Armenia at the time of the rebellion and afterwards, and that of the Jews as described in the books of the Maccabees.⁶⁷ His narrative is also imbued with references to and direct quotation from the Bible,⁶⁸ various hagiographic texts,⁶⁹ and several theological treatises that have been preserved in Armenian.⁷⁰

With a conscious use of all these patterns Elišē constructs a highly elaborate and stylised narrative which aims at teaching its recipients moral lessons and creating

⁶⁴ The Armenian Church canonised Vardan Mamikonean and his companions who fell in the battle, and the feast of these saints is commemorated on the Thursday of the last week before Great Lent. For the history of this feast, see Sargsyan et al. 2007, pp. 20–27.

⁶⁵ *Elišē*, p. 9.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25. A similar idea was earlier expressed by Abelyan (1968, pp. 335–337).

⁶⁷ For a detailed study of this comparison, see *Elišē*, pp. 11–16.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17. For the analysis of Elišē's references to the Bible, see Zeytounian 1980.

⁶⁹ *Elišē*, pp. 17–21. For the study of Elišē's use of hagiographic material, see Nalbandyan 1997.

⁷⁰ *Elišē*, pp. 21–22 and 27–29.

idealised role models.⁷¹ He explores several themes that reflect his understanding of a national ideology⁷² and the place of an individual in it. Elišē's main objective is to convince his audience, primarily representatives of the upper class, that what distinguishes Armenians from other peoples is their “ancestral and divinely bestowed *awrēnk*,” which is to be upheld through a “covenant [*uxt*] of the church” that implies “loyalty to God and country”; thus, “Patriotism and Christian faith are inextricably intertwined.”⁷³ The righteous members of the community show virtue and adhere to the holy covenant, whereas apostasy causes secession,⁷⁴ and as Elišē emphasises, “where discord penetrates, at the breaking up of unity heavenly virtue also departs.”⁷⁵ In addition, the rebellion of the Armenians should be perceived as a struggle for truth which will be suppressed should the Armenian people abandon the holy covenant.⁷⁶

Most notably, the category of gender plays no role in the propaganda of these ideologically charged concepts. For Elišē there are only two categories: ‘us’, who struggle for the preservation of our ancestral *awrēnk*, and ‘them’, who are the enemies of truth and foes of *awrēnk*. The gender of people does not determine their adherence to one group or the other, but because the struggle between them takes place only in the public sphere, predominantly men feature in the narrative.

⁷¹ For a more detailed discussion of these aspects of Elišē's work, see, Nalbandyan 1997, pp. 154–156, and Abelyan 1968, pp. 338–343.

⁷² There can be no doubt that Elišē specifically refers to a “national” ideology, for he constantly uses the epithet *Hayoc* (Armenian) in a variety of contexts, including the title, throughout the text to emphasise the ‘Armenianness’ of the phenomenon he describes.

⁷³ *Elišē*, p. 10. See also, Nalbandyan 1997, p. 148. For textual references to these concepts, see *Elišē*, pp. 133 [82], 154 [102], 230 [184], 241 [197] (*hayreni hawatk* / *awrēnk*); pp. 62 [7–8], 76 [23], 92 [41], 101 [50], “Chapter 3: Concerning the Unity of the Holy Covenant of the Church” (105–140 [54–88]), 142 [90], 147–148 [95], 151 [99], 158 [106], 175 [123], 179 [127], 233 [187] (*uxt ekelec'woy / hawatoy / k'ristoneut'ean*).

⁷⁴ *Elišē*, pp. 9–10.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 141 [89]: «ուր սպրդեալ անկանի երկպառակութիւն ի ներքս ընդ քակել միաբանութեանն՝ եւ երկնաւոր առաքինութիւնն հեռանայ».

⁷⁶ Surprisingly, in his *Introduction* Thomson does not discuss this important issue raised by Elišē, even though there are several references to the “truth” as a higher ideal that is in danger of being violated by its enemies: see, *Elišē*, pp. 141 [89], 148 [95], 153 [101], 165 [113], 192 [141] and 239 [195]. Cf. also with ‘God’s truth’ in *Aa* §13.

4.2.5 Łazar P'arpec'i's *History of the Armenians* and the *Letter to Vahan Mamikonean*

Mamikonean

Łazar P'arpec'i's *History of the Armenians* and the *Letter to Vahan Mamikonean* bear witness to one of the most crucial periods in Armenian history and offer fascinating insights into the Christian writer's, and ostensibly his circle's, understanding of women's roles and functions in society. The *History* closely examines the Armenian rebellions of 450–451 and 482–484 against the oppressive regional policies of Persia and the continuous struggle for religious and cultural independence, which reaches a satisfactory resolution with the compromise of Nuarsak in 484 and the subsequent appointment of Vahan Mamikonean as the *marzpan* of Armenia.⁷⁷ The *Letter*, on the other hand, focuses on the personal relationships between the author and Vahan Mamikonean and supplies details on Łazar's life and on the state of affairs in the religious circles of the country. Both texts contain references to women most of whom Łazar knew personally, and even though many representations in his narratives are ideologically charged, his descriptions of women reveal genuine patterns of 'real' female experience.

Łazar's oeuvre consists of the *History*, divided into three parts, and the *Letter* appended to it. According to the author, his work should be perceived as a natural continuation of Agat'angelos's *History* and of the *Epic Histories*.⁷⁸ The narration commences with a brief summary of the two texts and the main history begins in *ca* 387, where the *Epic Histories* ends. Łazar demonstrates considerable knowledge of his predecessors' works, though his interpretation of events is not always on a par

⁷⁷ The *marzpan* exercised wide administrative power as a regional governor and was installed by the Persian king as his representative on the given territory. For more details, see Adontz 1970, pp. 165–182.

⁷⁸ *ŁP*, pp. 33–39 [1–6].

with theirs.⁷⁹ The narrative continues with the description of the historical and political conditions in which the Arsacid rule is abolished and with the consequences of the death of St Sahak and St Maštoc‘ for the spiritual life of the country. Part two is dedicated to the Armenian revolt under the command of the *sparapet* Vardan Mamikonean and the aforementioned battle of the small Armenian force against the host of the Persian army on the plain of Avarayr. The third part covers the period of guerrilla warfare in which the contingents of several Armenian *naxarar* families gather around Vahan Mamikonean, the nephew of the martyred Vardan, and confront the Persian forces which were sent to subdue the disobedient magnates. Finally, the *Letter*, addressed to *marzpan* Vahan Mamikonean and written before the composition of the *History*, is Łazar’s desperate plea for support against his slanderers.⁸⁰

It is not feasible to determine the exact date of Łazar’s *History*, but the internal textual evidence points to the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century.⁸¹ This period is characterised by a relative political and social stability in the country, during which the Armenian Church was gradually strengthening its position in society thus contributing to the process of forging the Christian Armenian identity. It also marks the end of a very tumultuous century in Armenian history that found its reflection in Łazar’s work.

Unlike other early Christian Armenian authors, we have valuable information about Łazar P‘arpec‘i’s life, which has primarily been preserved in his autobiographic *Letter* to the *marzpan* Vahan Mamikonean. Its content allows us to assume that Łazar

⁷⁹ For instance, Łazar attaches more importance to the involvement of Catholicos Sahak in the creation of the Armenian alphabet than Koriwn does, who emphasises St Maštoc’s contribution (*ŁP*, pp. 46–52 [13–18]).

⁸⁰ For the discussion of various themes and issues in Łazar’s *History* and *Letter*, see Thomson’s Introduction to the 1991 English edition (*ŁP*, pp. 1–31), Alexanian 1987, and Yuzbashyan 1983.

⁸¹ *ŁP*, pp. 33–34 [1–2] and 247–249 [185–186].

was of humble origin, educated as a cleric both on Greek territory and in Armenia. Albeit less eloquent than Agat'angelos or Elišē, his works, too, demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of the scriptures. Łazar additionally claims that he is well versed in Greek patristic literature,⁸² and he clearly indicates strong preference for the teaching of the Greeks over that of the Syrian Christians.⁸³ He enjoyed the patronage of the Arcruni, Kamsarakan, and Mamikonean families at different stages of his life,⁸⁴ and, as Thomson remarks, “[m]ost important of all is that he [Łazar] has left a vivid picture of the outlook of his class – or rather of the class to which he aspired – and of his time.”⁸⁵

The task of writing the *History* was allocated to Łazar by his childhood companion and present patron Vahan Mamikonean, who was the most powerful political figure in Armenia at the time. As Łazar mentions at the beginning of his narrative, not only was Vahan “the author of many countless blessings to Armenia in the time of his own rule, and by his personal example encouraged many others,” but he also understood the importance of preserving the memory of historical events in writing for posterity.⁸⁶

⁸² *ŁP*, p. 255 [192]; see also Thomson's Introduction (*ŁP*, pp. 23–26).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 50 [16].

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 38 [5] and 250 [187–188].

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 37–38 [5]: «Որում արքնամիտ խորհրդականութեամբ ուշադրեալ այսմ ամենայնի մտաւոր եւ քաջ աշխատեալ Վահան տէրն Մամիկոնէից, զօրավարն Հայոց եւ մարգապանն, որ բազում եւ անհամար ուղղութեանց աշխարհիս Հայոց ի ժամանակս իշխանութեան իւրոյ եղեւ արարող, անձամբ եւ զայլս յորդորելով զբազումս: Սա որպէս եւ այլ ամենայն բարւոյ իրօք հոգացեալ զՀայաստան աշխարհի իրս՝ առաւել եւս զայս ի գէպ եւ պատշաճ համարեցաւ ի մնացեալ տեղւոյն պատմութեան Ներկրորդ գրոցն անեցուցանել յառաջ եւ գրել յայնմհետէ զեղեալս յաշխարհիս Հայոց»; “Of all this with vigilant prudence the thoughtful and valiant Vahan, lord of the Mamikoneank’, general of Armenia and *marzpan*, was heedful. He was the author of many countless blessings to Armenia in the time of his own rule, and by his personal example encouraged many others. Just as he cared for the affairs of Armenia in every other way that tended to her benefit, even more so did he consider this appropriate and suitable to push forward and write of the affairs of Armenia from the point where the Second Book ended ...”

It appears that Łazar addresses his *History* to representatives of all social strata of the country and his intention is unequivocal: to provide an evaluation of the historical events which he lived through, to foreground the most commendable deeds of his contemporaries, to expose iniquitous villains and to create role models worth of emulation and glorification.⁸⁷

Łazar, like all early Christian Armenian authors, is genuinely concerned with the public sphere of activity, for his focus is on the political history of the country. All the protagonists of his *History* are religious figures and men of noble origin, who are presented as either adhering to the “patrimonial and natural religion” of the Armenians, or abandoning it for the sake of the “impure religion” of the Persians.⁸⁸ Łazar presents the apostasy as a violation of *awrēnk*‘ and he clearly differentiates between “the Christian Armenians” and “the base Armenian princes, who at that time were insolently proud of their apostasy.”⁸⁹ Like Elišē, he establishes the categories of ‘us’ and ‘them’, and defines the acceptable social roles and modes of behaviour. Women, however, to whom Łazar refers occasionally, do not constitute an essential part of his ideological discourse; he primarily speaks about them in a casual manner, therefore, their representation contains relatively accurate information about the agency, experience, and identity of women in fifth-century Armenia, although some of his comments remain ideologically coloured and reveal the deep-rooted attitudes of his circle.

⁸⁷ See above n. 29.

⁸⁸ *ŁP*, p. 59 [24]: «ազտեղատէր» օրէնք (literally – “obscenity loving religion (law, set of laws)”; or p. 81 [44] – “impious religion” – օրէնք «անօրէնութեան» (literally – “lawless religion (law, set of laws)”).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 172 [118]: «Իսկ *քրիստոնէայ մարդիկն Հայոց*, որ այն ամ անդ ի կռուին էին՝ հարեալք մաշէին առաւել եւս յարեամարեանաց եւ ի նախանձուէ ի *յեռին իշխանացն Հայոց*, որք ուրացուքեամբն գոռոզացեալ ամբարեաւանէին ի ժամանակին, քան քէ ի բռնութենէ պարսիկ զօրագլխացն գործոց»;
“But *the Christian Armenians*, who were that year participating in the war, were more afflicted by the disdain and rancour of *the base Armenian princes*, who at that time were insolently proud of their *apostasy*, than by the tyrannical acts of the Persian generals” (my italics).

4.2.6 *The Martyrdom of St Šušanik*

In the present study the extensive Armenian redaction of the *Martyrdom of St Šušanik* is examined.⁹⁰ It recounts the story of the final years of life and of martyrdom of Šušanik, the daughter of the hero of Avarayr, the Armenian *sparapet* Vardan Mamikonean. The original narrative, from which the Armenian and Georgian extensive redactions originate, was composed in *ca* 475–482.⁹¹ In spite of the fact that the text contains many elements of the genre of hagiography, it reflects actual historical events that are also attested in other sources.⁹²

Šušanik is the wife of the Georgian *bdeašx* Vazgen and a mother of four children. At the beginning of the narrative Vazgen, who is visiting the Persian court, apostatises and adopts Zoroastrianism, for which the king gives his mother-in-law in marriage to him. When she hears about this, Šušanik bewails her misery and encloses herself in a hut near the church where she fervently prays day and night. She defies the *bdeašx*'s authority and refuses to join him after his arrival. The local bishop and some members of the extended family try to convince Šušanik that for the sake of all people she should return to Vazgen. However, Šušanik persists with her disobedience, for which she is beaten by her husband, and for some time kept in chains. This life of constant abuse and humiliations lasts for seven years, until Šušanik dies of her injuries.

The Martyrdom of St Šušanik is not only a hagiographic text, but most importantly it recounts the harrowing experience of a high-ranking woman, her lived

⁹⁰ For the Classical Armenian text and its translation into Modern Armenian, see Muradyan 1996, pp. 18–60.

⁹¹ Muradyan 1996, p. 177.

⁹² See, for instance, *ŁP*, p. 171 [118].

experience of domestic violence, and how this experience was perceived by people in her immediate circle.

4.2.7 *The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan*

The text of the canons of the Council of Šahapivan consists of two parts: the prologue, which provides important background information about the circumstances under which the council was convened, and the twenty canons which address a variety of social issues. From the prologue it becomes clear that after the abolition of the Arsacid rule and the deaths of the Patriarch St Sahak and St Maštoc⁹³ the state apparatus of Armenia was in crisis, and lawlessness thrived. This is why “forty bishops, a large number of priests, deacons, zealous churchmen, all the clergy of the holy church, the entire nobility” including the lesser nobility and the magnates⁹³ assembled in Šahapivan in the summer of 444, for they wished to restore the order in the country which had been established by the Armenian Church leaders.

The Šahapivan canons sought to address urgent problems which were not covered by the Apostolic and Nicene canons, and which were peculiar to Armenian reality.⁹⁴ In particular, they addressed issues related to adultery among the clergy and the lay population (*Canons I–III*), husbands abandoning their wives (*Canons IV–V*), wives leaving their husbands (*Canon VI*), bride theft (*Canon VII*), witchcraft and fortune telling (*Canons VIII–X*), those who wail over the dead (*Canon XI*), incestuous and consanguineous marriages (*Canons XII–XIII*), priests living in spiritual marriage

⁹³ Hakobyan 1964, pp. 427–428: «Եւ ժողովէին եպիսկոպոսք և երիցունք եւ սարկաւազունք բազում եւ նախնանոր պաշտօնեալք եւ համարէն ուխտ սրբոյ եկեղեցւոյ, իշխանք ամենայն...»

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 428–429: «Եւ զայս ասացեալ միաբան բաժանալապետիցն, եթէ՝ «Առաքելական եւ Նիկիական կանոն[ք]ն հաստատուն կացցեն եւ մեք հնազանդեալ եմք, բայց որ ինչ պիտոյ է ի լրութիւն ի նոյն կանոնս, եւ մանաւանդ ի մէջ տանս Թորգոմոյ եւ կողմանս արեւելեայցս»»; “And this is what the concordant high priests said, ‘May the Apostolic and Nicene canons be firmly established and we shall obey [them], but with some additions to them required especially in the house of T’orgom and in the eastern regions’” (my translation).

(*Canon XIV*), ascetic practices (*Canon XV*), several iniquities among the clergy (*Canons XVI, XVIII–XX*), and the relics of the saints (*Canon XVII*).

This significant document provides unique insights into the social relationships within the Armenian society of the fifth century and the way in which the ecclesiastical authorities approached them. We may notice that in most cases men and women received equal treatment and that only the social status of a person could affect the punishment one was to suffer.

5. Organisation

The material is presented by subject rather than by individual text containing the information. In this way a specific social and cultural phenomenon is explored through a comparative study of its representation in the works of different authors.

In *Chapter I* an overview of earlier studies on pre-Christian Arsacid Armenia along with pertinent evidence from Persian sources are presented. In particular, fragments of evidence on the socio-political structure of Armenian society and its division into classes before and immediately after the country's Christianisation are assessed. Furthermore, it discusses the religious beliefs of the Armenians, which to a large extent shaped people's mentality, and which Christianity was called to replace.

Chapter II explores the conversion narratives which lay the foundation for Christian Armenian ideology. The study of women's representation in these ideologically charged textual traditions enables us to understand how the ecclesiastical authorities envisaged the role of women in the newly emerging Christian society.

Christianisation provided women with the option of adopting an ascetic lifestyle, which was institutionalised during the reign of St Nersēs the Great (reigned *ca* 353–373). The number of communities of female ascetics increased in the second half of the fourth century, but after the battle of Avarayr in 451 they seem to disappear. *Chapter III* discusses the extant references to these communities and attempts to provide an evaluation of its role and importance in the life of society and of women in particular. Special attention is also paid to the references to *virgines subintroductae* in the Armenian tradition.

Despite the fact that the Armenian historians are concerned with the public sphere and male-dominated activities, their narratives also contain few but valuable references to physical spaces which women could enter and in which they could act. Furthermore, the deconstruction of their moralising encomia that aim at extolling righteous women enables us to reconstruct certain details of their everyday life and experience. These are examined in *Chapter IV*.

Chapter V deals with the institution of marriage. The common practices and norms, as described by fifth-century authors, are explored and evaluated. However, my task is here facilitated by the survival of the Canons of the Council of Šahapivan, for some of them directly deal with marriage practices common among the Armenians. Not only do they describe the pagan customs and traditions that are still followed by the representatives of all classes, but they also provide invaluable information on how the Church perceived the relationships between women and men in the family.

The texts that have been analysed for this study were all composed after the abolition of Arsacid rule in Armenia in 428. The representation of the Arsacid institutions of kingship and queenship is therefore made retrospectively and is based on memory rather than on first-hand experience. In spite of this, fifth-century sources

provide interesting details on the symbolic attributes of royal authority primarily preserved in the epic stories of the *Buzandaran Patmut'iwnek'*. By studying the representation of these attributes *Chapter VI* attempts to reveal the extent of power that Armenian queens could exercise.

Finally, *Chapter VII* addresses the issue of violence towards women during war. It foregrounds the significance of honour and shame in the mentality of the Armenian people, and examines how women's bodily integrity was manipulated for political and military gains.

Chapter I

Women in Pre-Christian Arsacid Armenia

1. Introduction

Before embarking on a quest to investigate the representation of female experience, agency, discourse, and identity in early Christian Armenian literature of the fifth century, it is essential to sketch the background against which the developments introduced by Christianity can be observed and successfully evaluated. I shall commence the present study in the first century CE, when the junior branch of Persian Arsacids (Aršakuni) acceded to the throne of Armenia. There is valuable, though scant, evidence and serious scholarly research available on this period of history,¹ which allows us a glimpse into the culture, mentality, habits, customs, traditions, religious beliefs, and social and political organisation of the Armenian society.

The emphasis of this chapter is on the most significant socio-cultural factors that determined the role of women in pre-Christian Arsacid Armenia.² The extant

¹ There is a conspicuous absence of evidence that would enable us to shed light on the position of women in Armenian society before the Arsacid period. However, this fragmented data, primarily provided by archaeology, should still be critically assessed – a challenging task which I intend to undertake in the future.

² In the period of the reign of the Arsacid dynasty Armenia was in no sense a politically unified country (Adontz 1970, pp. 7–74). The major division of Armenia into two spheres of influence between the Byzantine and Persian Empires was reflected in the political, cultural and social life of the Armenian people. Yet, Greater Armenia, which was under the control of the Arsacid dynasty, was, at least culturally, a uniform entity while the western Armenian lands were “neither politically nor culturally a homogeneous unit” (ibid., p. 25). Henceforth, the society of Greater Armenia will be our primary focus, unless stated otherwise, for this was the place where the Armenian historical writing reflecting the values and mores of people originated. For the difficulties in defining ‘Armenia’ in the first centuries CE, see Garsoïan 1971, pp. 343–346.

sources indicate that the assimilation and spread of Christian beliefs was a complicated and long process during which the old religious and traditional values persisted vigorously. I shall focus my attention on (a) the social stratification of Armenian society in which the family constituted its principal element; (b) the concept of the customary law in the Armenian reality; (c) Zoroastrianism as a state-sponsored religion of Arsacid Armenia, and, in particular, how women are presented in the teachings of Zoroaster and in what way the reality differed from the picture presented in the Avesta.

2. Armenian Society in the First– Fourth Centuries CE

2.1 Political and Social Structure

In 63 CE, after years of struggle between the Roman Empire and Parthian Iran over Armenia, the sides eventually reached a compromise at Rhandeia, according to which a member of the Parthian royal family would occupy the throne of Armenia but its legitimisation would be achieved only when the Roman Emperor put the crown on the king's head; thus, in 66 CE Trdat I, the younger brother of the Parthian king Vologeses, travelled to Rome and was officially crowned by Nero.³ Soon after this event, according to Agat'angelos, the Armenian king became the second person "in the kingdom of the Persians, for whoever was king of Armenia had second rank in the Persian kingdom."⁴ The conciliation of great rivals, however, did not endure long, for about half a century later hostilities were renewed.⁵ Notwithstanding the fact that in

³ Garsoïan 1997, pp. 64–67.

⁴ Agat'angelos's words (Aa §18) refer to the Armenian King Xosrov but they are applied to most Armenian Arsacid kings before the abolition of Parthian rule in Persia: «... Խոսրով թագաւորն Հայոց, որ էր երկրորդ տէրութեանն Պարսից, զի որ Հայոց թագաւոր էր՝ նա էր երկրորդ Պարսից տէրութեանն...»

⁵ Garsoïan 1997, p. 69.

ca 224 the Sassanids managed to overthrow the senior branch of the Arsacid dynasty in Iran, Arsacid rule in Armenia continued, with small disruptions, until 428, when the Armenian magnates (*naxarars*), reaching a consensus, appealed to the Persian king to abolish monarchy in Armenia.⁶

Despite the great influence of Hellenistic culture on many spheres of life of Armenian people both in the east and the west,⁷ the social structure of Arsacid Armenia “was unmistakably Iranian”.⁸ This claim is strongly supported by a whole range of aspects, one of which is the presence of many loan words from Parthian and Middle Persian in the vocabulary of social terms of Classical Armenian: e.g. Arm. *azat* = “‘free, noble’ from Parth., Mid. Pers. *āzād*”; Arm. *sparapet* = “‘army leader,’ loan translation based on Parth. *spāδ-pat* (cf. Mid. Pers. *spāh-bed*)”.⁹ Furthermore, as indicated by Mahé, the Iranian influence on the legislative vocabulary of Armenian is also more than obvious: “*awrēn* «loi», *hraman* «commandement», *hrovartak* «décret», *muṛhak* «document scellé», *uxt* «pacte, alliance», *vkay* «témoin»”.¹⁰ Various studies¹¹ on the structure of ancient Armenian society and culture show that it is methodologically appropriate to refer to Iranian reality while speaking about the

⁶ Lang 2000, p. 529.

⁷ Most Artaxiad monarchs (ca 188 BCE – ca 14 CE) declared themselves philhellenes, and already in the first century BCE a strong presence of Hellenistic culture was conspicuous in many parts of Armenia. Plutarch, for instance, informs us that there was a sizable Greek community in Tigranocerta, and that the Armenian King Tigranes II had brought many actors from all the quarters of his empire for his newly built theatre (Plutarch 1914, *Lucullus*, XXIX). For archaeological evidence see, *inter alia*, Tiratsian 1983, p. 55. See also Garsoïan 1976, pp. 4–5, n. 9.

⁸ Garsoïan 1997, p. 76.

⁹ Schmitt and Bailey 1987, p. 451, (cf. Ačaiyan 1971–1979, 1:83 and 4:263).

¹⁰ Mahé 2000, p. 683. For further sources see Garsoïan 1976, pp. 11–12, n. 32.

¹¹ See *inter alia* Garsoïan 1976, pp. 1–6, 33–35; Russell 1987, p. 84; Adontz 1970, pp. 141, 290–291; Toumanoff 1963, pp. 108–139.

social structure of Armenia,¹² though the existence of unique local elements of social and political organisation should not be overlooked.¹³

Garsoïan provides a concise summary of the stratification of the society based primarily on her analysis of the *Epic Histories*.¹⁴ In short, the central social institution of Arsacid Armenia was the kingship followed by the class of *naxarars* (magnates), *azats* (junior nobility) and *ramik* (this was a broad term which described non-noble people, namely artisans, traders and the peasants, the latter also known as *šinakan*). In this stratified society the most powerful class was the *naxarar* class, and the king was obliged by customary law to get their agreement to his decisions on most important matters. The *naxarar* families possessed vast tracts of land over which the head of the family exercised absolute administrative and judicial power. Despite this fact, the whole property of the land was administered jointly with all the members of the family circle.¹⁵ Most *naxarar* families also held hereditary offices in the service of the king: e.g. *sparapetut'iwn* – “the supreme command of the army,” was the prerogative of the Mamikonean house; the Gnuni held the office of *hazarapet* – “seneschals,” and so on. As for the *azats*, they owned some land, but their main function in the society

¹² In a similar manner scholars of ancient Iranian culture use Armenian sources to understand and explain certain phenomena in their field. For instance, Zaehner extensively uses Eznik Kolbac'i's *Elc Alandoc'* to discuss Zervanite mythology (Zaehner 1955), and Widengren points out the fact that “[a]ll the Armenian sources are important for our knowledge of social and religious affairs and political and military institutions” of Parthian Iran (Widengren 1983, p. 1267).

¹³ An important reference to such differences is made in the *Epic Histories* (IV.xx): “Then Šapuh king of Persia strongly urged Aršak king of Armenia to come with him to Asorestan that he might honor him with great glory, and elevate him to [the dignity] of son-in-law. But Aršak and all his army were distressed to go on such a long journey, for every one of them longed for his own house, his own place, in accordance with *the inborn ways of the Armenian men*”; «Իսկ թագաւորն Պարսից Շապուհ մեծաւ ստիպով ստիպէր զթագաւորն Հայոց զԱրշակ, զի առցէ զնապցէ զնա ընչ ինքեան յԱսորեստան, զի անդ մեծափառ պատուով եւ փեսայութեամբ մեծաբեւցէ զնա: Իսկ Արշակ եւ ամենայն զօրք իւր տաղտալէին երբաւ զհեռի հաճապարհն. զի ամենայն ոք յանձնիւր տուն յիրաւանջիւր *մեղի գօրէն բարուց հայաստան մարդկան անձկացեալ էին*» (my italics).

¹⁴ Garsoïan 1997, pp. 75–81.

¹⁵ See also Mahé 2000, p. 690 and Perikhanian 1983a, p. 643.

was to serve in the army of the *naxarar*, under whose vassalage they were.¹⁶ It should also be mentioned that the largest section of the Armenian population belonged to the class of the *ramik*: agriculture along with artisanship formed the main economic activities.¹⁷

The social structure of Arsacid Armenia reveals conspicuous features of a patriarchal society. The political power of the realm was in the hands of its male members who inherited it from their ancestors:¹⁸ never had there been a female *naxarar* throughout Armenian history, nor had there been a queen who would possess as much power and authority in the realm as a male monarch.¹⁹ All the hereditary offices attested in Armenian sources were the prerogative of men, a fact which shows the exclusion of women from the social mechanism of power distribution.

2.2 The Institution of the Family

2.2.1 Structure

The nucleus of Arsacid Armenian society was the institution of the family.²⁰ It was the characteristic feature of Iranian societies even before the Parthian and Sasanian periods,²¹ and the evidence that Armenian society shared this feature lies in the organisation of the society as described by ancient historians. The existence of a large number of Classical (and Modern) Armenian words referring to various bonds within

¹⁶ Chaumont and Toumanoff 1989, p. 170.

¹⁷ Sukiasian 1963, pp. 77, 120. It is noteworthy that in Sasanian Iran there was an influential class of scribes, which is not attested in Armenia. For a brief discussion of this discrepancy, see Garsoïan 1976, p. 41.

¹⁸ For the importance of hereditary rights, see Garsoïan 1976, p. 41–6.

¹⁹ The institution of queendom is examined in more detail in *Chapter VI*.

²⁰ At this point it should be underscored that owing to lack of evidence only the basic structure of upper-class families can be reconstructed, and based on this we can draw some conclusions about the families of the *ramik* class, too.

²¹ Perikhanian 1983a, p. 641.

a family indicates the importance attached to defining the relationships within the extended family.²² Belonging to a family provided one with a name and ancestry,²³ defined one's social status and the extent of one's authority.

In Classical Armenian sources there are several words which are translated into English with the word 'family'; the most frequently used ones are *tun*, *tohm* with its derivative *azgatohm* and *əntanik*.²⁴ The existence and frequent use of these lexemes by various authors indicates that the social institution of family was firmly established and regulated by specific norms by the end of the fifth century. The difference among these terms cannot be easily explained due to the absence of any clarification in the sources, but scholars have suggested several feasible interpretations. According to Garsoïan, for instance, *tun* and *tohm* are interchangeably used in the *Epic Histories* to denote "noble house, family,"²⁵ this usage being also attested elsewhere. Agat'angelos uses all four words: *azgatohm* in connection with all the representatives of Parthian Anak's family,²⁶ *tohm* while referring to the Arsacid dynasty,²⁷ and *tun* and *əntanik* in the words attributed to Trdat in his address to the Armenian magnates.²⁸ Thomson translates *tun* as 'house,' and *azgatohm*, *tohm* and *əntanik* as 'family,' the latter referring to people who live in the 'house.'

²² See Mahé 1984, pp. 327–45. Mahé's article is based on the study of Modern Armenian vocabulary but all of these lexical units can also be found, with minor morphological changes, in Classical Armenian.

²³ The importance of this aspect is especially underscored in Xorenac'i's *History* in Book 1 (*Մենկաբանութիւն Հայոց Մեծաց*), where he provides the genealogy of Armenian *naxarar* families, and of the nation as a whole.

²⁴ There is also the word *gerdastan* (գերդաստան), which is very common in modern Armenian with the meaning 'an extended family'. According to *NBHL*, *gerdastan* refers to *tun* including its property and servants, and it may be found in John Chrysostom's commentary on Matthew and the letter of Paul to the Ephesians, as well as in Luke 12.42 (*NBHL* 1:547). However, with the meaning 'family' it appears much later (Ačaryan 1971–1979, 1:541), and this is the reason why I have not included its discussion in this study.

²⁵ *EH* p. 565.

²⁶ *Aa* §34.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, §44.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, §130.

Agat'angelos also mentions *tun T'orgomay*, – *tun* again rendered as 'house' by Thomson, – to speak about Armenia in general.²⁹ In addition, *əntanik'* is interpreted by Thomson as 'household' in the episode when the King Xosrov sees Anak and his family arrive at his court.³⁰ These examples are by no means exhaustive, and I refer to them only to show the complexity of the concept of 'family' in Arsacid Armenia as it occurs in two works of the fifth century.

To indicate the head of the family words like *tanutēr*, *nahapet*, and their synonym *išxan* were used in early Armenian texts. Presumably from the context in which these words are found, Sukiasian inferred that they referred to the position of the male members within a family, while the word *naxarar* was used to denote one's social status.³¹ Furthermore, according to Toumanoff, *išxan* was also "applicable to High Kings, their cadets, and to sub-kings alike."³² It is interesting that there is no female derivative of *naxarar* or *nahapet*, while in Koriwn, for instance, we find the

²⁹ Ibid., §796.

³⁰ Ibid., §30. Etymologically, *tun* derives from Proto-Indo-European word **dōm*, genitive *dém-s* denoting a 'house, dwelling place' (Martirosyan 2010, p. 618; Ačaiyan 1971–1979, 4:427), while *tohm* and its compound *azgatohm* are Iranian loanwords: *tohm* meaning 'family, tribe, line' derives from Mid. Pers. *tohm* and Parth. *tōxm* (Schmitt and Bailey 1987, pp. 452, 463; Ačaiyan 1971–1979, 4:417), and *azg* from Pahlavi meaning 'branch' (Schmitt and Bailey 1987, p. 464; Ačaiyan 1971–1979, 1:84). The root of the word *əntanik'* is *tun*: prefix *ən(d)-* + *tan* (locative of *tun*) + *-i* (adjectival suffix) + *k'* (plural ending), meaning 'those who live under the same roof, in the same *tun*'. The head of the *tun* was called *tēr* or *tanutēr*, the latter compound deriving from *tan-* (gen. of *tun*) + connective(?) *-u-* + *tēr* = **tī-* + *ayr*, meaning 'great man, lord' (1:172-3 and 4:401), that is 'the lord of the house', where 'house' could refer to both one household and the agnatic group as a whole. The oldest and the most influential male member of the *tohm* was called *nahapet* – from Parthian *nāfapati* 'head of a clan', from *nāfa* 'race' + *pāti* 'chief' (3:423) (cf. Schmitt and Bailey 1987, p. 463: "Northwest Prakrit *ṇavhapati*- 'prince,' Sogd. *n'β*, *n'f* 'family, people'"), whereas the younger male members were called *sepuhs* – Avestan *visō-puθrā*, 'an offspring of a noble family,' north-west and Manichean Pahlavi *vispuhr* – 'lord' (Ačaiyan 1971–1979, 4:202; cf. Schmitt and Bailey 1987, p. 463). The wife of a *tanutēr* was called *tantikin*, a compound which consists of *tan-* + **tī-* as in *tēr* and *kin* 'woman' (Ačaiyan 1971–1979, 2:588–589 and 4:406), meaning 'the lady of the house.' Correspondingly, the wife of a *nahapet* was called *tikin* – 'the great lady'. It is worth noting that *tēr* became the main word to address the Christian god, whereas *tikin* was used as the title of Zoroastrian goddess Anahit.

³¹ Sukiasian 1963, p. 195. Cf. Toumanoff 1963, pp. 116–117.

³² Toumanoff 1963, p. 114.

word *išxanakin*, by which he refers to the Mamikonean lord Vardan's wife named Dustr.³³ It appears that the choice of the word referring to a nobleman or noblewoman largely depended on the context of writing and which aspect of his/her authority the ancient historian wished to emphasise.

Anahit Perikhanian's studies of the ancient Iranian family³⁴ may help us shed further light on the structure of the Arsacid Armenian family, for the similarities are significant. In Iranian reality *tōxm* along with *nāf* and *gōhr* was used to denote the agnatic group, which "[i]n its simplest form ... included several dozen patriarchal families who all originated from one common ancestor on the father's side, three or more generations back from the living heads of these families".³⁵ The smallest unit of the agnatic group was the individual family followed by the patriarchal family of undivided brothers characterised by "a strict system of rights and obligations"; "members of the family were linked together by shared worship ... and religious rights, joint family property ... and by common activity in production and consumption".³⁶ The head of the patriarchal family was called *katak-xvatāy*, which literally meant

³³ Koriwn, XXIV.

³⁴ Perikhanian's extensive research into the law and social organisation of pre-Islamic Iran is based on her study of the early seventh century Sasanian book of law cases known as *Mādigān ī Hazār Dādistān* (the Russian translation was published in Yerevan 1973 by the Academy of Sciences of Armenian SSR, and its English translation by Garsoïan appeared in 1997 (Costa Mesa, CA.; Mazda Publishers)), supported by the evidence from the Parthian epigraphic records, as well as scant evidence from Greek, Roman, Syriac and Armenian sources (Perikhanian 1983a, p. 627; 1983b, p. 4). Although certain parts of her translation of the *Mādigān ī Hazār Dādistān* were revised by Maria Macuch in her German translations (*Das sasanidische Rechtsbuch 'Mātakdān ī hazār dādistān': (Teil II)*, Wiesbaden: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft 1981; and *Rechtskasuistik und Gerichtspraxis zu Beginn des siebenten Jahrhunderts in Iran: die Rechtssammlung des Farrohmard ī Wahraman*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1993), the picture of the Iranian society as described by Perikhanian, to the best of our knowledge, has not been challenged so far. In addition, Perikhanian's findings concur with Pigulevskaya's (1956) earlier but less detailed summary of the information on the Iranian family of the fourth-sixth centuries, which will also be cited below.

³⁵ Perikhanian 1983a, p. 642. The 'agnatic group' should be understood as a 'patrilineal group', in which the property of family and its social status are passed on "from father to legitimate son" (Scott and Marshall 2009).

³⁶ Perikhanian 1983a, pp. 641–642.

‘head of the family’ (the same as the Arm. *tanutēr*), and his wife was referred to as *katak-bānūk* – ‘mistress of the house’³⁷ corresponding to Armenian *tantikin*. The council of *katak-xvatāys*, presided by the *nāfapati* (Arm. *nahapet*) formed the administrative body which managed virtually everything that concerned the agnatic group.³⁸ There is no evidence of women’s participation in decision-making at these councils, although their presence in different ceremonies is widely attested.³⁹

According to Perikhanian, there were two parties in the Iranian family which coexisted and interacted according to a strict hierarchic division – *personae sui iuris* and *personae alieni iuris*: the former included the head of the family along with all grown-up adult men (fifteen and more years old), and the latter were women and all the children under fifteen.⁴⁰ A woman, by herself, did not possess any legal rights: it was through her husband or her father that she acquired a certain status in society. In the absence of tangible evidence of a similar division in the Armenian extended family, we may only speculate that the situation in it was not much different.⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid., p. 641; Pigulevskaya 1956, p. 182.

³⁸ Perikhanian 1983a, pp. 643–644. Perikhanian mentions events such as the Zoroastrian investiture with the sacred girdle and shirt, weddings, and judicial acts.

³⁹ See, for instance, Garsoïan’s study of the banqueting scenes found in the samples of Sasanian art (1981, pp. 56–57).

⁴⁰ Perikhanian 1983b, p. 50.

⁴¹ In fact, there is a sentence in Łazar’s *History* (p. 135 [88]) mentioning women and children as if they are a separate group, which might be a hint to such a division in Armenian society: when speaking about the Armenian *naxarars* the Persian King Yazkert II says, “*their wives, sons, and daughters*, when brought by anyone ornaments of gold, silver, or pearls, if the smallest piece of these dead men’s bones is given them, think this to be the most estimable and precious” («*կանայք նոցա, ուստեբ և զստեբ, և զգարդս ոսկոյ և արծաթոյ և մարգարտոյ տարեալք ուրով նոցա, քէ կարի փոքր ինչ յոսկերաց այնր մեռելոց տայր նոցա՝ զայն մեծարգոյ և պատուական համարին*») (my italics).

2.2.2 *Iranian Marriage Patterns*

While describing events just before the establishment of Arsacid dynasty in Armenia, Tacitus writes that “neither Tigranes nor his children reigned long, though, in foreign fashion, they were united in marriage and in royal power.”⁴² The Roman historian refers to the Artaxiad king of Armenia Tigranes III and his children Tigranes IV and Erato. The marriage “in foreign fashion” for the Roman historian is the union of Tigranes IV and Erato, obviously conducted according to the Iranian tradition, which apparently was not foreign to the Armenian ruling dynasty due to their close ties with the Persian elite.⁴³ As we shall see below,⁴⁴ this is not the only reference to an Iranian style marriage which the Armenians adopted; therefore, a study of these widely attested marriage patterns will enable us to understand better the form and function of this important social institution in the Armenian reality.

To begin with, Tacitus’ mention of the marriage of Tigranes and Erato suggests an incestuous relationship within the royal family, which, taking into account the unstable political situation in the country, might have been prompted by necessity to consolidate power. On the other hand, this union could have been in accordance with the practice of *xvaētvadatha-* (Mid. Pers. *xvēdōdah*) in Zoroastrianism, which encouraged next-of-kin marriages and is attested in a number of ancient sources including Sasanian ones.⁴⁵ It has been widely acknowledged that consanguineous

⁴² Tacitus 1942, Ann. 2.3.

⁴³ For these relationships, see Toumanoff’s overview of Armenian dynasties (1963, pp. 192–229).

⁴⁴ See *Chapter V*, 4.1.

⁴⁵ See Boyce 2001, pp. 53–54, 97, 111; Orenco 2009, pp. 641–642; Russell 1987, p. 94; *HZ* I, p. 254; Pigulevskaya 1956, pp. 185–187. The most famous evidence quoted for the Sasanian period is an inscription from the second half of the 3rd century CE on the Kaabah of Zoroaster signed by Kartīr, the magus-master, “And by the provision of the gods and the King of Kings and by my efforts in the empire of Iran many fires of Varahrān were established, and many kin marriages were made, and many people who had become unfaithful [to their vows], these became faithful” (Sprengling 1953, p. 52).

marriages, alongside polygamy, were common among the ruling elite of the Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sasanian empires,⁴⁶ but it is not clear whether they were also practised at the lower strata of society.

Much more information has been preserved about other types of marriage in Sasanian Iran. The most common ones were the *pātixšāyīh* (legally and socially full marriage which produced legitimate heirs of the husband)⁴⁷ and *stūr* marriage which could be of two types – *čakar* (or *čakarīh*), when a widow of a childless man married the nearest agnate to bear a male heir for her late husband, and, if the widow was unable to deliver children, the marriage of *epikleros* (Gk. ἐπίκληρος = heiress, in this case – the one who will bear an heir) daughter or sister was sanctioned by the agnates so that the male child born of this marriage would become the legitimate successor of the deceased man.⁴⁸ The practice of *stūr* marriages implied that virtually any type of union between a man and woman was possible, but on the basis of extant evidence I would assume that, in most cases, it was the head of the clan himself who would accept the responsibility to beget an heir for the deceased person.⁴⁹ Thus, in accordance with the institution of *stūr* marriage a single female survivor of a family could ensure the continuation of her father or husband's line.

Iranian peoples also practised marriage “for a definite period”, during which a husband had “the right to hand over his wife – by a formal procedure and in response to a formal request – to another man belonging to his community, as a temporary wife for a definite period which was stipulated in a declaration”.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ See Brosius 2010.

⁴⁷ Perikhanian 1983a, p. 646.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 649.

⁴⁹ See the discussion in *Chapter V*, 4.1, in which St Nersēs warns against the intimate relations between a father-in-law and his daughter-in-law.

⁵⁰ Perikhanian 1983a, p. 650.

The Armenian sources have not preserved any direct reference to these types of marriages, but as we shall see in *Chapter V* the available evidence evinces many instances when identical or similar practices were followed in *naxarar* Armenia.

Unsurprisingly, the extant historical evidence points to the fact that the household was the primary locus of female agency.⁵¹ Noble women were occupied with managing the economy of their estates and providing basic education to their children.⁵² The everyday chores were carried out by maids and servants, as well as by the younger members of the family.⁵³ There was a strict hierarchy among the female members of the family, with the wife of the *tanutēr* being the most powerful figure which allocated tasks to the rest.⁵⁴ Yet, if the widowed mother of *tanutēr* was still alive, then she would normally be in charge, for in the case of demise of the *tanutēr*, his widow would find herself under the guardianship of her elder son,⁵⁵ thus remaining the oldest female in the household.

Emil Benveniste's study of Indo-European kinship vocabulary has shown that there are more words that describe the connections of the wife with her in-laws than the husband's relationships with his wife's relatives, with the main explanation being the fact that

the wife leaves her clan to enter that of the husband and this institutes relations between her and the family of her husband which demand expression. ... On the other

⁵¹ As we shall see in *Chapter IV*, 2.2 senior women and widows were not deprived of access into the socio-political sphere of life, but the household still remained their primary space of activity.

⁵² Sasanian sources contemporary to this period mention the same roles for women within the household. Rose (1998, p. 30), writing about the traditions of Zoroastrian families in pre-Islamic Iran mentions that "[s]ince the upkeep of the home and the education of young children was the traditional concern of the women of the household, their role in transmitting religious tenets and customs may be presumed to have been considerable."

⁵³ See the discussion in *Chapter IV*, 4.

⁵⁴ Mahé 2000, p. 690. A similar situation is observed in the Sasanian family (see Rose 1998, p. 32).

⁵⁵ Perikhanian 1983a, pp. 648–649.

hand, for the man, there is no necessity to distinguish by specific terms relatives of his wife since he does not cohabit with them.⁵⁶

This assumption, however, does not reflect the evidence preserved in classical Armenian, which contains many words denoting kinship of the husband with his in-laws: e.g. *anēr* = father-in-law⁵⁷ (with plural *anērḱ* also meaning ‘in-laws’⁵⁸), *zok’anč* – mother-in-law,⁵⁹ *k’eni* = sister-in-law.⁶⁰ The existence of a rich paradigm of kinship vocabulary, in which both husband’s and wife’s relatives are comprehensively presented,⁶¹ is an indication that the daughter did not completely sever the ties with her paternal family after her marriage (unlike, for instance, the Iranian family)⁶² and there was a constant interaction between her husband and her next of kin. The child born in full (*pātixsāyih*-type) marriage automatically entered the husband’s clan,⁶³ but the maternal uncles had a moral obligation to protect and educate their nephews.⁶⁴

This short survey into the social structure of pre-Christian Arsacid Armenia shows that the patriarchal paradigm of power distribution permeated the most important layers of social organisation – the state mechanism and the family. A strict

⁵⁶ Benveniste 1973, p. 167.

⁵⁷ *MX*, II.xxv: «Թայնն ժամանակի Հերովդէս զանէր Աղեփսանդրի որդոյ իւրոյ ... ընդ իւրով ձեռամբ թագաւոր Միջերկրեայցն կացուցանէր»; “At that time Herod ... established as king of Anatolia under his own authority the father-in-law of his son Alexander...”

⁵⁸ *EH*, III.v: «վասն այնորիկ զգուէին զնա աներք նորա»; “his in-laws oppressed him on account of this.”

⁵⁹ Eusebius of Caesarea 1818, Chronicle II, pp. 258–260: «Հերովդէս ... սպանանէ եւ զմայր սպանելոյ կնոջն՝ զիւր զոմանչ»; “Herod ... also kills his mother-in-law, the mother of his wife whom he killed” (my translation).

⁶⁰ *LP*, p. 91 [52]: «ունէր կին յագգէն Արծրունեաց, զհենի մեծի սեպիին Մամիկոնէից»; “had as wife an Arcruni, the sister-in-law of the great noble of the Mamikoneank’.”

⁶¹ For a comprehensive scheme of modern Armenian kinship vocabulary, see Mahé 1984, pp. 342–343; most words found there are also attested in early Armenian sources.

⁶² Perikhanian mentions that the *pātixsāyih* marriage “assumed entry by the wife into the husband’s agnatic group and her passing under the guardianship of her husband (also, if he was alive, of her father-in-law), with the loss of her position in her previous family and complete release from the authority of her father or guardian...” (1983a, p. 646).

⁶³ Mahé 2000, p. 690.

⁶⁴ Darinsky, quoted in Mahé 2000, p. 690 n. 53.

hierarchy and clear distribution of roles based on customary law sustained this system. Most women's agency and experience were limited to the household, and the roles they were to play and the amount of respect they were shown depended on their position in it.

3. Customary Law

There are many reasons why this gender asymmetry in agency and experience characteristic of patriarchal social structures was formed,⁶⁵ but what interests us here is how it was sustained in pre-Christian Armenia, when no written universal law code, either native or borrowed, which could legitimise such a state of affairs, is attested in Antiquity.⁶⁶ In early Armenian literature, however, there are numerous references to an unwritten law – *awrēnk* – which seems to have been widely acknowledged by the members of the society. Several scholars⁶⁷ identified it with the customary law, and there is no obvious reason to disagree with them.⁶⁸

While discussing Hegel's ideas about historicity and narrativity, Hayden White made the following revealing remark,

The more historically self-conscious the writer of any form of historiography, the more the question of the social system and the law that sustains it, the authority of this law and its justification, and threats to the law occupy his attention. If, as Hegel suggests, historicity as a distinct mode of human existence is unthinkable without the presupposition of a system of law in relation to which a specifically legal subject could be construed, then historical self-consciousness, the kind of consciousness

⁶⁵ See a detailed discussion in Lerner 1986.

⁶⁶ In ancient Mesopotamia three such law codes are attested – the Codex Hammurabi (*ca* 1750 BCE), the Hittite Laws (starting from *ca* fifteenth century BCE) and the Middle Assyrian Laws (*ca* eleventh century BCE). For how these codes, along with Jewish Covenant Code, sustained the patriarchal social institutions and ascribed certain roles to women, see Lerner 1986, pp. 101–122.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Mahé 2000, pp. 683–687 and Mardirossian 2004, pp. 25–26.

⁶⁸ Hereafter, 'customary law' and *awrēnk* will be used interchangeably throughout the present study.

capable of imagining the need to represent reality as history, is conceivable only in terms of its interest in law, legality, and legitimacy, and so on.⁶⁹

Here is not the place to discuss to what degree early Armenian authors were “historically self-conscious”, but their works indeed evince a considerable interest in the law and norms that contribute to the maintenance of the social system they describe. It is reflected in constant references to the patrimonial *awrēnkʻ* of the Armenians and the moral obligation of righteous people to adhere to it.

The concept of *awrēnkʻ* enclosed in itself various notions such as “order and rules (canons) defined by god or man, beliefs, faith, *dēn*,⁷⁰ tradition, rights, commandments, ceremonies.”⁷¹ Even after the adoption of the Christian faith at the beginning of the fourth century the customary law exerted great influence on all spheres of life. The Armenian Church was to fight many common beliefs which contradicted the principles of Christianity by issuing canons that prohibited certain practices, especially those which were remnants of Zoroastrian tradition. However, being unable to eradicate completely these phenomena, the Church assimilated and transformed several of them,⁷² and the concept of *awrēnkʻ* was also adopted.⁷³ It came to signify “a combination of elements of the customary law and the Christian

⁶⁹ White 1987, pp. 13–14.

⁷⁰ This is the Middle Persian word *dyn* or *dʻyn* [dēn], which means religion, faith.

⁷¹ «Կարգ եւ կանոն սահմանեալ յԱստուծոյ կամ ի մարդկանէ, կրօնի, հաւատի, դէն, աւանդութիւն, իրաւունք, պատուիրանք, արարողութիւնք». This definition, provided by *NBHL* (2:1032), covers all the elements involved in the formation of the customary law, though it also mentions եւ մատենակ օրինակ (“and the law codes”) referring to the modern usage of the word *awrēnkʻ* meaning ‘state-sponsored written legislation’, which, however, appeared much later in the Middle Ages.

⁷² For instance, the Armenian Feast of the Transfiguration (Քրիստոսի Պայծառակերպությունը), more commonly known as *Vardavar* (Վարդավառ), has preserved elements of the cult of Anahit (Russell 1987, pp. 251–252).

⁷³ As Mahé emphasises (2000, p. 689) it, “loin de transformer l’ordre ancien, le christianisme s’y est simplement inséré en lieu et place de la religion précédente. Le même phénomène s’est également produit dans le domaine du droit: l’ancienne loi coutumière a été globalement maintenue; puis, un siècle plus tard, quand l’écriture arménienne a été inventée, les canons sont venus s’y ajouter soit pour la reformer sur certains points précis, soit pour statuer sur des matières nouvelles.”

principles, a set of norms which was to be preserved in the communal consciousness as *hayreni* [*astvacatur*] *awrēnk'* – [god-given] laws of the ancestors (literally, of fathers).”⁷⁴ In Thomson’s words, *awrēnk'* denoted “more than religion to include customs, laws, and traditions, a whole way of life that characterized Armenians as Armenians”.⁷⁵

As opposed to written civil law,⁷⁶ customary law was handed down orally from generation to generation through everyday interaction within the family and community. Armenian customary law was constituted of many layers containing customs and habits of proto-Armenian tribes, which were significantly influenced by the Zoroastrian worldview. From the early Armenian literary sources we can infer that *awrēnk'* was perceived as a framework of unwritten rules and norms which imposed a socially acceptable behaviour on every member of the community. Whoever deviated from this framework, was severely chastised and characterised as *anawrēn* – ‘unrighteous’ or ‘unlawful’, which is found in virtually all literary sources of the fifth century.

Customary law was the basic regulator of the public and domestic spaces of Arsacid Armenia. It was the law of fathers (*hayreni*) and not of mothers because it was the product of the public sphere, where male members of the society produced norms and values that enabled them to ensure their domination in all spheres of life. Being established as a result of a long process of societal transformation from primitive tribal unions to a strictly hierarchical *naxarar* system, the customary law

⁷⁴ Zakarian 2013a, p. 5. In *Elišē* (p. 154 [102]), Vardan Mamikonean calls upon the Armenian troops to fight «վասն հայրենի աստվածատուր օրինացն»; “for our ancestral and divinely bestowed religion”; Xorenac’i (*MX*, II.ix) describes the death of Bagratuni princes, who refused to worship the idols, saying that «սրով կատարեցան արիաբար ի վերայ հայրենի օրինացն»; “[they] bravely died by the sword for their ancestral customs”.

⁷⁵ *Elišē*, p. 10.

⁷⁶ For the development of both types of law, see Mardirossian 2004 and Mahé 2000.

was profoundly influenced by the religious beliefs of its adherents, which implied that the gender roles were also, to a certain degree, defined in accordance with religion's norms and values.

4. The Pre-Christian Religion of Armenia

4.1 Zoroastrianism

While speaking about the gods of Olympus, Sarah B. Pomeroy remarks that in patriarchal societies “[t]he goddesses are archetypal images of human females, as envisioned by males”; they possess all the characteristics that men desire but these are distributed among many goddesses instead of being concentrated in one.⁷⁷ Although this statement oversimplifies the complicated process of formation of a polytheistic pantheon,⁷⁸ its underlying assumption that various characteristics attributed to gods and goddesses may reflect certain values cherished by the given male-dominated society is a useful point of reference for our study of pre-Christian Armenia pantheon. An investigation of human characteristics that are ascribed to various deities will enable us to advance, to some extent, our understanding of qualities and values which were extolled within the dominant discourse of the Armenian society.

In *circa* the sixth century BCE, being part of the vast Achaemenid Empire, the semi-independent Armenian satrapy assimilated the main tenets of Zoroastrianism into the local Indo-European, Asianic, and Semitic religious beliefs and traditions.⁷⁹ It

⁷⁷ Pomeroy 1995, p. 8.

⁷⁸ Later in her work Pomeroy herself shows the limitations of this statement when she discusses Roman festivals and cults which were confined only to women (ibid., pp. 205–226).

⁷⁹ Russell 1987, p. v; Petrosyan 2004, pp. 205–206. Although both scholars agree that it betrays traces of various religious traditions older than Zoroastrianism, such as Indo-European, Sumero-Akkadian, and Urartian, Russell considers pre-Christian Armenian religion to be a local variant of Zoroastrianism (p. 15), while Petrosyan sees a systemic difference

appears that Zoroastrianism came to modify and transform but not fully replace the cults of the ancient gods of Armenia: most gods are known to us only under their Iranian names, but they have also preserved characteristic features of more ancient deities.⁸⁰ It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss in detail the constituent elements of pre-Christian Armenian religion, but what is crucial for our understanding of the representation of women in literature of Christian Armenia is the fact that this complex religious construct determined the way people perceived their own existence and provided the main ideological framework for the customary law, with the help of which the socio-political relationships were regulated.

Currently, most scholars⁸¹ are of the opinion that Zoroaster, the founder and the revered prophet of Zoroastrianism, provided both men and women with equal opportunities to contribute to the fight of goodness against the powers of evil, and thus have hopes to achieve redemption.⁸² Both Ahura Mazdā, the beneficent spirit, and Angra Mainyu, the destructive spirit, are masculine divinities but they give birth

between the two religions and suggests that the pagan religion of Armenia was affected by Zoroastrianism only on a surface level (pp. 231–232). A more balanced approach is adopted by Zekiyan (2005, p. 235), who admits that “there can be no doubt at all of its [Zoroastrian] capillary penetration extending till the simplest strata of the Armenian population”, and yet, the “enormous Iranian impact did not dim some very original and archaic features of the Armenian pantheon” (p. 236).

⁸⁰ For examples, see Petrosyan 2004, pp. 208–225, Russell 1987, pp. 28–29, and Zekiyan 2005, pp. 235–238.

⁸¹ See, for instance, *HZ I*, p. 308 n. 83, and de Jong 1995, p. 41.

⁸² This view has been challenged by Jamshed Choksy (2002, p. 2.), who claims that “[t]he notion that the feminine – including many aspects of the female and of women – was believed to be more chaotic, dangerous, evil, and, consequently, distant from the order and goodness of god became ... a perspective of the Mazdean or Zoroastrian religion for much of the history.” This latter view appears to be largely based on the works of Robert Zaehner (whom Choksy extensively quotes in his book (2002, p. 160)) on Zoroastrianism and, in particular, one of its most influential branches, Zurvanism, in which Zaehner elaborates on Zurvanite misogyny. However, Choksy’s research has largely been criticised as “a rehash of others’ scholarly works” (Adhami 2004, p. 343.) and “a somewhat crude mixture of rather different – and in the last instance even contradictory – forms of theorizing religion” (Stausberg 2003, p. 72). The evidence that Choksy provides, in an attempt to prove a gender-based division of various aspects of Zoroastrian religion, is not convincing, and the matter requires further investigation.

to various deities and spirits, both male and female, whose categorisation, however, is not based on their gender, but according to their allegiance. At the same time, in the process of creation described in one of the sacred Zoroastrian texts known as *Bundahišn*, the human couple is born from the seed of the deceased first man, Gayōmard.⁸³ In this episode there is no evidence of the male being created first like in Gen. 2.21–22 – in contrast to Gen. 1.26–27 – which gave Christian Fathers of the Church a justification to elaborate on female secondariness as an indication of her inferiority. In addition, no explicit reference to female inferiority is found in sacred Zoroastrian books, even though the texts that reached us were first written down in the Sasanian era, when, as it is discernible from the *Mādigān ī Hazār Dādistān*, women held an essentially subordinate position in society. Furthermore, in a quite unequivocal passage from *Yasht* 46.10 one can perceive, to use Albert de Jong's words, that “in the mind of the prophet, hope of salvation was equally good for men and women: ‘O Wise Lord, whoever, man or woman, shall give me what you know as the best of being [...] with all these, I shall cross the bridge of the Separator’.”⁸⁴

These concepts, already known to the Achaemenids and perpetuated throughout the centuries, were part of the ideological apparatus of Zoroastrian religion that reached the Sasanian period. This is confirmed by a valuable literary monument known as “King Husrav and his Boy” (*ca* early 7th c. CE), which was preserved in Pahlavi and Arabic versions, and was most likely used for recreation in the Persian court.⁸⁵ It is an amusing dialogue between the king of kings and the boy

⁸³ “Out-of the seed [of Gayōmard] which went into the Earth, Masīya and Masyīnī grew up in forty years, through whom arouse the perfect-progress of the world, the destruction of the dīvs and the inability of the evil Spirit” (*Zand-Ākāsīh: Iranian or Greater Bundahišn* 1956, 6F.9).

⁸⁴ De Jong 1995, pp. 23–24.

⁸⁵ Unvala 1921, p. 3. For a brief introduction to the history of this text, see *ibid.* pp. 3–10.

(the page), during which the king enquires about various aspects of the boy's education and receives answers that please him. For the present study the king's twelfth question is most revealing: "Which woman is the best?"⁸⁶ The boy's reply is in accordance with the Zoroastrian tradition discussed above, for he declares that "that woman is the best who in her thoughts is a friend of man."⁸⁷ Although this text to a large extent reflects the mentality of the nobility, there is no concrete proof that in reality men and women possessed equal opportunities. On the contrary, it was unequivocally a patriarchal society in which women were denied access to public discourse, their position in society depended entirely on the social status of their husbands or fathers, and there was a clear gender-based distribution of social roles.

4.2 Female Deities of the Armenian Pantheon

I shall now discuss the female deities of pre-Christian Armenian pantheon and my focus will be on those aspects of their nature that were emphasised and extolled, and on those features that were deemed desirable and worth emulating. It is important to note that all our knowledge of this aspect of Armenian culture is mediated and derives primarily from Greco-Roman and Christian Armenian literature, as well as from Armenian folklore. Most interestingly, however, it appears that certain elements of the cults of Zoroastrian female deities were preserved in various forms in Christian Armenian feasts and customs.

From the words ascribed to King Trdat by Agat'angelos we may assume that pre-Christian Arsacid Armenians most revered Aramazd⁸⁸ as the supreme authority

⁸⁶ Ibid. §95.

⁸⁷ Ibid. §96.

⁸⁸ 'Aramazd' is the Parthian and Armenian variant of the name 'Ahura Mazdā'.

along with “Lady Anahit” and “valiant Vahagn,”⁸⁹ while for the Sassanids Zurvan, Time, acquired more importance, for he was considered to be the father of the twins, Ahura Mazdā (Arm. Aramazd, Ormizd) and Angra Mainyu (Arm. Ahriman, Arheman).⁹⁰ Trdat’s invocation of the holy Zoroastrian deities, as preserved by Agat‘angelos, is an indication of a close affinity to old Iranian religious tradition. It echoes a similar utterance of the Achaemenid Artaxerxes II, found in various inscriptions in Susa and other places, in which the king of kings invokes Ahura Mazdā, Anāhita and Mihr.⁹¹ In addition, Artaxerxes was known to be a benefactor and ardent supporter of the cult of Anāhita, who was to be held in high esteem in Armenia for many centuries to come.⁹²

Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā, known in Armenia as Anahit, was one of the most popular deities worshiped throughout the centuries with the remnants of her cult having survived into modern times. The word *arədvī* occurs only in this name,⁹³ whereas in Younger Avestan *sūrā* stands for “strong, mighty,” and *anāhitā* means “undefiled, immaculate.”⁹⁴ She is primarily the goddess of waters and fertility,⁹⁵

⁸⁹ *Aa* §127: «Ողջոյն հասեալ եւ շինութիւն դիցն ոգնականութեամբ, լիութիւն պարարտութեան յարոյն Արամազդայ, ինամակալութիւն յԱնահիտ տիկնոջէ, եւ քաջութիւն հասցէ ձեզ ի քաջէն Վահագնէ ամենայն Հայոց աշխարհիս ...»); “May there be health and prosperity by the help of the gods ... abundant fertility from noble Aramazd, protection from Lady Anahit, valour from valiant Vahagn, to you and to all our land of Armenia.”

⁹⁰ *HZ* I, p. 423.

⁹¹ *HZ* II, pp. 216–217.

⁹² The name ‘Anahit’ has been preserved in the communal memory and is one of the most popular female Armenian names for over a century, though in ancient time it was used only for the goddess (Ačariyan 1972, pp. 145–146). In addition, along with Anāhitā, the Armenians also revered other female deities from the Zoroastrian pantheon, such as Spəntā Ārmaiti, Haurvatāt and Amərətāt, whose representations are discussed below.

⁹³ Boyce, quoting Bartholomae and Lommel, is inclined to believe that *arədvī* is an adjective which means “moist, humid” (*HZ* I, p. 71).

⁹⁴ *HZ* I, p. 71.

⁹⁵ The cult of Anahit is very ancient: *Yasht* 5, which is dedicated to Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā, is considered to be one of the oldest Avestan hymns. Throughout the centuries the goddess

whose importance in Armenian tradition has been attested by various sources. Strabo in his *Geography*⁹⁶ writes about temple prostitution or “cultic sexual service”⁹⁷ at the temple of Zoroastrian goddess Anahit at the end of the first millennium BCE in Erēz in the province of Ekeleac’ (Acilisene) in Greater Armenia. Later, Agat’angelos would eloquently describe the destruction of the same temple by St Gregory the Illuminator.⁹⁸

In Middle Persian the title of Anāhitā was *banug* “lady”,⁹⁹ which was rendered in Armenian as *tikin*, a title, as mentioned above, indicating a woman occupying a high position in the *tohm*. It was also used for the queen,¹⁰⁰ as we shall see, for instance, in connection with Queen P’aranjem. In Agat’angelos’s *History* King Trdat speaks of the goddess as the great Lady Anahit, “the progeny of great and intrepid Aramazd”, “the glory and the life-giver of our race”, “the mother of all virtues” and

assimilated features from different traditions and was subsequently attributed other functions as well. For more details, see *HZ I* pp. 71–74, 173, 176.

⁹⁶ Strabo 1924, 11.14.16: “Now the sacred rites of the Persians, one and all, are held in honor by both the Medes and the Armenians; but those of Anaitis are held in exceptional honor by the Armenians, who have built temples in her honor in different places, and especially in Acilisene. Here they dedicate to her service male and female slaves. This, indeed, is not a remarkable thing; but the most illustrious men of the tribe actually consecrate to her their daughters while maidens; and it is the custom for these first to be prostituted in the temple of the goddess for a long time and after this to be given in marriage; and no one disdains to live in wedlock with such a woman. ... And they are so kindly disposed to their paramours that they not only entertain them hospitably but also exchange presents with them, often giving more than they receive, inasmuch as the girls from wealthy homes are supplied with means. However, they do not admit any man that comes along, but preferably those of equal rank with themselves.”

⁹⁷ Lerner’s term (1986, p. 125) by which she differentiates between “cultic sexual service” and common prostitution: the former refers to sacred rituals which included sexual acts and the latter refers to “commercial prostitution”.

⁹⁸ *Aa* §786.

⁹⁹ Russell 1987, p. 245.

¹⁰⁰ *EH*, pp. 564–565. This use of the title *tikin* will be discussed in details below in connection with Queen P’aranjem (see *Chapter V*, 4.2).

“the benefactor of all humankind”,¹⁰¹ who is the source of solicitude for the whole race.¹⁰²

As it was demonstrated by Karen Melik‘-P‘ašayan, a large number of features of the ancient cult of Anahit have been adapted and incorporated into the cult of the Virgin Mary.¹⁰³ For instance, the spring celebration of fecundity associated with Anahit and celebrated on 6 April has become the Christian celebration of the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, the August celebration of fruit ripening, which used to have direct links to the cult of Anahit, has been substituted by the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin, when grapes and other ripened fruit are blessed in church and distributed among the believers.¹⁰⁵

The Sumero–Akkadian goddess Nanē (Nanā, Nanaia) was another deity revered by the Armenians. Under the influence of Zoroastrianism, Nanē was preserved in later Armenian tradition as the daughter of Aramazd.¹⁰⁶ She shared many characteristics with Anahit, which they both inherited from the ancient cult of the Great Mother Goddess.¹⁰⁷ Nanē was worshiped as the goddess of fertility, whose sphere of influence lay in everything that was related to giving birth: “earth, water, sex and motherhood.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ *Aa* §53: «Գիտացիք, զի ապախտ արարեր զվաստակսն զոր ինձն վաստակեցեր, որում ես եմ վկայ: Արդ՝ փոխանակ կենացն զոր պարտ էր առնել քեզ՝ յաճախեմ քեզ նեղութիւնս, եւ փոխանակ պատուին՝ անարգանս. եւ փոխանակ բարձ տալոյ եւ յառաջ ձգելոյ՝ բաւոյ եւ կապանս, եւ մահ՝ որ հատանէ զյոյս կենաց մարդկան, եթէ ոչ առնուցուս յանձն դիցն պաշտօն մատուցանել, մանաւանդ այսմ *մեծի Անահտայ տիկնոջս*, որ է *փառք ազգիս մերոյ եւ կեցուցիչ*, զոր եւ թագաւորք ամենայն պատուեն, մանաւանդ թագաւորն Յունաց. որ է *մայր ամենայն զգաստութեանց, բարեբար ամենայն մարդկան բնութեան*, եւ ծնունդ է մեծին արին *Արամազդայ*» (my italics).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, §127: «Ողջոյն հասեալ եւ շինութիւն դիցն օգնականութեամբ, ... խնամակալութիւն յԱնահիտ տիկնոջէ ...».

¹⁰³ Melik‘-P‘ašayan 1963, pp. 126–155.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 135–137.

¹⁰⁶ *Aa* §786.

¹⁰⁷ Russell 1987, p. 235.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

Furthermore, three out of seven great Zoroastrian Aməša Spəntas (Bounteous Immortals) – Spəntā Ārmaiti (Arm. S(p)andaramet), Haurvatāt (Arm. Hawrot) and Amərətāt (Arm. Mawrot), which were also female deities – were highly praised and worshipped in Armenia. Each deity represented a specific entity that was sacred for Zoroastrians: Spəntā Ārmaiti – Bounteous Devotion or Obedience, Haurvatāt – Wholeness or Health, Amərətāt – Life.¹⁰⁹ While Spəntā Ārmaiti was associated with earth, Haurvatāt and Amərətāt were associated with water and plants respectively.¹¹⁰ With time the names of the Aməša Spəntas came to be used for the entities they represented.¹¹¹ In Armenian, for instance, the name of Spəntā Ārmaiti is found in various forms such as *sandarametk*‘, meaning “Hades or the underworld,” or as an adjective *sandarametakan* meaning “of/from the underworld”;¹¹² as for Haurvatāt and Amərətāt, they are preserved in the name of a flower *hawrot-mawrot*.¹¹³ It is interesting that the adjectives *hawrot/hawrotik* or *xawrot/xawrotik* are still used in some dialects of Armenian in the meaning of “beautiful.”

The only goddess that has preserved her Armenian name is Astlik (‘little star’). Agat‘angelos mentions that at Yaštišat the pagan Armenians worshipped Anahit, Vahagn, and his consort Astlik rendered in Greek as Aphrodite.¹¹⁴ Scholars seem to agree that the cult of Astlik is closely related to the worship of the Great Mother

¹⁰⁹ HZI, p. 203.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 203–206.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 205.

¹¹² These are two of the examples that Russell adduces. For a full discussion, see Russell 1987, pp. 325–329.

¹¹³ See Dumézil 1926, pp. 43–69, referring to M. Abelyan, and also Russell 1987, pp. 375–398.

¹¹⁴ Aa §809: «Զի յայնժամ դեռ եւս շէն կային երեք բազինք ի նմա. առաջին՝ մեհեանն Վահեղանեան, երկրորդն՝ Ոսկեմօր Ոսկեծին դից, եւ բազինն իսկ յայս անուն անուանեալ Ոսկեհատ Ոսկեմօր դից. եւ երրորդ՝ մեհեանն անուանեալ Աստղիկան դից, Սեւեակ Վահագնի կարդացեալ, որ է ըստ յունականին Ափրոդիտէս»;¹¹⁴ “It was called Yaštišat from the frequent sacrifices of the site, for at that time there still stood three altars in it. The first was the temple of Vahagn; the second that of the Golden-mother, the Golden-born goddess, and the altar was called after her golden of the Golden-mother goddess; the third was the temple named for the goddess Astlik, called the concubine of Vahagn, who is in Greek Aphrodite.”

Goddess, as well to Syrian goddess Kaukabta and Hurrian goddess Hebat.¹¹⁵ Hence, Astlik shares some of the characteristics of Anahit and Nanē, and is considered to be the goddess of love and motherhood.

The features attributed to the supreme female goddesses disclose some of the attitudes of patriarchal society towards the ideals which were to be emulated. The use of Anahit's title *tikin* to denote the rank of mortal women, or the metonymic use of a deity's name to describe something that is associated with it indicates that the religious and social worlds were neatly interwoven. Women were perceived as producers and carers of new life (Nanē, Anahit, Astlik, Haurvatāt, and Amərətāt), their main virtue being spiritual and physical purity and obedience (Anahit, Spəntā Ārmaiti), but they also possessed a certain amount of authority stemming from their status (Anahit). Women delivered children into this world and were responsible for their edification through which they would differentiate between good and evil and contribute to the common cause by fighting the dark forces.

It becomes apparent that the complex structure of pre-Christian Armenian religion largely influenced by Zoroastrian practices and concepts determined the worldview of Armenian people. These religious beliefs were naturalised in the customary law establishing social norms which regulated the interaction of the members of society even after the introduction of Christianity to Armenia.

I am inclined to believe that the absence of overt gender discrimination in the religious ideology of Zoroastrianism alongside the high esteem for the social institution of motherhood expressed in the worship of life-giving ability of several Armenian goddesses contributed to the creation of benevolent conditions for women's participation in social processes. This may explain why in the works of early

¹¹⁵ Russell 1987, p. 29; Petrosyan 2004, p. 218.

Armenian historians there are quite a few women (predominantly of upper-class) who appear to possess enough authority to transform social relations and to influence the course of events.¹¹⁶

5. Conclusion

This overview of the culture, mentality, habits, customs, traditions, religious beliefs, and socio-political organisation of the pre-Christian Armenian society, based on the extant fragments of information, is by no means exhaustive. It nevertheless allows us to enhance our understanding and gain deeper appreciation of the numerous allusions to traditional cultural and spiritual perspectives and values which early Christian Armenian authors presented and often challenged in their writings.

As the above discussion shows, the family (*tohm*, *tun*, *əntanik*‘) appears to have been the most important unit of the largely male-centred *naxarar* system, and its preservation and welfare was the concern of its every member. As was the case with many ancient cultures, the sustainability of the pre-Christian Arsacid Armenian society was based on the division of spheres of activity and influence which presupposed a clear distribution of responsibilities: men were in charge of the public sphere, which involved participating in decision-making events that concerned the family, establishing alliances, preparing for and fighting wars and so on; at the same time, women were preoccupied with the household chores such as nurturing children, tending the family hearth, preparing food. This order was sustained through compliance with the norms and values of the customary law and pre-Christian Armenian religion, which was largely influenced by Zoroastrianism. Transgression of

¹¹⁶ See the subsequent chapters, as well as Pogossian 2003, pp. 373–375, 379–380, and Zakarian 2013a, pp. 16–19, 22–25.

this order, by both men and women, was condemned as *anawrēn* (unrighteous, iniquitous) and could lead to dishonouring and even death of the perpetrator, and, in the case of a high-ranking man, it might result in his family's extermination.

In the ensuing analysis I shall explore the representation of women in fifth-century Christian Armenian literary works which clearly reflect the socio-cultural transformation that Armenian society was undergoing after the adoption of Christianity. It will become evident that despite the considerable influence of the Early Church Fathers, predominantly Greek and Syriac, on the formation and development of Christian Armenian ideology, the remarkably widespread misogynistic concepts of their writings do not appear in the works of Armenian clerics of the fifth century. Instead, the pre-Christian understanding of the role of women in society as partners of men in their struggle against evil seems to be perpetuated and extolled.

Chapter II

Women in the Conversion Narrative

Զի ոչ միայն ի ձեռն արանց, այլ եւ ի ձեռն կանանց սրբոց քարոզեցաւ Աւետարանն կենդանութեան ընդ տիեզերս ամենայն. զի եւ կանայք օրհնեցան վասն կուսանին ծննդեանն որ ի նոցանէն:

Not only by men, but also by holy women the gospel of life was preached throughout the whole world. For women also were blessed on account of the virgin birth which was from among them.

Aa §684

1. Two Traditions

The adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Armenian Arsacid kingdom at the beginning of the fourth century CE¹ marks a very significant event in the history of the Armenian people. It not only transformed the society and introduced a new element in the geopolitical relationships in the area, but Christianity also contributed to the development and perpetuation of Armenian culture and national identity. The propagation of Christian beliefs heightened a paramount need for the creation of an alphabet capable of rendering the sounds of the Armenian language at the beginning of the fifth century, which, in its turn, was conducive to the emergence

¹ Although in 2001 the Armenian Apostolic Church celebrated the 1700th anniversary of the Christianisation of Armenia (the date 301 CE was proposed by Čamčēanc' (1784, pp. 385–390)), the absence of a reference to a specific date of conversion in the historical sources has given rise to various speculations, and several dates have been suggested by scholars: 219 (Akinean), 279 (Malxasean), 291 (K'asuni), 313 (Manandyan) and 314 (Ananean and most modern scholars). For the study of each approach, see Ananean 1998, pp. 9–80. Mahé (1999, p. 69), on the other hand, concurring with Manaseryan (*Hayastanə Artavazdic minč'ew Trdat Mec'* (Armenia from Artavazd to Trdat the Great), Yerevan, 1997), supports a date between 305 and 307.

of native Armenian literature. The overall impact of Christianisation on Armenian society is succinctly summarised in Robert Thomson's following remark:

The conversion of Armenia to Christianity in the early fourth century A.D. not only wrought a momentous change within Armenia itself but was also significant for the general history and culture of the Near East. Christian Armenia produced an original art and architecture as well as a rich native literature. The Armenian church played a major role in the development of Eastern (non-Greek) Christianity. And Armenian culture in general developed a fascinating amalgam of indigenous traditions and foreign influences, sifted and adapted over the centuries.²

This was a major social and cultural shift, and the extant historical sources bespeak active participation of women in it.

Two distinct traditions of the Christianisation of Armenia have been preserved. One has survived in Agat'angelos's *History of Armenia*, which relates the story of the martyrdom of virgin Hrip'simē and her companions, and St Gregory the Illuminator's conversion of Armenia. The second tradition is based on St Thaddeus's apostolic mission to the East and the martyrdom of Sanduxt, maintained in the anonymous *Vkayabanut'iwn ew Giwt Nšxarac' S. T'adēi Arak'eloy ew Sandxtoy Kusi* (The Martyrdom and the Discovery of Relics of St Thaddeus the Apostle and of the Virgin Sanduxt).³ These two traditions reflect the Greek and Syriac strands of Armenian Christianity, but what is pertinent to the present study is that in both narratives much space and attention is devoted to female protagonists, who are depicted as powerful figures that attempt to subvert the authority of pagan rulers, and their agency plays a crucial role in the conversion of the Armenians.

To what degree these stories reflect real historical events is difficult to assert, but hardly any scholar will disagree that they, and especially Agat'angelos's text,

² Thomson 1976, p. vii.

³ The English translation of the passages from *The Martyrdom of St Thaddeus and Sanduxt* used in the present study is mine. For the recent French translation, see Calzolari 2011a, pp. 51–88.

exerted profound influence on subsequent generations of Armenians, whose identity throughout centuries came to be inextricably linked to Christian beliefs. Christianity, as “a religion with a story”,⁴ was *translated* into Armenian⁵ at the beginning of the fifth century, when the “God-given alphabet”⁶ of the Armenian language, as narrated in Koriwn’s account, was invented by St Maštoc’, and new narratives of champions of Christ were soon born, recounting the stories of the country’s Christianisation. The Armenians wrote their own national ‘story’, more precisely ‘stories’, which laid the foundation for the Christian Armenian ideology. They represented the male perspective and understanding of the new socio-cultural reality which was to endure for many centuries.

Armenia’s Christianisation narratives have preserved the memory of glorious, powerful women who had actively participated in both the conversion of the nation and the subsequent propagation of the Christian faith. No matter how heavily these stories have been modified rhetorically, most of them were based on real events which were preserved in the communal memory; or even if some specific details lacked historical basis, they were still perceived as authentic ones by many generations.

This chapter is divided into two sections. My initial focus will be on Agat’angelos’s narrative and his portrayal of female characters, while the representation of Sanduxt in *The Martyrdom of St Thaddeus and Sanduxt* will be

⁴ Cameron 1991, p. 89.

⁵ Koriwn, XI: «... յանկարծ ուրեմն օրէնսուսոյց Մովսէս՝ մարգարէական դասուն, եւ յառաջողէմն Պաւլոս՝ բովանդակ առաքելական գնդովն, հանդերձ աշխարհակեցոյց աւետարանուն Քրիստոսի, միանգամայն եկեալ հասեալ ի ձեռն երկուց հաւասարելոցն՝ հայաբարբառօ հայերէնախօսօ գտան»; “... by the hands of two colleagues, suddenly, in an instant, Moses, the law-giver, along with the order of the prophets, energetic Paul with the entire phalanx of the apostles, along with Christ’s world-sustaining gospel, became Armenian-speaking.”

⁶ Ibid., I; «գաստուածապարգեւ գրոյն».

examined in the second part. The analysis will demonstrate that both conversion narratives endow their female characters with multifaceted agency, and present them as energetic partners of men contributing to the success of an upright cause. What should be reiterated here⁷ is that a similar representation of female agency, identity, and experience is reflected in the ideological framework of the pre-Christian religion of the Armenians, which allows us to infer that such a portrayal of women must have been deployed deliberately to restate the assumption that women's social role had not changed with the introduction of Christianity. The political and religious elite of Armenia apparently assumed that women, as the keepers of the domestic hearth and the transmitters of religious values, should be ideologically empowered if they wanted Christianity to enter the households and acquire many supporters.

2. Agat'angelos's *History*

2.1 The Text: Structure and Audience

Agat'angelos's *History* can be conveniently divided into five parts, as it is done by Tēr-Mkrtč'ean and Kanayeanč' in the 1909 edition: *The Prologue of Agat'angelos* (*Yaraġaban Agat'angeleay*), *The Life and Account of St Gregory* (*Vark' ew Patmut'iwn Srboyn Grigori*), *The Martyrdom of the Hrip'simian* (Virgins) (*Vkayabanut'iwn Hrip'simeac'n*), *The Teaching of St Gregory* (*Vardapetut'iwn S. Grigori*), *The Redemptive Conversion of the Land of Armenia* (*Darj P'rkut'ean Ašxarhis Hayastan*). The storyline follows a linear order of events in which the causes and consequences are skilfully intertwined to create an effect of a cohesive story with St Gregory and King Trdat featuring as its main protagonists. Yet, the structure of the

⁷ See *Chapter I*, 4.1.

narrative is heavily dependent on the agency of the female characters of noble origin.

In the first place, as Valentina Calzolari observes,

Pour que son œuvre missionnaire puisse trouver un terrain fertile en Arménie, il fallait au préalable que la terre arménienne soit imprégnée du sang de femmes vierges. C'est en effet seulement après le martyre de Hripsimé et de ses compagnes que l'œuvre 'illuminatrice' de Grégoire put se manifester.⁸

In addition, it is Trdat's sister, Xosroviduxt, who urges the Armenians to bring St Gregory out of the pit, after which he begins his mission of illumination, accompanied throughout by another female figure, Trdat's wife Queen Ašxēn.

Agat'angelos deploys many well-established clichés of the epic passion in the representation of the Hrip'simian virgins, but the whole *History*, as we shall observe in the ensuing discussion of the text, is not limited to it. Numerous recensions of this work indicate that it was one of the "stories people want[ed]",⁹ and because of its high literary value and significant ideological implications its popularity grew over the centuries and it was perceived as a truthful account of Armenia's Christianisation by many generations.¹⁰

It is also important to identify the target audience of Agat'angelos's work at the time of its creation in the fifth century, and its purpose. Thomson believes that Agat'angelos was writing in a milieu which was "dominated by biblical and hagiographical terms; and where ecclesiastical considerations were paramount", that is in "the circle that produced the first translations from Greek and Syriac into

⁸ Calzolari 2011b, p. 180.

⁹ This is the title of Cameron's *Chapter Three* (1991, pp. 89–119), in which she underlines the importance of the stories such as the *Lives*, *Acts* and *Passions* of Christian saints and martyrs "for the diffusion of Christianity as a whole" (ibid., p. 89).

¹⁰ Cf. Cameron 1991, p. 93: "The better these stories [i.e. "stories people want"] were constructed, the better they functioned as structure-maintaining narratives and the more their audiences were disposed to accept them as true."

Armenian and then the first original compositions”.¹¹ The aim of their activity was the spread of Christian beliefs by means of education and the strengthening of the position of the Church, which could happen only with the patronage of the *naxarars*, especially after the abolition of the Arsacid rule. Thus, we may assume that the target audience of the *History* was primarily representatives of the nobility, which is further supported by the fact that almost all the main characters of the narrative are people of noble origin. Agat‘angelos urges them to believe that God has not forsaken them, and that the Armenian people, indeed, play an important part in heaven’s design.¹² In their eyes the enigmatic author strives to validate the authority of the Armenian Church and the first patriarch, as well as to point at the primacy of the church of Vałaršapat.

Garsoĭan¹³ has significantly advanced our understanding of this seminal work in Armenian literature when, through the example of King Trdat’s metamorphosis into a boar,¹⁴ she demonstrated that Agat‘angelos, whose narrative is largely dependent on biblical models and motifs,¹⁵ deliberately used non-Christian, more specifically Zoroastrian, symbols which were obviously well-known and understandable to his audience. It was a consciously and carefully chosen strategy aimed at reaching and transforming the minds of those whose worldview was still imbued with pagan concepts and ideals. The representation of women as an indispensable element of Christianisation of Armenia was a significant part of the same strategy, and any interpretation of this representation will be deficient without reference to its Zoroastrian substratum.

¹¹ Thomson 1976, p. lxxxvii.

¹² Calzolari 2011b, p. 179.

¹³ Garsoĭan 1982, pp. 151–174.

¹⁴ *Aa* §§211–213.

¹⁵ Thomson 1976, pp. lxxx-lxxxvii.

Agat'angelos builds his argument by extensively using antitheses in order to express his point of view and to convince his audience. As in the works of most early Christian authors, the contrast between paganism and Christianity is at the forefront of his argument: the former is associated with impurity, lawlessness, and evil, whereas the latter – with purity, righteousness and goodness. In St Gregory's address to King Trdat, for instance, Agat'angelos highlights this opposition: he characterises the fire-worship, that is the pre-Christian religion of the Armenian people, as “lawlessness” (*anawrēnut'awn*), and juxtaposes it to the true faith of Christians.¹⁶ Thus, by denigrating the religion of Trdat, St Gregory strives to raise Christianity to the status of law, *awrēnk'*. To achieve this, the author continually reveals the *anawrēn* ('unrighteous' or 'lawless') nature of the Zoroastrian religion¹⁷ through the chastisement of its followers, certain customs, beliefs, and practices,¹⁸ and he opposes it to the manifestations of “the lawful religion”,¹⁹ or “the righteous faith” of Christians.²⁰

¹⁶ Aa §64; «Վասն զի նա [Քրիստոս] ինքն է կենդանորին, զի նորոգեցէ զբունչս մարդկան՝ զգեցեալ նովին մարմնով. եւ ապա յայտնի արասցէ ըստ իւրաքանչիւր վաստակոցն զիւրաքանչիւր հատուցմունս. զի նա արձակեցէ զկապեալս ի տանէ կապանաց կապաւորութեան, որ կապեալ են ի մեղս եւ խղեսկէ զեղբայս անօրէնութեան՝ որ են իբրեւ զհեզգոյ»; “He [Christ] himself is life so that he may renew the souls of men, having been clothed in the same flesh. Then he will reveal each one's recompense for each one's labours. He will bring forth the bound from the house of bondage to idolatry, those who are bound in sin; and he will break the chains of lawlessness [for] those who are like you.”

¹⁷ In Aa §149 Agat'angelos calls the religion of pagans «անօրէն կրօն», “lawless religion”, which is opposed to «կրօն օրինաւոր», “lawful religion” of Christians (*ibid.*, §143). In addition, in §280 Satan is called «Անօրէն իշխան», “lawless prince”, which might be an allusion to the apostate “princes” of the 450–451 rebellion.

¹⁸ In Aa §163 *azatk'* (freemen) and common people are described as jostling “one another in the passion of their dissolute concupiscence and the debauched, polluted and heathen habits of their deranged minds” («Նա եւ ազատաւոյտն, խառնաճաղանքն ամբոխին հանդերձ, զմիմեամբք զիգանէին ի միմեանց վերայ, առ պակաս յիմարութեան ցովութեան բարոյիցն, այլանդակ մտացն զեղխութեան գիւնութեանն հերանոսաբար սովորութեանցն»)). This description associates the old habits of people with pollution and uncontrolled sexual behaviour opposed to the virginal chaste state of the female martyrs.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, §143: «Իսկ երանելին պարկեւորատէրն Գայիանէ, սբբասնելովն Հովիսիմեաւ հանդերձ եւ այլ ընկերօքն իւրեանց, յիշեալ զովստն սբբութեան, զօրինաւոր կրօնիցն զգաստութեան սբբութիւնն յոր մտեալ էին ...» (*my italics*); “Then the blessed and chaste Gaiane, with the saintly Rhipsime and their other companions, remembered the covenant of holiness, the religious rule of holy chastity into

The choice of words is not accidental either. Agat'angelos strives to appeal to the Iranian mentality of the Armenian nobility by manipulating concepts and categories such as “purity”, “chastity”, “righteousness”, and so forth, which are familiar to his audience, for they occupied an equally prominent place in the pre-Christian Zoroastrian religion of Armenia.²¹ In addition, Agat'angelos touches upon the concept of virginity, of sexual renunciation, which played a central role in the ideology of the early Church, and which was widely spread in many parts of Christendom.²² Yet, virginity as the ideal Christian state of life was in discord with the principles of Zoroastrian religion that sees fertility as a divine grace bestowed upon humans.²³ To what extent this aspect of Christian purity was embraced by the Armenians is not entirely clear from the extant sources,²⁴ and although in Agat'angelos's *History* it is explicitly highlighted and praised, the virginal state is not presented as an indispensable quality for redemption.

2.2 The *Prologue* and the *Life*

In the *Prologue* (§§1–17) Agat'angelos announces that he intends, *inter alia*, to tell his audience about the arrival of “God's beloved martyrs” in Armenia, “who arose like luminaries to scatter the mist of darkness from the land of Armenia; then how

which they had entered” Note that in the Armenian version of II Mac. 4.11 we find the same expression, «գկրօնսն օրինաւորս».

²⁰ Ibid., §159: «այլ ի վերայ աւտանակացն ոսկեց զարդարելոց, եւ ոսկւովք նրազարանօք զիւզն պարարտութեան անուշութեան, զարդարութեան հաւատոցն՝ վառեալ զլոյսն համապայծառ» (my italics); “but on the candlesticks ornamented with gold and with golden torches one should kindle the glorious light, the oil of sweet plenty of the righteous faith.”

²¹ See our discussion of pre-Christian religion of Armenia in *Chapter I*.

²² Clark 1999, pp. 16, 18-19; Cameron 1991, pp. 72–73.

²³ In sacred Zoroastrian books there are many references to fertility as being a great virtue: see, for instance, our discussion of Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā in *Chapter I*, 4.2. A revealing example is found in *Yasna* 11.1 and 3, in which two pure creatures, the cow and sacred Haoma, curse their offenders by wishing them to have no offspring (Mills 1887, pp. 244–245).

²⁴ For the discussion of female ascetic practices in early medieval Armenia, see *Chapter III*.

they gave up their lives for God's truth."²⁵ The martyrs are not named and no allusion is made concerning their gender, but the subsequent unfolding of events evinces that he was referring to the Hrip'simian virgins. The word *lusawork* ("luminaries," literally "the ones that emit light", Gk. φωστῆρες)²⁶ anticipates their significant role in the illumination of the Armenian nation, that is the baptism and the delivery of true knowledge.²⁷ It is additionally supported in §78, when St Gregory uses the word *lusawork* in connection with God's prophets on earth within a similar context,²⁸ and later again in §572 when St Gregory calls the Hrip'simian virgins "apostles of yours" (i.e. of the Armenian people).²⁹ He subsequently explains this approach by stressing that "[n]ot only by men, but also by holy women the gospel of life was preached throughout the whole world."³⁰ These unambiguous characterisations of Hrip'simē and her companions underscore the attitude of Agat'angelos and, most likely, of the leaders of the Armenian Church towards the role that they envisaged for the Armenian women, namely the role of educators and preservers of the true religion.

²⁵ *Aa* §13: «վասն սիրելեաց վկայիցն Աստուծոյ ... իբրեւ լուսաւորք ծագեցին, փարատել զմէզ խաւարի և Հայաստան աշխարհէս. կամ որպէս զանձինս իւրեանց փոխանակեցին ընդ Աստուծոյ համարտութեանն». It is noteworthy that in the same paragraph we find a clear hint about heterogeneity of the narratives which Agat'angelos put together: although in the subsequent narrative St Gregory's coming out of prison and evangelising the country is deeply dependent on the martyrdom of the nuns, a mention of this dependence is entirely missing in the *Prologue*, and the acts of the nuns and of St Gregory are presented as separate events.

²⁶ Cf. Gen. 1.14. In the Armenian version of the Bible we find: «Եւ ասաց Աստուած. Եղիցի՛ն լուսաւորք ի հաստատութեան երկնից, ի լուսաւորութիւն ՚ի վերայ երկրի. և մեկնէ՛լ ի մէջ տուրնջեան, և ի մէջ գիշերոյ. և եղիցին ի հեռոս, և ի ժամանակս, և յաւուրս, և ի տարիս» (*my italics*).

²⁷ *NBHL*, 1:901. As was the case in the Armenian tradition, according to Lampe, φωστῆρ besides 'luminary,' was also used metaphorically as a reference to "patriarchs" (*APGL* p. 1507).

²⁸ «ի ներել երկայնատութեանդ քո առաքեցեր զսուրբ զմարգարէսն յերկիր եւ զսիրելիս քո, որ եղեն լուսաւորք յերկրի, ի խաւարչտական միջոյ ազգացն երթանոսաց»; "In your long-suffering indulgence you sent to earth the holy prophets, your beloved ones, who became luminaries on earth in the midst of the benighted heathen races."

²⁹ «ձերոց առաքելոցս». See, also, Calzolari, 'Le sang des femmes', 188.

³⁰ *Aa* §684. For Sanduxt, who preaches the word of God, see below in 3.2.

If we compare the introduction of the virgins in the *Prologue* with how St Gregory and King Trdat are presented,³¹ it becomes apparent that for Agat'angelos the martyrdom of Hrip'simē and her companions is as momentous for the conversion to take place as the subsequent activities of the king and Armenia's first patriarch. Yet, we should not ignore the fact that in this passage the description of St Gregory's acts is more detailed than that of the Hrip'simian virgins and King Trdat, which shows the priority attached by Agat'angelos to the figure of St Gregory, whose authoritative voice will guide and instruct the audience in most parts of the narrative.³²

Absence of reference to female characters is conspicuous in the *Life*, which might be ascribed to the nature of events recounted by Agat'angelos. As is the case with other fifth-century Armenian historians, he focuses only on the public sphere – the world of wars, conflicts, betrayal, miraculous escapes, expression of loyalty and so on; it is a men's world which seems to be inaccessible to women. There is, nonetheless, one passage that is crucial for our understanding of the representation of Hrip'simē and her companions. In §48 King Trdat, accompanied by his men including St Gregory, goes to the village of Erēz in the province of Ekeleac³³ to sacrifice to the

³¹ Ibid., §13: «կամ որպէս գրացեալ Աստուծոյ՝ այց արար Հայոց աշխարհիս, ի ձեռն առն միոջ եցոյց զսմանչելիս մեծամեծս, որ համբերութեամբ բազում եւ ազգի ազգի փորձութեանց եւ կապաւնաւոր վշտաց մենակուի մենամարտիկ երկպառական բռնութեան յԱրտաշատ քաղաքի վասն Քրիստոսի յաղթութեամբ տարեալ, որոյ զվկայ առուն ժառանգեալ, որ ի մահ հասեալ մտեալ, եւ կամօք Աստուծոյ այսրէն դարձեալ՝ ի վերակացութիւն դառնայր յերկիրս Հայոց: Սա մտեալ ի դրունս մահու՝ դարձեալ առտի կամօքն Աստուծոյ, վարդապետութեան Քրիստոսի պատգամաւոր գտեալ, յետ Աստուծոյ սմանչելագործ պատուհասին մարդասիրութեան: Իսկ բարեացապարտն Տրդատ յանկարծակամ՝ կենացն ասպնջանական ցանկալի ամենեցուն լինէր, որ աշխարհածնունդ հայրենեացն որդի գտանէր շնորհօքն Աստուծոյ, եւ յաւիտենական կենացն մերձաւոր լինէր»;

“How God had mercy and visited this land of the Armenians, and showed great miracles through one man, who endured many and various torments and afflictions in prison, as in his solitary struggle he triumphed for Christ over a double tyranny in the city of Artasat. He acquired the title of martyr; he came as far as death yet by God's will returned from there and was raised up again to life in this land of Armenia. He entered the gates of death but returned by the will of God; he became the messenger of Christ's teaching, after God's miraculous and merciful punishment. Then how the meritorious Trdat accepted unhopd for salvation and became dear to all, becoming by the grace of God the son of his reborn native land and heir to eternal life.”

³² Cf. Calzolari 2011b, p. 180.

³³ See *Chapter I*, 4.2, especially n. 94.

goddess Anahit, but St Gregory refuses to participate in it.³⁴ Trdat attempts to convince the holy man and in his address to him first describes the goddess as “the great lady Anahit,” who “is the glory of our nation and our saviour,” “the mother of all virtues, benefactor of all human nature, and the offspring of the great and noble Aramazd”;³⁵ then as “the great Anahit, through whom our land of Armenia lives and is provided with prosperity.”³⁶ These words ascribed to the king are revealing for our understanding of the goddess Anahit’s importance in the pagan Arsacid Armenian tradition, for there is no ambiguity in her description: Anahit is the life-giving protectress and saviour of the Armenian nation, who is revered for her virtues and benevolence. With these qualities she is elevated to the same rank as the almighty Aramazd and valiant Vahagn.³⁷

This Zoroastrian worldview is to be modified by means of the Christian religion. To achieve this Agat’angelos deploys the acts of St Gregory and the martyrdom of the Hrip’simian virgins as a proof of the superiority of the Christian god. Writing approximately a century and a half after the events and within a decade or so after the Battle of Avarayr, and observing the lingering Iranian mentality of members of the *naxarar* society, Agat’angelos would understand only too well that changing the conceptual framework of people was a painful and complicated process which could not be achieved by entirely ignoring the old moral values and prejudices. Thus, the ideological void that would emerge as a result of the demystification of

³⁴ *Aa* §§49–50, 52.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, §53: «մեծի Անահտայ տիկնոջն, որ է փառք ազգիս մերոյ եւ կեցուցիչ, ... որ է մայր ամենայն զգաստութեանց, բարերար ամենայն մարդկան բնութեան, եւ ծնունդ է մեծին արին Արամազդայ».

³⁶ *Ibid.*, §68: «գնեծն Անահիտ, որով կեայ եւ զկենդանութիւն կրէ երկիրս Հայոց».

³⁷ *Ibid.*, §127. See *Chapter I*, 4.2, and in particular nn. 88–89.

pagan idols³⁸ was to be filled by the Christian imagery. The femininity of Anahit called for the appropriation of a female character, and Agat'angelos allocates this role to Hrip'simē and her companions, who replace the “saviour” (*kec'uc'ič'*) Anahit, and themselves become intercessors between God and the Armenians.³⁹ Demystified Anahit is substituted by virtuous women who walked and shed their blood on the Armenian soil. Interestingly, a similar strategy of replacement is used, albeit less obviously, in the *Buzandaran Patmut'wnk'*, when the goddess Anahit's features are transferred onto St Thecla.⁴⁰

In his narrative, as Thomson underscores, Agat'angelos also introduces a very common patristic theme, namely a juxtaposition of Eve and the Virgin Mary,⁴¹ which is included in St Gregory's prayer uttered in between the tortures inflicted upon him

³⁸ For example, in §59 St Gregory says: «Այլ զոր դուդ կոչես մեծ Անահիտ տիկին՝ լեալ իցեն արդեօք մարդիկ ոք յայնժամ երբեմն ժամանակի: Քանզի դիցապաշտ կախարդութեամբ զմարդիկն որ յայն ժամն էին ցնորիւ կերպս ի կերպս լինելով դիւացն՝ հաւանեցուցին մեհեանս շինել եւ պատկերս կանգնել եւ երկիր պագանել: Որ ոչ իսկ են ոչ չար եւ ոչ բարի ումեք ինչ կարեն առնել ոչ պատուել կարեն զպաշտաւնեայս իւրեանց եւ ոչ անարգել զբռնամանայիրս իւրեանց զոր դուքն ցնորեալ պաշտէ յափուրիւն մտաց ձերոց: Եւ փոխանակ Աստուծոյ յորոյ ի բարիսդ վայելէ՛ պաշտէ՛ զփայտեղէնսդ եւ զգարեղէնսդ եւ զոսկեղէնսդ եւ զարծարեղէնսդ զոր Աստուծոյ կարգեալ է ի սպաս եւ ի պէտս եւ ի փառաւորութիւն մարդկան»;

“Now as for the one whom you call the great lady Anahit, there may well have been some such person at some time. For the demons, by impious magic and by assuming various deceiving forms, persuaded the men who lived at that time to build temples and set up images and worship them. But they do not really exist; they can do neither harm nor good to anyone; they can neither honour their worshippers nor dishonour those who insult them. You are deranged when you worship them in the folly of your minds. Instead of God, whose blessings you enjoy, you are worshipping objects of wood and stone and gold and silver, which God has established for the service and needs and glory of mankind.”

³⁹ *Aa* §572: «Արդ՝ քէպէտ յերեկ սպանէ՛ դուք զնոսա, այլ Աստուծոյն նոքա եւ այժմ կենդանի են, եւ յաւիտեան կենդանի են լինելոց: Արդ՝ նոցին բարեխօսութեամբ հանեցայք դուք ընդ Աստուծոյ, ըստ խրատու սոցին առաքելակցին ձերոց առաքելոցս՝ մեծին Պաւղոսի, որ ասէն, քէ «Մեօք հանեցարուք ընդ Աստուծոյ ի ձեռն մահու Որդոյ նորա»։ զի Որդին Աստուծոյ մեռաւ եւ եկեաց, սոյնպէս եւ վկայքն նորա սիրելիք կենդանի են եւ ձեզ բարեխօս»;

“Although yesterday you killed them [the nuns], yet they are God's and now are living and will live for ever. By their intercession you will be reconciled with God according to the instruction of the companion apostle to these apostles of yours, the great Paul, who said: ‘Through us be reconciled with God by the death of his Son.’ For the Son of God died and lived, and likewise his beloved martyrs are alive and intercede for you.”

⁴⁰ See Calzolari 1997, pp. 39–49.

⁴¹ Thomson 2010, p. 172.

by Trdat.⁴² Although Thomson directs our attention to 1 Cor. 15.21, which contains a similar juxtaposition of Adam and Christ,⁴³ Agat'angelos most likely paraphrases John Chrysostom's comment on *Psalms* 44: "A virgin expelled us from paradise; through a virgin we found eternal life."⁴⁴

In patristic literature the sin committed by Eve is often emphasised and presented as the main reason why women ought to be considered inferior to men and submit to their authority,⁴⁵ while the Virgin Mary is perceived as a personification of purity and virtue.⁴⁶ There is no elaboration on this opposition in the passage,⁴⁷ and it should be understood within the context of St Gregory's prayer as a common reference to biblical motifs.

In §141 Agat'angelos in an extended metaphor once again speaks of Eve and explicitly compares her with the Hrip'simian virgins, whose strong faith enables them to resist the forces of evil and not to fall into their trap, as did the first woman.⁴⁸ As

⁴² *Aa* §79: «Զի զոր օրինակ ի ձեռն կուսին առաջնոյ Եւայի մահ եմուտ յաշարի՝ սոյն օրինակ եւ ի ձեռն այսր կուսի կեանք մտցեն յաշարի: Զի զոր օրինակ ի ձեռն ծնընդեան Եւայի՝ Կահելի անէծք եւ բրտունք եւ աշխատութիւնք եւ երեքմունք եւ տատանմունք մտին յաշարի՝ սոյն օրինակ եւ ծնանելով Որդւոյ խոյ ի կուսէն հանգիստք եւ կեանք եւ օրհնութիւնք մտցեն յաշարի»; "For as through the first virgin, Eve, death entered the world, so through this virgin life will enter the world. As through Eve's giving birth, Cain's curse and sweat and toil and agitation and troubles entered the world; so through the birth of your Son from the virgin, rest and life and blessings will enter the world."

⁴³ 1 Cor. 15.21–22: "For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ."

⁴⁴ John Chrysostom, *PG* 54, p. 193: «Παρθένος ἡμᾶς ἐξέβαλε παραδείσου, διὰ παρθένου ζῶην εὐρομεν αἰωνίαν» (my translation).

⁴⁵ For details, see Clark 2009, pp. 168–169. A similar attitude can be found in Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* VI:3: "(Satan) made his incursion on Adam by means of Eve, and in his childishness Adam was beguiled." The Syriac Father then continues with examples from the Old Testament which support his argument and demonstrate how powerful and righteous men were destroyed through women's agency.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Proclus, *PG* 54, pp. 715–758.

⁴⁷ See above, n. 42 (*Aa* §79).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, §141: «Իսկ իբրեւ տեսին առաքինիքն զգաղտնաձիգ նետս թռնամուտն, որ ի ծածուկն սովոր էր ձգել ի սուրբոն բխտոսասէրսն, աման չարի գտեալ զբազաւորն. որպէս ի դրախտի անդ զօճն անդրուկար արարեալ, առ ի պատուիրանն մոռանալոյ, մտեալ յանգամ յունկն կնոջն առաջնոյ»; "But when the virtuous women saw the hidden arrows of the enemy, who is accustomed to shoot secretly at the saints who love

Calzolari mentions, “[l]’importance de la femme vierge [i.e. of Hrip‘simē] est ici de transcender la faiblesse de la première femme.”⁴⁹ The metaphor gets even more complicated in §174, when the virgins offer their prayer to the Lord, for they announce that they “have dedicated their virginity” to Christ.⁵⁰ This alludes to a common allegory found in patristic literature according to which Christ is referred to as the “Celibate Bridegroom”⁵¹ and the consecrated virgins as “Brides of Christ”.⁵² Cameron’s characterisation of these allegorical expressions as “a discourse that worked by metaphor and paradox, and that boldly exploited the very imagery it was ostensibly denying”⁵³ evinces the complexity of the debate over virginity and celibacy in the works of the Fathers, of which Agat‘angelos is well aware.⁵⁴

Before introducing the main female protagonists of his narrative, Agat‘angelos also mentions a widow who provides St Gregory with food when he is thrown into the *xor virap* (deep pit) as a punishment for refusing to worship Anahit.⁵⁵ It appears as

Christ, they found that the Emperor (had become) a vessel of evil. Just as in the garden he had used the snake as a vehicle for causing the forgetting of the commandment, entering into the senseless ear of the first woman...”

⁴⁹ Calzolari, “Le sang des femmes,” p. 187.

⁵⁰ Aa §174: «նմա [Գրիգորիոսին] նուիրեցա՛մ գկուսութիւնս մեր, զի նմա աւանդեցա՛մ զսրբութիւնս մեր, զի նմա մնամք եւ սիրոյ նորա ցանկացեալ սպասեմք, մինչեւ կացցուք առաջի փառաց գովութեան նորա առանց ամօթոյ եւ պատկառանաց»; “to him [Christ] we have dedicated our virginity, to him we have commended our purity, for him we wait, and his love we await with longing until we stand before his praiseworthy glory without shame or timidity.”

⁵¹ Clark 2008, p. 1.

⁵² Ibid., p. 13. This theme is elaborated by Agat‘angelos in the *Teaching* in §§439–441.

⁵³ Cameron 1991, p. 175.

⁵⁴ For a detailed discussion of the nuptial imagery in patristic literature, see Clark 2008, pp. 1–25, and Cameron 1991, pp. 155–188.

⁵⁵ Aa §124: «Եւ զայն ամս երեքտասան, որ եղև Գրիգորիոս ի բերդին բանդին եւ ի խոր վիրապին, կին ոմն այրի, որ էր ի բերդին յայնմիկ, հրաման առեալ յարեալարաց՝ զի աւուրն նկանակ մի արարեալ պատրաստական ընկենուլ ի ներքս ի խոր վիրապն. եւ այնու կերակրեալ լինէր նա ի հրամանէն Աստուծոյ զայն ամս որ եղև նա անդ»; “During those thirteen years that Gregory was in the dungeon of the fortress, in the deep pit, a certain widow who lived in that fortress received a command in a dream to prepare a loaf a day and to throw it into the deep pit. Thereby he was nourished by God’s command for the years he was there...”

another biblical motif⁵⁶ used by the author with no intention to stress the woman's identity, for the widow does not appear in the ensuing narrative. This is additionally supported by the fact that in *Vg* she is referred to even more vaguely: "a woman, one of the inhabitants of the city who lived a pious life."⁵⁷ The noteworthy fact is that Agat'angelos allocates the task of saving St Gregory to a woman who carries out God's command and provides the saint with a loaf of bread throughout the years of his imprisonment there. It is obvious that without this woman he would not survive and would not be able to accomplish his mission of evangelisation, but Agat'angelos does not focus on her figure, perhaps because her agency is only required at this episode of the narrative.

2.3 The Hrip'simian Virgins

As mentioned above,⁵⁸ the representation of Hrip'simē and her companions contains virtually all the elements of "la passion épique" with some compelling nuances. The descriptions of their agency and inner world, as well as of their interaction with other people indeed abound with religious imagery, symbols, and hagiographic topoi, but on some occasions Agat'angelos's ingenious approach presents events in a different light, which reveals additional substrata of his narrative. In the ensuing analysis I shall discuss Agat'angelos's approach to the representation of the Hrip'simian virgins and attempt to elucidate what role models the author strives to create, to what extent these role models are gender-related, and what implications his account of the martyrdom of the virgins might have for his audience within the given historical context.

⁵⁶ As noted by Thomson (2010, p. 206), this episode is "reminiscent of Elijah and the widow" (1 Kings 17.8–24).

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ See the discussion of the genre of Agat'angelos's work in the *Introduction*, 4.2.1.

The narrative of the acts of Hrip'simē and her companions commences in §137 with the introduction of a common topos of the epic passion featuring the emperor Diocletian who is looking for a wife that will “please his eye”.⁵⁹ The emperor's men arrive in Rome at a convent of nuns led by Gayianē, and enter it by force. They find Gayianē's protégée Hrip'simē, “who was descended from pious and royal lineage”,⁶⁰ and being “amazed and charmed at her wonderful appearance”, they make a painting and send it to Diocletian.⁶¹ When it is shown to the emperor, he goes “mad with licentious desire” and immediately orders to make arrangements for the wedding.⁶²

The details of the quest for a bride as well as subsequent description of Trdat falling in love with Hrip'simē are deployed by the author to reveal the perspective of impious pagan rulers who give primacy to woman's physical attractiveness over her spiritual qualities. It is additionally stressed in Diocletian's edict to Trdat, in which the emperor once again describes Hrip'simē as “a young and beautiful girl”⁶³ and suggests that Trdat keep her for himself should her beauty delight him.⁶⁴ In the

⁵⁹ *Aa* §137: «ակնհանոյ կամաց թագաւորին».

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, §138: «ի դստերաց ուրումն յաստուածապաշտ եւ ի թագակալ տոհմէ». Another reference to her royal background is found in §167: «Յիշեալ, որդեակ իմ [Հռիփսիմէ], զի թողեր լիքն գնեծապատիւ շէնդաւոյ մսկիսկուռ զարոնն բն հայրենի, զծիրանեաց թագաւորութեանն...»; “Remember, my child [Hrip'simē], that you have left and abandoned the honour and the splendour of the golden throne of your fathers and the royal purple.”

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, §139: «Եւ իբրեւ եկին հասին՝ բռնութեամբ մտեալ ի սուրբ կայեանս առաքինեացն, տեսեալ զպարկեւտագեղն Հռիփսիմէ, զարմացեալ սիրացեալ ընդ սքանչելատեսիկն տեսիլ՝ ի նկարապահոյն ի տախտակսն յօրինէին, եւ առ թագաւորն հասուցանէին»; “When they arrived, they entered by force into the holy dwelling of these virtuous women; and seeing the modest beauty of Rhipsime, they were amazed and charmed at her wonderful appearance. They painted her likeness on their tablets and brought it to the emperor.”

⁶² *Ibid.*, §140: «Եւ իբրեւ ետես թագաւորն զգեղապանծ վայելչութիւն պատկերակերպ նկարագրին Հռիփսիմեայ, մոլեգնական ցանկութեամբ տախտակ զեղիշեալ, զի անկարգ ցանկութիւն յիմարութեանն մոլութեան ստիպէր, ժամ տուեալ ուրախութեան հարսանեաց՝ նեղով տագնապաւ փութայր զուրախութիւնս հարսանեացն կատարել»; “Now when the emperor saw the graceful beauty of Rhipsime's portrait, he went mad with licentious desire. The unbridled passion of his raving folly urged him to set a time for the marriage, and he was anxious rapidly to celebrate the joyful wedding.”

⁶³ *Ibid.*, §155: «օրիորդ մի կոյս եւ գեղեցիկ».

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, §156: «Թէ հանոյ բուեսցի քեզ տեսիլ գեղոյ նորա».

subsequent narrative we are informed that the Armenian king “had not yet seen her, but planned to take her to wife because of what they had told him about her wonderful beauty”.⁶⁵ Furthermore, in §164 the nuns are explicitly under the scrutiny of the male gaze,⁶⁶ for the rumours of their beauty have attracted men of all social groups to come and stare at them. To this impudent heathen, and invariably male viewpoint Agat‘angelos opposes his authorial perspective which unequivocally stresses the spiritual superior qualities of Hrip‘simē and her companions, albeit preserving a reference to their attractive physical appearance. He describes them as “sober, modest, and pure women of the Christian faith”⁶⁷ possessing “modest beauty”,⁶⁸ and, in particular Hrip‘simē, as becoming renowned for her “chastity and wonderful beauty”.⁶⁹ Agat‘angelos’s ideal of a female subject appears to be modelled in accordance with the depiction of praiseworthy heroines of the Apocryphal or

⁶⁵ Ibid., §166: «Բանգի չեւ էր տեսեալ զնա՝ խորհեցաւ կին առնել զնա, վասն այնորիկ որ պատմեցինն զնմանէ վասն վայելչութեան գեղոյ նորա». It should be noted that the text also contains a reference to Trdat being married to Ašxēn (§765), and his wish to marry Hrip‘simē may pose two questions which, however, can be both answered positively: is this an indication that polygyny was still practised in Armenia, or is this some evidence that the text is a collection of various traditions? In §173 there is another reference to the idea of Hrip‘simē marrying Trdat, with an additional remark that she will be hailed as queen by the nobility: «նախարարքն եւ մեծամեծք աւագանւոյն, որ եկեալ էին շաղկիւր՝ պատիւ առնել նմա եւ երթալ ընդ նմա յարքունիս. զի տարցին զնա կնութեան թագաւորին Տրդատայ եւ Հայոց տիկնութեան»; “princes and nobles who had come to pay homage and honour her and escort her to court, in order to marry her to king Trdat and make her queen of Armenia.” For a full discussion of polygyny in early Christian Armenia, see *Chapter V*, 4.1.

⁶⁶ Aa §164: «Իսկ երանելիքն ... գերեսս իւրեանց պատեալ՝ անկեալ դնէին յերկիր, յամօրոյ լկտեացն տեսողաց, որ ժողովեալն էին ի տեսանել»; “But the blessed ones ... covering their faces ... fell to the ground in shame at the impudent sightseers who had gathered to stare.”

⁶⁷ Ibid., §138: «զգաստացեալս, պարկետականս, սրբամատոյց կանայս քրիստոսական հաւատոց».

⁶⁸ Ibid., §139: «զպարկետագեղն».

⁶⁹ Ibid., §162: «համբաւն հռչակեալ պարկետութեան զանգաւն գեղեցկութեանն Հռիփսիմեայ ի մէջ բազմամբոյս հրապարակացն լինէր»; “the report of the chastity and wonderful beauty of Rhipsimē became known to the public.”

Deuterocanonical literature.⁷⁰ It also coincides with the Zoroastrian idealised image of a woman, which is found in the description and perception of the goddess Anahit.⁷¹

The conflict between the nuns and the emperor is further elaborated in biblical terms and presented as a struggle between the Christianity of “the virtuous women” and *the* enemy whose “vessel of evil” the emperor has become.⁷² Diocletian is the personification of evil,⁷³ described as “lawless”,⁷⁴ “impure” and “impious”.⁷⁵ Because of his impurity,⁷⁶ the almighty emperor, who worships “images of futile corpses, vain gods of gold and silver, wood, stone and bronze”,⁷⁷ is doomed to concede defeat to the virgins, who have “illuminated their souls in angelic form by the virtue of their conduct”.⁷⁸ Not only is this a transgression of gender roles, when “fragile” women

⁷⁰ See *NRSV*, p. 1548.

⁷¹ See Trdat's invocation of the goddess in *Aa* §53 (see also above *Chapter I*, 4.2), as well as *Yasht* 5, where Anahit's spiritual and physical beauty is extolled: “She [Anahit] said no to the evil gods and took Ahura Mazdā as her guide ... Beautiful, indeed, were her arms, white and thicker than the thighs of a horse. Two beautiful armlets I clasped around her delicate arms” (Skjærvø 2011, pp. 59–60).

⁷² *Aa* §141: «Իսկ իբրեւ տեսին առաքինիքն զգաղտածից նետս թեմանայն, որ ի ծածուկն սովոր էր ձգել ի սուրբսն քրիստոսասէրսն, աման չարի գտեալ զթագաւորն»;
“But when the virtuous women saw the hidden arrows of the enemy, who is accustomed to shoot secretly at the saints who love Christ, they found that the emperor [had become] a vessel of evil.”

⁷³ Cf. Delehay 1921, p. 240.

⁷⁴ *Aa* §141: «անօրէն».

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, §143: «պիղծ եւ անօրէն». It is noteworthy that King Trdat, who persecutes Hrip'simē and her companions and eventually brings their death, does not receive such criticism. For him the anti-Zoroastrian metamorphosis is reserved, which is even more effective, as it strikes at the heart of the image of the King-Hero (see Garsoïan 1982, pp. 153–164).

⁷⁶ As Calzolari (2011, pp. 183–184) mentions, “l'association entre paganisme et impureté constitue un lieu commun de la littérature chrétienne; il convient néanmoins de remarquer que dans l'œuvre d'Agathange, dont le thème central est l'affirmation du christianisme sur le paganisme en Arménie au IV^e siècle, cette association assume une valeur apologétique et contribue à dénigrer l'ancienne religion pour montrer la supériorité de la nouvelle ... l'opposition entre pureté (chrétienne) et impureté (païenne) se trouve renforcée par l'idée que la défense extrême de la pureté, jusqu'à la mort, de la part des vierges est une défense de la foi chrétienne elle-même.”

⁷⁷ *Aa* §142: «պազանել երկիր ուրուականաց մեռելաւոց, ոսկեղէն եւ արծաթեղէն, փայտեղէն եւ քարեղէն պղնձագործ պատկերաց դիցն սնոսեաց».

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, §149: «զանձինս իւրեանց իրեւտական գուարբական կարգօք լուսաւորեալ վարուցն քաջութեամբք».

disobey a “strong” male subject,⁷⁹ but also it is a transgression of the social order, when an autocrat and his country’s state religion are humbled by an “erring sect”.⁸⁰

Under the leadership of Gayianē and accompanied by the divine presence, to whom they incessantly address their prayers, the nuns flee to Armenia.⁸¹ The Armenian text omits all the details of their long trip from Rome to Armenia⁸² and continues at the point when the virgins arrive in Vałaršapat, which happens to be the city of residence of the Armenian royal family. They take shelter in the vat-stores⁸³ just outside the city, until their hiding place is discovered.

At this stage, Agat’angelos comments that “the truth and virtue of martyrs”⁸⁴ should be revealed to the world. I believe that the association of the virgins with ‘truth’ is deliberate, for it must have had profound implications for his audience, both Christian and Zoroastrian. In patristic literature ἀληθεία was, *inter alia*, related to various manifestations of the divine will, and it could even refer to a “divine person”.⁸⁵ Similarly, in ancient Indo-Iranian tradition, as well as later in Zoroastrianism, Mitra/Mithra (Arm. ‘Mihr’) – a powerful deity in pre-Christian religion of Armenia – was considered to be the protector of an important moral

⁷⁹ For a discussion of gender stereotypes reflected in hagiographic texts, see Marjanen 2009, pp. 232–237.

⁸⁰ Aa §153: Diocletian’s characterisation of the Christians is «ի մուրա աղանդէս քրիստոնէից».

⁸¹ Ibid., §§143–149.

⁸² M. Thierry and Bernard Outtier (1990, pp. 695–733) have translated into French and have provided an interesting analysis of a text that elaborates on this trip, but as they note, it is obviously a ninth-tenth-century text. There is a brief reference to their trip in *Vg* (Thomson 2010, p. 223), which, however, does not contain any useful information about the female characters of the work.

⁸³ On the symbolic meaning of the ‘vat-stores’, see *Chapter III*, 2.2.

⁸⁴ Aa §159: «Այլ ոչ իսկ էր պարտ թագչել համարտութեանն եւ վկայիցն առաքինութեան, եւ ոչ լուսոյ հրազի ընդ գրուանաւ ծածկել, եւ ոչ ի ներքոյ ստուերաց կաթեղրացն աներեւոյր լինել. այլ ի վերայ աշտանակացն ոսկւոց զարդարելոց, եւ ոսկւով հրազարանոք զիւզն պարտութեան անուշութեան, զարդարութեան հաւատոցն՝ վառեալ զլոյսն համապայծառ»; “It was not right for the truth and virtue of the martyrs to remain hidden, nor for the light of [their] lamp to be hidden under a bushel of remain invisible under the shadow of a chair; but on the candlesticks ornamented with gold and with golden torches one should kindle the glorious light, the oil of sweet plenty of the righteous faith.”

⁸⁵ APGL, pp. 70–72.

principle *ṛta/aša* (*OP. arta*), which represented the “cosmic order,” “moral order or ‘truth’,” though, as Boyce mentions, it “cannot be precisely rendered by any single word in another tongue”.⁸⁶ Russell connects this term to Armenian *ardarut’iwn* (justice, righteousness),⁸⁷ and by examples demonstrates its significance as a concept for the Armenian people.⁸⁸ This shows that Agat’angelos, once again, wishes to elevate the virgins to an outstanding position in the eyes and minds of his audience.

As soon as Trdat’s plans to marry her are revealed, Hrip’simē utters a fervent prayer which continues even when she is taken to the royal palace by force and shut in a chamber. She beseeches God to deliver her from this ordeal and let her leave the world in purity.⁸⁹ Here, too, Agat’angelos follows the literary conventions of the genre. What is noteworthy about it is that he mentions several female characters from the Old Testament – Sarah (Arm. *Saṛa*), Rebecca (Arm. *Erep’ika*), Susanna (Arm. *Šušan*),⁹⁰ Jael (Arm. *Yayel*) and Deborah (Arm. *Debovra*),⁹¹ a strategy, as Clark has highlighted, used by the Church Fathers, too.⁹² It does not seem accidental that the author has chosen them among so many biblical female figures. For the Christian

⁸⁶ *HZ I*, p. 27.

⁸⁷ Russell 1987, p. 660.

⁸⁸ For instance, Russell highlights the fact that there are “a number of theophoric names with *arta-* in Armenian” which “suggests that Armenians were acquainted with Iranian *Aša*” (*ibid.*, p. 659).

⁸⁹ *Aa* §§169–172 and 178 –179.

⁹⁰ The story of her salvation with the help of Daniel (Dan. 13:1–64) was obviously well-known in Armenia through the translation of the Septuagint or Theodotion, and *Šušan* was a popular name amongst Armenians, although it might have been due to *sparapet* Vardan Mamikonean’s daughter *Šušanik*, the story of whose martyrdom was preserved in Georgian and Armenian sources (see, e.g., Muradyan 1996, p. 18).

⁹¹ In *Greek* *Vo* the name of Esther also appears, whereas in *Arabic* *Va* Deborah is replaced by Rebecca (Thomson 2010, p. 246).

⁹² Clark 1994, p. 172. See, for instance, Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* XIV:11, where Deborah, Jael, and Rebecca are mentioned; similarly, John Chrysostom refers to Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Deborah, and Anna (*In Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Hom. 13.4, PG 62, 99). Moreover, in Syriac homiletic and hymnographic literature (ca 4th–7th centuries) biblical women, including the Virgin Mary, were granted voice which they often lacked in the Bible: the words attributed to them were usually sung by women’s choir during the liturgy (Harvey 2001, pp. 108–109; see also Harvey 2005) and were “employed to demonstrate right teaching, intelligent reflection, autonomy, agency, and free will” (Harvey 2001, p. 124).

audience the mention of these women would evoke associations with the qualities they symbolise and the roles they play in the biblical stories. Thus, reference to Sarah alludes to her beauty which attracts the Pharaoh of Egypt⁹³ and Abimelech, King of Gerar,⁹⁴ but she is eventually saved by God's will "from the stain of shameful outrage and death";⁹⁵ Agat'angelos's mention of Rebecca refers to the same context in which Sarah appears – her beauty could have become an incentive for the Philistines to kill her husband Isaac;⁹⁶ Susanna represents "a very beautiful woman and one who feared the Lord";⁹⁷ Jael is a strong woman who destroys a tyrant;⁹⁸ Deborah is the only female judge of the Old Testament, a prophetess, whose prowess gains the Israelites victory over the Canaanites.⁹⁹ The features that these women have in common are their beauty, chastity, fear of God, determination, and strong will. In addition, they are all representatives of the higher social stratum, with whom women in the audience could easily identify.

The episode that follows is one of the most revealing ones in the *History*: it deviates from the conventions of the genre of the epic passion even though some of its elements are still present. It features a powerful pagan ruler renowned for his physical strength and brave deeds,¹⁰⁰ who is overpowered by a fragile Christian virgin in a full-contact physical confrontation.

⁹³ Gen. 12:10–20.

⁹⁴ Gen. 20.

⁹⁵ Aa §170: «յամօրոյ նախառնաց պղծութենէ մահու ապրեցուցեր զաղախին քո զՍառա». In addition, in the New Testament Sarah is presented as an example of a faithful wife (1 Pt. 3:6), but Agat'angelos does not refer to it.

⁹⁶ Gen. 26:6–11.

⁹⁷ Sus. 2. «գեղեցիկ յայժ' երկիւղած ի Տեառնէ», Dan. 13:2.

⁹⁸ Judg. 4:17–22.

⁹⁹ Judg. 4:1–24.

¹⁰⁰ It is repeated several times by Agat'angelos: see §§42–45, 123 and 202.

When the king entered, he seized her in order to work his lustful desires. But she, strengthened by the holy Spirit, struggled like a beast and fought like a man. They fought from the third hour until the tenth, and she vanquished the king who was renowned for his incredible strength. [...] So he, who was so famous in every respect, now was vanquished and worsted by a single girl through the will and power of Christ.¹⁰¹

This is an allegorical representation of the fight between Hrip'simē's Christianity and the paganism of Trdat. Trdat is symbolically castrated, stripped off his masculinity, deprived of indispensable attributes of a pagan monarch – great valour, divinely bestowed strength,¹⁰² and royal diadem. His ignominious defeat humbles and fills him with deep shame: “she struck him, beat him off, and overcame him; she wore the king out, weakened him and felled him. She stripped the king naked of his clothes; she tore his robes and threw away his royal diadem, leaving him covered with shame.”¹⁰³ Hrip'simē's victory should be perceived as a transgression of gender norms, which, however, is achieved through a divine (masculine) intervention and empowerment repeatedly stressed by Agat'angelos.¹⁰⁴ Her agency becomes a tool for the author to demonstrate that everything associated with paganism is doomed to be destroyed by the only true God.

While in the earlier account Agat'angelos focuses on the spiritual supremacy of Christian believers, this episode foregrounds the bodily strength that springs from faith. The descriptive adjectives are substituted by verbs of action and the use of asyndeton in §191 creates a more vivid image of violent confrontation. The royal

¹⁰¹ *Aa* §181: «Արդ՝ մտեալ քագաւորն՝ բռնոյն հարկանէր զնմանէն, կատարել զկամս ցանկութեանն: Իսկ նա զօրացեալ լինէր ի Հոգւոյն սրբոյ. զազանաբար ոգորեալ, առնաբար մարտնչէր. իբրեւ յերեւ ժամուց սկսեալ մարտնչել մինչեւ ի տասն ժամն՝ պարտեալ լինէր զքագաւորն իսկ զայն, որ անհնարին համարեալ ուժով. ... եւ որ այնպէս հռչակեալ էր ամենայնիւ՝ արդ յաղջկանէ միռջէ պարտեալ վատթարանայր կամօք եւ զօրութեամբն Քրիստոսի».

¹⁰² For the discussion of these qualities in the Iranian cultural milieu, see Garsoïan 1982, pp. 156–159, as well as below *Chapter VI*, 2.

¹⁰³ *Aa* §191: «Կարեալ վանեալ պարտեալ, վաստակաբէկ առնելով զքագաւորն՝ մեղկեալ ընկենոյր: Մերկ կողոպուտ եւս ի հանդերձից զքագաւորն կացուցանէր, եւ զպատմութեանն պատառեալ եւ զնշան քագին ցրուեալ կողոպտեալ՝ ամօթալից բոլոյր».

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, §§181, 191 and 202.

chamber transforms into a ring¹⁰⁵ for Hrip'simē, where she fights “like a man” to preserve her purity. This simile is based on the assumption that strength is a male prerogative, but a woman empowered by the Holy Spirit can be even stronger.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the unity of spiritual and physical power, which characterises a true Christian, is extolled in this episode. In the fight against *anawrēn* religion, gender distinctions are blurred and a new kind of identity – a Christian identity acquired through baptism – comes forward.¹⁰⁷ Interestingly, this representation is again on a par with the Zoroastrian understanding of gender unity in the fight against the evil spirits.¹⁰⁸

Hrip'simē is the winner of this battle, for she emerges victoriously from Trdat's chamber and rushes to her friends. What follows is typical of the conventions of the genre: she is caught, stripped off her clothes and brutally tortured to death. Many friends and supporters of Hrip'simē, men and women, follow her in her martyrdom,¹⁰⁹ and among them is the abbess Gayianē, about whom several words should be said. She is the only nun besides Hrip'simē, whose name is preserved in the *History* and to whom voice is granted by Agat'angelos. She is a motherly figure who accompanies Hrip'simē and encourages her to remain truthful to her faith and to endure all the pain in God's name, and she eventually dies as a martyr after being subjected to torture.¹¹⁰ Similar figures are also found in other hagiographic traditions,

¹⁰⁵ It is a common topos in martyrdom literature to present female martyrs as athletes, gladiators, or warriors fighting in the arena. See, e.g., Marjanen 2009, pp. 238–242, and Giulea 2006, p. 163.

¹⁰⁶ For the “masculinisation” of virtuous Christian women as a common literary topos, see Marjanen 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Gal. 3:28: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”; «ն'չ Հրէի, և ն'չ հեթանոսի. ն'չ ծառայի, և ն'չ ազատի. ն'չ արուի, և ն'չ իգի. զի ամենեկեան դուք մի էք ի Քրիստոս Յիսուս».

¹⁰⁸ See our discussion in *Chapter I*, 4.1.

¹⁰⁹ Aa §§199–201 and 207.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., §§138, 143, 149, 167, 175, 182–183, 185–190, and 204–210.

but Gayianē cannot be identified with any known prototype.¹¹¹ Her role in the narrative is different from that of other nuns, for she is named and thus offers the author an opportunity to introduce an ‘authentic’ dialogue between Gayianē and Hrip‘simē. I am inclined to believe that, as in the case of Hrip‘simē, her name was preserved in oral tradition and was familiar to Agat‘angelos’s audience.¹¹²

Through the subsequent acts, the sermons and the *Teaching* of St Gregory Agat‘angelos, amongst other things, attempts to provide a symbolic interpretation of the virgins’ martyrdom and to explain their role in the conversion of the country. As noted by Calzolari, after death the virginal bodies of Hrip‘simē and her companions are perceived as “réceptacle privilégié du divin,” for they remain incorruptible after nine days of abandonment in the wild,¹¹³ which can be nothing else but “une manifestation ultérieure du contact avec le divin dont elles bénéficient”.¹¹⁴ The virgins are praised for the firmness of their faith and character,¹¹⁵ which they evince when God dispatches “his beloved martyrs” on this mission to Armenia.¹¹⁶ Thus, they become the source of new life and intercessors between God and the Armenians.¹¹⁷

These characterisations of the virgins and their fundamental role in Armenia’s Christianisation are several times repeated in the *Teaching*. The martyred nuns are

¹¹¹ Such a motherly figure is, for instance, the deaconess Bryene in the Syriac story of martyrdom of St Febronia (Brock and Ashbrook Harvey 2008, §§512–650). Albeit under different circumstances, like Gayianē, Bryene urges the nuns of her convent to “stand up and resist” the enemy and “die for the sake of him who died for us in order that we may live with him” (§539). Bryene also advises her protégée, Febronia, to accept death rather than to succumb (§569), and like Hrip‘simē, Febronia chooses to “manifest a man’s valiant conviction” (§570) and die. The similarities end here, for Bryene was not martyred but “lived for a further two years after the dedication of the blessed woman’s [Febronia’s] shrine. Having arranged everything, she then fell asleep in peace” (§649).

¹¹² Cf. Pogossian 2003, pp. 360–361.

¹¹³ *Aa* §223.

¹¹⁴ Calzolari 2011b, p. 184.

¹¹⁵ *Aa* §230.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, §237: «գիւր վկայսն սիրելիս».

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, §§237 and 241.

alluded to as “Christian cups,”¹¹⁸ and should the Armenians drink from them, they will “burn away” their sins, their souls will be filled with the joy of purification,¹¹⁹ and they will “become witnesses of the truth of these preachers”.¹²⁰ The virgins are praised for the renunciation of worldly pleasures,¹²¹ and their bodies and bones become “temples of God”¹²² and “dwelling places of his majesty”.¹²³ Only “by intercession of their prayers” can the Armenian people approach God.¹²⁴ St Gregory calls them “these apostles of yours”,¹²⁵ which, as Calzolari writes, implies that “les vierges romaines étaient bien chargées d’une mission, dont le champ a été choisi par Dieu lui-même”.¹²⁶ This elevates Hrip’simē and her companions to an eminent position and allows them to assume authority as luminaries of the Church.

The overall representation of the Hrip’simian virgins is summarised by St Gregory in his final exhortation. In his address to the Armenian people he declares that the martyred virgins are to become “a strong fortress and mighty tower”, as well as “protectors by intercession”, because “[t]hey were valiant in the shedding of blood, so that by their martyrdom they might bring you to God. They brought you profit and showed the victorious power of their heroic struggle”.¹²⁷ The choice of words by the

¹¹⁸ By “Christian cups” St Gregory refers to the “cup of life” («բաժակն կենդանութեան»), which he mentions in the previous paragraph (ibid., §540).

¹¹⁹ Ibid., §541: «Ահա երեսուն եւ եօթն բաժակք քրիստոսեանք որ եկին պաշտել զձեզ. ... Արդ՝ եթէ կամենալիք սիրով ըմպել զբաժակն երանութեան, որ յակամայն ի մէջ ձեր բոլորեաց՝ այրեացէ զմեղս ձեր եւ զտեցէ եւ ընտրեացէ զանձինս ձեր յուրախութիւն»;

“Behold the thirty-seven Christian cups who came to serve you. ... So if you desire with love to drink the cup of blessedness, which has sprung forth among you unexpectedly, it will burn away your sins and clean and purify your souls for joy.”

¹²⁰ Ibid., §544: «Լերուք վկայք համարութեանն քարոզաց».

¹²¹ Ibid., §§563 and 599.

¹²² Ibid., §564: «Իսկ մարմինք նոցա եւ ոսկերք նոցա Աստուծոյ տաճարք են ի միջի ձերում».

¹²³ Ibid., §598: «օրեւանք մեծութեան նորա».

¹²⁴ Ibid., §564: «զի ոչ այլ իւրի կարիցէք դուք զԱստուծոյ ընդ ձեզ հաշտեցուցանել եւ մերձեանալ առ Աստուծո՝ եթէ ոչ բարեխօսութեամբ աղօթից նոցա».

¹²⁵ Ibid., §572: «ձերոց առաքելաց».

¹²⁶ Calzolari 2011b, p. 188.

¹²⁷ Aa §720: «Եւ վկայս այս լինիցին ձեզ ոգորմութեամբ նորա բերդ ամուր եւ աշտարակ հզօր ամրութեան եւ վերակացուք բարեխօսութեամբ, հեղմամբ արեանն քաջացեալք, նահատակութեամբն իւրեանց զձեզ առեալ առ

author in this part is noteworthy. Agat'angelos uses the word *k'ajac'ealk'* with the root *k'aj*, which was considered to be an adjective that characterised male rulers and warriors of great valour, although occasionally it was also applied to describe champions of Christ.¹²⁸ Furthermore, the words and expressions such as “fortress”, “tower”, “protector”, “valiant in the shedding of blood” and “victorious power of their heroic struggle” create a vivid image of warfare, which, given the historical context, could be an allusion to the Armenian uprising against the religious oppression of the Persians, the memory of which must still have been fresh in the minds of the audience within a decade after the events. The virgins fought valiantly and died while protecting their faith against the heathens, as the Armenians led by the *sparapet* Vardan Mamikonean did on the plain of Avarayr.

The burial of Hrip'simē and her companions followed by the construction of chapels on their tombs symbolise the establishment of the Armenian Church.¹²⁹ Thus, as Calzolari notes, the bodies of the holy virgins literally become the temple of God and “la seule garantie” for the Armenians to approach God.¹³⁰ This is the place, to use Peter Brown's words, “where the contrasted poles of Heaven and Earth met”,¹³¹ and they met because holy *women* were laid to rest here.

2.4 The Teaching

This section examines other references to female characters that feature in the *Teaching*, which constitutes a large part of Agat'angelos's *History*. As mentioned earlier, it is written in the genre of catechetical instruction, and its narration is

Աստուած մատուցանիցեն, որ շահեալի գծեզ՝ զիւրեանց նահատակութեանն մարտին ցուցին ձեզ զյաղթոյ զօրութիւնն».

¹²⁸ See *EH*, pp. 534–535, and below *Chapter VI*, 2.2.

¹²⁹ *Aa* §§757–771.

¹³⁰ Calzolari 2011b, pp. 184–185.

¹³¹ Brown 1981, p. 3.

conspicuously male-centred. St Gregory presents and interprets the most important concepts of the Christian faith by referring to prominent male figures of the Old and New Testaments. Amongst female figures only the Virgin Mary is mentioned several times, whereas others are only invoked as examples of righteousness (Tabitha,¹³² Miriam¹³³), or unrighteousness (Sapphira¹³⁴).

There is no direct reference to female inferiority in this influential piece and one of the utterances even puts women on the same scale with men. While presenting the birth of mankind,¹³⁵ Adam appears not only as the first human being, but he also shares the responsibility for the fall with Eve,¹³⁶ for he “had freedom and free will and wisdom from God”.¹³⁷ Eve is not mentioned by name and her being created after Adam from his rib is stressed: “This bone now is from my bone, and this flesh from my flesh; she will be called woman, because she was taken from her husband.”¹³⁸ In §347 and §350, nevertheless, again only Adam is recalled in relation to the first sin, and there is no reference to Eve’s being seduced first.¹³⁹ It contradicts Agat‘angelos’s words in §141, where the “enemy” enters “into the senseless ear of the first woman,” and, as mentioned earlier, it challenges the common discourse of the patristic literature which justifies the inferior position of women in society by their role in the

¹³² *Aa* §509.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, §545.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, §509.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, §§263–274.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, §§279–281. Cf. *Elīšē*, pp. 85–86 [31–32], in which the fall is ascribed to the “man” or “person” (անձն) in general and no gender distinction is made.

¹³⁷ *Aa* §279: «ուրէր ազատութիւն Ադամ եւ անձնիւթան կամս եւ իմաստութիւն յԱստուծոյ». On Adam’s free will in fifth-century texts, see Stone 2013, pp. 19–21. Eznik (Book I, XV:57–66), too, stresses the importance of free will and refuses to accept that evil is in the nature of human beings.

¹³⁸ *Aa* §275: «Այս այժմ ոսկր յոսկերաց իմոց եւ մարմին ի մարմնոյ իմմէ. սա կոչեացի կին, զի յառնէ իւրմէ տուու».

¹³⁹ A similar approach is adopted by Paul in Rom. 5:12–14: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned – sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.”

fall. Interestingly, a similar shift of focus from Eve's being seduced first to Adam's defiance of the Lord's commandment, is found in Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*,¹⁴⁰ the content of which must have been known to Agat'angelos.¹⁴¹

In his *History* Elišē, too, avoids highlighting Eve's being seduced first: he writes that the fallen angel "proffered an unrealizable hope to the untested, inexperienced, and newly created man, as to a child, turning his mind upwards so that by eating of the fruit of the tree ... he might become god."¹⁴²

The Virgin Mary appears on several occasions in §§364–395. As in the works of the Greek Fathers,¹⁴³ the emphasis is on her virginal state and the virginal conception, which overcame the original sin of humankind and gave human flesh to Jesus Christ. She became the recipient of divine grace and "conceived by the Holy Spirit the son of God in her chaste and pure womb in a manner that passes comprehension."¹⁴⁴ The Holy Virgin then passed this grace onto all women and opened the gates of salvation in front of them, for, as Agat'angelos informs his audience, "women also were blessed on account of the virgin birth which was from

¹⁴⁰ Aphrahat, IX:14: "The earthly nature of Adam was from the earth. His Lord set for him the commandment to keep, so that when he should keep that which was commanded, his Lord would bring him to an elevated nature. But because he wished to take for himself an elevated status, which was not from his nature, the Lord turned him to the former nature of humiliation"; XIV:37: "But the transgression of the law is found with Adam. From the first day and also until eternity he is transgressing law." See also, Jarkins 2008, pp. 35–43.

¹⁴¹ For the Syriac influence on the *Teaching*, see Thomson 2001, p. 49.

¹⁴² *Elišē*, p. 89 [37]: «Ունն ի հրեւոտկաց յանմտիցն գնդէն ստամբակեալ եւ ի բաց գնացեալ յերկնից, եւ ի մեր աշխարհս եկալ՝ պատիր բանիւք եւ սուտ խոստմամբ զանլինելի յոյսն առաջի դնէր՝ իբրեւ տղայ մանկան՝ անփորձ եւ անկիրք նորաբեք մարդոյն, ի վեր հայեցուցանելով զմիտս նորա, ուտելով ի պտղոյ ծառոյն, ... զի լիցի աստուած».

¹⁴³ Cf. Agat'angelos 2001, pp. 41–49.

¹⁴⁴ *Aa* §392: «Եւ յղացեալ այնուհետեւ ի Հոգւոյն սրբոյ շնորհագիտ կուսին յանարանց յանապական արգանդին գորդին Աստուծոյ՝ անհասական պայմանաւ». A parallel passage is found in John Chrysostom (*PG* 57, p. 42): «Καὶ πῶς τὸ Πνεῦμα εἰργάσατο τοῦτο ἐκ παρθένου; Εἰ γὰρ τῆς φύσεως ἐργαζομένης ἀδύνατον ἐρμηνεύσαι τῆς διαπλάσεως τὸν τρόπον, πῶς τοῦ Πνεύματος θαυματοουργοῦντος δυνήσομεθα ταῦτα εἰπεῖν»; "But how was it that the Spirit wrought this of a virgin? For if, when nature is at work, it is impossible to explain the manner of the formation; how, when the Spirit is working miracles, shall we be able to express these?" (John Chrysostom 1994, p. 22).

among them”.¹⁴⁵ In contrast to the Hrip‘simian virgins, she is presented not as an active agent of these processes, but as an idealised, speechless,¹⁴⁶ divine instrument for the successful accomplishment of the prophecy about the advent of God’s son.

2.5 Xosroviduxt and Ašxēn

Along with the holy virgins who came to Armenia from a foreign land, Agat‘angelos presents and extols local women with whom the members of his audience could clearly identify. Not a secondary role in this is played by the fact that, like Hrip‘simē, these women are of royal lineage: Ašxēn is king Trdat’s wife, and Xosroviduxt is his sister. For the noble women in the audience these characters were more appropriate role models than the Hrip‘simian virgins, for they are presented as earthly Armenian women not bound to Christ by the oath of virginity. The zeal by which Agat‘angelos describes their participation in the events that transformed the country and its people betrays his intention to provide a more tangible point of reference for emulation.

Xosroviduxt is the second female character after Hrip‘simē with whom God communicates. She receives the divine message in her dream and urges people to go to Artasat and fetch St Gregory, for he is the only person who can cure king Trdat and his court from divinely inflicted insanity and sufferings.¹⁴⁷ Not many things can be inferred about the king’s sister from Agat‘angelos’s narrative besides the fact that the author wishes to highlight her presence by the side of her brother and her participation in various acts of piety. In the *Aa* Xosroviduxt is merely presented as “the king’s

¹⁴⁵ *Aa* §684: «Էւ կանայք օրհնեցան վասն կուսանին ծննդեանն որ ի նոցանէն». Cf. Aphrahat VI:6: “Henceforth, at the advent of the Child of the blessed Mary, the thorns are uprooted, the sweat is removed, the fig-tree is cursed, the dust is made into salt, the curse has been affixed to the cross, the sharp sword (blade) has been removed from before the tree of life, (and the Tree) has been given as food to the faithful.”

¹⁴⁶ Cf. above n. 92.

¹⁴⁷ *Aa* §§213–214.

sister”,¹⁴⁸ whereas in the *Vg* we are additionally informed that she “lived a pious life”,¹⁴⁹ but the latter could be a retrospective appraisal of the princess. We further observe her determination to convince people that St Gregory is still alive, even though they first laugh at her suggestion.¹⁵⁰

After this episode Ašxēn and Xosroviduxt appear side by side in the rest of the narrative. They are among the representatives of the noble families who accompany Trdat and St Gregory in their mission of the country’s illumination, and obediently carry out the saint’s commands. Thus, along with other noble women they bring expensive clothes and jewellery in order to decorate the bodies of the martyred virgins before their burial.¹⁵¹ Afterwards, with the king, they prepare the resting-places for the martyred saints by digging their graves and removing the earth.¹⁵² In a short passage (§766) Agat‘angelos mentions Ašxēn and Xosroviduxt’s names two times, thus emphasising their participation in the communal repentance act by which homage was paid to Hrip‘simē and her companions.

In general, all the references to the queen and the princess reveal Agat‘angelos’s genuine willingness to underscore the importance of these royal women in the Christianisation of the country, and present them as commendable female figures who should serve as role models for Armenian women.

2.6 The Dissemination of Agat‘angelos’s *History*

Agat‘angelos’s oeuvre was very popular in the Middle Ages and influenced the mentality and self-definition of the Armenians. It is circulated in later literary sources

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., §214: «fēn pūqūnūpēn».

¹⁴⁹ Thomson 2010, p. 278.

¹⁵⁰ *Aa* §§215–216.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., §761.

¹⁵² Ibid., §§765–766.

by numerous references to the main protagonists of the *History*, as well as by their visual representation in the form of carvings on churches and burial monuments. This section will briefly discuss some of the available material that shows the importance attached to Agat'angelos's conversion narrative.

One of the first extant literary pieces dedicated to the Hrip'simian Virgins was composed by the Armenian Catholicos Komitas I Ałc'ec'i's (6th–7th centuries). It is a long *šarakan* (hymn) “Anjink' Nuirealk'” (Devoted Souls)¹⁵³ that beautifully describes and extols the sacrifice of Hrip'simē and her companions, thanks to whom Christianity triumphed over the beliefs of the pagans.

A series of lyrical pieces by St Nersēs Šnorhali's (12th century) dedicated to Agat'angelos's conversion narrative are also worth mentioning. For instance, in *Tal i Surbn Hrip'simē, i Nersisē Hayoc' Kat'olikosē Asac'eal* (Ode to Saint Hrip'simē composed by the Armenian Catholicos Nersēs) Šnorhali presents Hrip'simē as Christ's bride and praises her moral virtues that make her so special.¹⁵⁴ The story of the martyrdom of Hrip'simē and her companions, and their significant role in Armenia's conversion are beautifully related in verse in *Tal Srboc' Hrip'simeac'* (Ode to Saint Hrip'simē and Her Companions).¹⁵⁵

The visual representations of the conversion narrative were also influential, for they were in public spaces, and everyone, regardless of their social class and education, could have access to it. One such example is the Ojun (Awjun) funerary monument in the province of Lori, in northern Armenia. It is situated at a distance of about 10 metres from the church of the Holy Mother of God (5th–7th centuries) and

¹⁵³ For the full text, see *Šarakan Hogewor Ergoc'* 1853, p. 487–501. See also Hacıkyan 2002, pp. 46–47 and 905–907.

¹⁵⁴ K'yoškeryan 1987, pp. 269–270.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 274–279. For further examples, see *ibid.*, pp. 280–287.

consists of two approximately four-metre-high obelisks facing east and west, which are enclosed within three arched columns. Both obelisks used to be fully covered by carvings of Christian content, but not all of them have reached us in full. One of the carvings of the southern obelisk on its eastern face depicts a woman standing next to a man: in the man's right hand there is a tall cross-stick and the woman is holding it with two hands; there is a halo only on the man's head. These two figures are believed to be Xosroviduxt and St Gregory, for the segment on which their images are found begins a series of carvings that depict scenes from Agat'angelos: immediately below Xosroviduxt and St Gregory is Trdat with the boar's head, followed by a segment that is reminiscent of one of the martyria built by St Gregory in places where the virgins found their death; this is followed by three segments that most probably depict the holy virgins.¹⁵⁶ On the second obelisk, in a similar arrangement as in the first one, we find three segments with figures of secular couples in the position of prayer: they are believed to be the images of the members of a noble family who erected this monument.¹⁵⁷

Besides the Ojun memorial there is a large number of other monuments and fragments of masonry that bear witness to the dissemination of the tradition of Christianisation preserved by Agat'angelos. Scenes from his narrative, especially those referring to King Trdat's metamorphosis, are found, for instance, on a fragment of a pedestal from K'asał (Aparan), on a stele from Karmrak'ar (former Darband),¹⁵⁸ as well as on a burial memorial and several fragments of monuments from T'alín.¹⁵⁹ The *terminus ante quem* for these carvings is believed to be the 10th century and some

¹⁵⁶ Azarian 1965, p. 214.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 214–215.

¹⁵⁸ Arak'elian 1949, pp. 43–44.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 51–54.

of them could even be contemporary with Agat'angelos's *History*.¹⁶⁰ The popularity of this tradition is also well attested in medieval Armenian literature.¹⁶¹ This evidence corroborates the assumption that Agat'angelos's narrative was very popular amongst the Armenians and occupied a prominent role in public discourse.

2.7 Summary

Agat'angelos's complicated and multi-layered account of the Christianisation of Armenia features women of noble origin who are presented as active and indispensable agents of this socio-political and cultural change. Although an attempt is made to extol the Church as the most important institution in the country, and to emphasise the primacy of the patriarchal see of St Gregory in Vałaršapat, it could barely escape readers' notice that women actually lay the foundations for the Armenian Church. That St Gregory emerges safe and sound out of the pit after thirteen years of oblivion and illuminates the land of Armenia becomes possible only thanks to the martyrdom of the virgins and to the divinely sent vision of the princess Xosroviduxt. Hrip'simē and her companions become the intercessors between God and the Armenians, and clear the path to their salvation. Finally, women are directly engaged in the transmission of the new religion.

In his interpretation of Armenia's Christianisation, Agat'angelos creates two types of female role models – virgins who renounce earthly pleasures and dedicate themselves to godly service, and secular women who support the transmission of the new faith. As we shall see in the next chapter, Armenian sources have preserved little

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Arak'elian 1949, pp. 32–36.

¹⁶¹ For the tradition of textual transmission of Agat'angelos's work in the Middle Ages, see Thomson 2010, pp. 24–87.

information about female monastic establishments in the country after the second half of the fifth century, whereas the names of many noble women have reached us owing to their contribution to spreading and sustaining Christianity. Such disproportionate attestations should be attributed to the lingering pre-Christian mentality of people for whom the notion of sexual renunciation was alien.

3. *The Martyrdom of St Thaddeus and Sanduxt*

3.1 The Text

The Martyrdom of St Thaddeus and Sanduxt reflects the Syriac strand of Armenian Christianity, and it is one of the narratives that aimed at forging a connection between the establishment of the Armenian Church and the apostolic tradition.¹⁶² This is why it is not surprising that the central figure of the narrative is the Apostle Thaddeus; he is the one who was authorised by Jesus Christ to come to Armenia and “to preach the word of life”.¹⁶³ Very early in the storyline the apostle, however, acquires a faithful female companion, King Sanatruk’s daughter Sanduxt. Even though she will repeatedly reinforce the primacy of the apostle,¹⁶⁴ Sanduxt is also to play an essential role in the narrative.

¹⁶² For a recent study on the topic with extensive bibliography, see Calzolari 2011a.

¹⁶³ *The Martyrdom of St Thaddeus and Sanduxt*, p. 11: «զի նա էր քարոզ բանին կենաց ... զի առաքեցաւ յամենախրիստէն մերմէ Յիսուսէ Քրիստոսէ».

¹⁶⁴ See, e.g., *ibid.*, p. 14: «Եւ [Սանդուխտ] հասեալ ի գիշերի առ սուրբ առաքեալն լսէր ի նմանէ զբանն քարոզութեան աւետարանին, եւ զձայն երկնաւոր զօրացն, եւ ընդունէր, եւ անկանէր առաջի սուրբ ոտից նորա, եւ արտասուօք համբուրէր, եւ ուսանէր ի նմանէ զբազում աւուրս»; ‘and upon reaching the holy apostle by night, she [Sanduxt] heard from him the word of the gospel and the voice of the heavenly hosts, and she accepted [it], and she prostrated at his holy feet, and with tears kissed [them], and for many days she had been taught by him’; *ibid.*, p. 27: «Եւ տեսեալ զսուրբ առաքեալն զի աղօթէր եւ լոյս մեծ ի վերայ նորա, զահի հարեալ սուրբն Սանդուխտ՝ անկանէր ի վերայ երեսաց իւրոց արտասուօք եւ համբուրէր զգարեալարս առնն Աստուծոյ եւ ասէր. Տեր իմ եւ հայր, որ գտեր զիս զմուրեալս, եւ ծանուցեր ինձ զերկնաւոր գտերն իմ զՅիսուս Քրիստոս զմիաձին որդին...»; ‘And seeing the holy apostle in prayer with a bright light over him, awestruck Sanduxt fell on her face, and with tears kissed the soles of

3.2 Sanduxt

Sanduxt's representation is consistent with the classical pattern of the apocryphal acts, according to which the female protagonist is always of noble origin; she is to embrace Christianity and to live a chaste life, but it will eventually enrage the pagan ruler, who will put her and the apostle to death.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, as the beloved daughter of the Armenian King Sanatruk,¹⁶⁶ the princess is converted to Christianity by the Apostle Thaddeus, and both of them are subsequently martyred by the king. Thus, Sanduxt's royal status raises the prestige and symbolical significance of her martyrdom in the eyes of the audience, and makes her an attractive role model for Armenian women.

At the beginning of the narrative Sanduxt is introduced as being “of young age, with a beautiful mien and pretty countenance, the like of whom was not to be found upon the earth”.¹⁶⁷ With the exception of Hrip'simē, none of the women who might have served as a prototype for Sanduxt's character are described in these terms.¹⁶⁸ For this reason it seems plausible to assume that in the Armenian mentality female physical beauty was an important category, which was deployed by the author for propagandistic reasons in an attempt to appeal to a wider audience.

the feet of the man of God, and said, “My Lord and my father, who found me when I was lost and introduced me to my heavenly Lord Jesus Christ, [God's] only son...”.

¹⁶⁵ Calzolari 2011a, p. 171.

¹⁶⁶ *The Martyrdom of St Thaddeus and Sanduxt*, p. 14: «դուստր թագաւորին, որուն անուն էր Սանդուխտ»; ‘the daughter of the king, whose name was Sanduxt’; *ibid.*, p. 25: «խորհուրդ արարեալ թագաւորին վասն դստերն իւրոյ Սանդիստոյ, թէ զի՞նչ պարտ է առնել. վասն սպանման ոչ կարէր տալ հրաման, վասն աղէտի գրոյ հայրութեանն, զի առաւել սիրէր»; “he contemplated about what he was to do with his daughter Sanduxt. He could not order her killing because of his fatherly affection, for he loved her most of all.”

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14: «ի տիւղ տղայ, գեղեցիկ տեսեամբ եւ վայելուչ երեսօք, որ ոչ գտանէր համեմատ նմա ի վերայ երկրի».

¹⁶⁸ Here I refer to the possible prototypes mentioned by Calzolari (2011a, p. 171), namely Thecla in *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Maximilla in *The Acts of St Andrew*, Mygdonia and Tertia in *The Acts of Thomas*, and Ogohi in the Armenian *Martyrdom of Bartholomew*.

As the narrative unfolds, Sanduxt's identity undergoes a remarkable transformation from a young, beautiful maiden into a potent symbol of Armenian Christianity. After she is baptised by the apostle and receives "a sign of heavenly light", Sanduxt is referred to as "a holy virgin".¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, in the subsequent narrative she is interchangeably presented as "saint Sanduxt",¹⁷⁰ and the Lord's (holy) "handmaiden".¹⁷¹ Finally, when she is martyred, and laid to rest by St Thaddeus, the narrator calls her "the blessed holy lady" (*eraneli surb tikin*).¹⁷² The latter characterisation is especially remarkable, for the phrase "holy lady" is also used for St Thecla in the *Epic Histories*,¹⁷³ and, as discussed earlier,¹⁷⁴ *tikin* (lady) was an honorific title of the goddess Anahit, also applied to high-ranking noblewomen, including the queen, in pre- and early-Christian Armenia. Thus, by the end of the narrative, through her acts and manifestation of fervent belief, Sanduxt assumes a new identity, that of a "holy lady", and once again we observe an attempt of a Christian author to replace a Zoroastrian symbol by a Christian one.

Evidently, in order to create an attractive and powerful role model for his audience, the author portrays Sanduxt acting in what he believes to be a socially appropriate and desirable way. In this regard, the representation of her agency and experience in the narrative is highly revealing for our understanding of the social roles and patterns of behaviour that a noblewoman could adopt in early Christian Armenia.

¹⁶⁹ *The Martyrdom of St Thaddeus and Sanduxt*, p. 14: «Եւ տեսեալ սուրբ առաքելոյն զճերմեռանդն գուր սիրոյ նորա առ Քրիստոս, առեալ մկրտէր զնա յանուն Հօր եւ Որդւոյ եւ Հոգւոյն սրբոյ: Եւ եղև նշան լուսեղէն յերկնից ի վերայ սրբոյ կուսին ...».

¹⁷⁰ See, e.g., *ibid.*, pp. 17, 25, 26–28.

¹⁷¹ See, e.g., *ibid.*, pp. 18, 32, 45.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 46: «Եւ առեալ զմարմինն սրբոյն Սանդիստոյ՝ [առաքելուն] եղ ի նմին տեղոջ եւ արար աներեւոյր զհանգստարանն երանելի սուրբ տիկնոջն»; "And having received the body of holy Sanduxt, he [the apostle] buried her in that same place, and made the resting place of the blessed holy lady invisible."

¹⁷³ *EH*, IV.x. For a detailed study of this episode, see Calzolari 1997, pp. 39–49.

¹⁷⁴ See *Chapter I*, 4.2, and in the present chapter 2.2 (especially n. 35).

What the audience might initially have perceived as scandalous is Sanduxt's open defiance of her father's authority. However, as in the case of Hrip'simē's bold disobedience to Diocletian and Trdat, Sanduxt's actions are justified by the fact that her father rejects the supreme authority of the true God, for which he is referred to as *anawrēn t'agawor* ("iniquitous king").¹⁷⁵ According to Sanduxt, his unrighteousness springs from his faith in "the ghosts of dead idols that neither see nor hear",¹⁷⁶ whereas her God is the one "that has created everything from nothing, and has settled all the creatures by the word of his mouth".¹⁷⁷ This provides her with the moral right to subvert her father's authority.

Besides her earthly status Sanduxt's character assumes more authority in the narrative when she communicates with Christ without an intermediary. Among the multitude of believers whom the heathen king orders to kill, Christ singles out Sanduxt and speaks to her directly: he praises her for renouncing her lawless father and the earthly glory, and for calling *him* "Father", and promises to bestow upon her "the supreme light which is brighter than [that] of many others".¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, when in distress Sanduxt asks Christ for help, and he reassures her that he will not abandon her.¹⁷⁹ Finally, Christ communicates with her through a vision which she receives in her dream. This reminds us of Xosroviduxt's vision in Agat'angelos,

¹⁷⁵ *The Martyrdom of St Thaddeus and Sanduxt*, p. 26.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35: «Գու՛հ պագանէ՛ք էրկիր ուրուականաց կոռց մեռելոտեաց, որ ոչ տեսնեն եւ ոչ լսեն ...».

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*: «Եւ է Աստուած, որ արար զամենայն յոյճնչէ, եւ հաստատեաց զամենայն արարածս բանիւ բերանով իւրով».

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19: «Եւ դու, Սանդուխտ, որ եկիր զկնի իմ, եւ արհամարեցեր զերկրաւոր պատիւս, եւ կոչեցեր զիս հայր, տոց քեզ զվերագոյն լոյս, եւ առաւել պայծառ քան զբազմաց».

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 36: «Իսկ սուրբն Սանդուխտ ... ասէ. Տէր իմ Հիսուս Քրիստոս, փութա հաս ինձ յօգնականութիւն ... եւ եղև ձայն որ ասէր. Քաջալերեաց դուստր իմ, զի ընդ քեզ եմ ի փրկել ի գեղ ...»; "And holy Sanduxt ... says, 'My Lord Jesus Christ, hasten to help me ...' and there was a voice that said, 'Be brave, my daughter, for I stand by you in order to save you ...'."

though Sanduxt needs an interpretation, which is given by the authoritative figure of the apostle.¹⁸⁰

Sanduxt's experience is not, however, limited to being a passive recipient of St Thaddeus's teaching. She possesses her own voice in the narrative, which is heard more often than that of Hrip'simē in the *History*, but like Agat'angelos's heroine Sanduxt's discourse is primarily, albeit not exclusively, deployed to address God¹⁸¹ and her spiritual adviser,¹⁸² and to avow her Christian faith in the face of persecution. The anonymous author also describes how Sanduxt instructs others, with "stentorian voice" encouraging her fellow Christians to "[r]emain steadfast" and "be strong in Christ" despite the tribulations which they are about to face.¹⁸³ Most importantly, Sanduxt preaches to the persecuted believers, and converts people by working miracles¹⁸⁴ as a true apostle, which may also imply that Sanduxt performs baptism.¹⁸⁵

Finally, Sanduxt is presented as a compassionate person who cares for the needs of the believers that surround her. In one episode she lovingly attends to the bodies of her martyred companions and lays them to rest near the royal palace.¹⁸⁶ On another occasion, she consoles the destitute believers in Christ and provides them

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 40–41.

¹⁸¹ See, e.g., *ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁸² See, e.g., *ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 33: «Ասէ սուրբն Սանդուխտ մեծաբարբառ ձայնիւ ցհաւատացեալ ընկերակիցսն իւր ցնծալով. Եղբարք իմ, պինդ կացէք եւ զօրացարուք ի Քրիստոս ...».

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 40: «Եւ [Սանդուխտ] քարոզէր զբանն կենաց, եւ դարձուցանէր զբազումս առնելով նշանս եւ սխանչելիս»; "and [Sanduxt] preached the word of life, and converted many by performing miracles and wonders." These actions have impact not only on the lower strata of society, but they also influence the king's court, for a lady called Zarmanduxt from amongst the relatives of the king converts to Christianity and is subsequently martyred (*ibid.*).

¹⁸⁵ Cf. *Didascalia apostolorum* 3.9 and *Apostolic Constitution* 3.9.1–4 (Miller 2005, p. 65), which forbid women baptising.

¹⁸⁶ *The Martyrdom of St Thaddeus and Sanduxt*, pp. 26–27: «յայնժամ յղեր ի տուն իւր Սանդուխտ գաղտ ի հօրէն իւրմէ եւ տալի բերել բարակ կտուս, եւ առնալ զհաւատացեալ սուրբ ընկերսն, ամփոփէր զմարմինս նոցա, համբուրէր եւ ասէր ... եւ թաղէր զնոսս մօտ յապարանս իւր ... »; "at that time Sanduxt, secretly from her father, sent [someone] to fetch fine linen from her house, and having enclosed the bodies of her companions-in-faith [in it], she kissed [them] and said ... and she buried them near her palace..." Cf. *Aa* §760, in which St Gregory himself takes care of the bodies of the martyred virgins.

with food and clothes, so that “they would not lack anything”.¹⁸⁷ Through this account the author yet again endeavours to convey an unambiguous message about Christian values and ethics and to set a remarkable example to his audience.

3.3 Summary

The anonymous author of *The Martyrdom of St Thaddeus and Sanduxt* creates an image of a beautiful, courageous, compassionate, and devoted princess, who assists the apostle in his mission to evangelise the Armenians. Despite the fact that the main hero of the narrative is the apostle himself and the female protagonist acknowledges his supremacy on several occasions, Sanduxt’s agency is crucial for the development of the plot. As the main subversive character, she provokes the conflict by her defiance of her father, and the first climax in the narrative is reached at her martyrdom.

The most interesting elements of Sanduxt’s representation are the social functions that she performs, such as preaching, converting, caring for the poor, and, perhaps, baptising. It appears that the narrator deploys her royal status to create an influential Christian role model, whom other women should endeavour to emulate.

4. Conclusion

Both conversion narratives discussed here follow the same pattern – from top to bottom. Representatives of the elite are baptised first, and they subsequently facilitate the transmission of religious beliefs to the general public. Christianity is brought to Armenia by a male figure, but to ensure its spread in the country a holy woman’s

¹⁸⁷ *The Martyrdom of St Thaddeus and Sanduxt*, pp. 39–40: «միտրաբէր սուրբն Սանդւխտ զամենայն հաւատացեալսն. կերակրէր զնոսս հացիւ եւ զգեցուցանէր հանգիւստի, եւ ոչինչ տոնէր նոցա պակաս...»

blood must be shed. Thus, early Christian Armenian clerics create an enduring and powerful narrative tradition of Christianisation, in which female and male characters act together and equally contribute to the conversion. The “virgin birth” cleanses women of Eve’s transgression and permits them to evangelise and preach; women baptising people is not explicitly forbidden either.

In spite of the structural balance between female and male agency, on the content and representational levels, however, the supremacy of men is repeatedly acknowledged by the male narrators. It would be therefore fallacious to assume that the conversion narratives subvert the established patriarchal order of the *naxarar* society. On the contrary, in both cases an attempt is made to affirm male authority by stressing the primacy of men in all spheres of life and by underscoring the supporting role of women. In the sphere of faith the superiority of the masculine Godhead of Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit is absolute, and only through the interference of this masculine entity are Hrip’simē and her companions, as well as Sanduxt, empowered in their battle against the lawless heathens. In the earthly life, too, men – St Gregory, Trdat, and St Thaddeus – are the figures that govern and instruct; they enunciate the divine revelations and interpret them from a male perspective. Thus, although women’s agency is crucial for the cohesion and unfolding of the storyline, at the conceptual level the male-centred hierarchy is reinforced.

As a result of the transmission of these stories, the Armenians commenced to perceive worldly matters through the prism of the Christian doctrine, of which Agat’angelos’s *History* with the *Teaching of St Gregory* and the anonymous *Martyrdom of St Thaddeus and Sanduxt* were a fundamental part. In this way Christianity slowly entered the realm of customary law and gradually became a significant element of identity. The spiritual qualities of the Hrip’simian virgins,

Sanduxt, Queen Ašxēn, and Xosroviduxt were idealised and espoused by medieval authors who often preached them through their works.

Chapter III

Female Asceticism in Early Christian Armenia

1. Introduction

After Armenia's Christianisation the Church leaders supported by influential magnates embarked on the reorganisation of the social and religious life in the country by promoting Christian ideals. It was a slow and complex process accompanied by strong resistance from the supporters of the old religion. In the second half of the fourth century with the efforts of the Armenian patriarch St Nersēs the Great (reigned *ca* 353–373) notable, though not unanimously approved, reforms were introduced. This appears to be the period when the option for an ascetic lifestyle becomes available to women as an alternative to conjugal bonds.

It should nevertheless be stressed that, unlike by some Greek and Syriac authors, marriage as an institution was not criticised by the Armenian clerics.¹ Only if it led to an unrighteous lifestyle, or a woman was to marry or remain married to a non-Christian, as is the case with Šušanik discussed below, was asceticism presented as a more preferable option than marriage.²

¹ Cf. Gregory of Nyssa's *On Virginity* (Miller 2005, pp. 94–105); Aphrahat, *Demonstration* XVIII.

² See, for instance, *Eznik*, Book I, X:37: «[ե]թէ յիւր կին ոք աւրինաւ ամուսնացեալ մերձեցայցէ վասն որդեծնութեան եւ զաւակի սերելոյ, բարիոք է մերձաւորութիւնն»; “[i]f a man has sexual relations with his lawfully-wedded wife for the purpose of procreation and begetting a child, the coupling is good.” Cf. *EH*, III.v: «իբրեւ ոչ եթէ զամուսնութիւնն ինչ ազտեղի համարէր [Յուսիկ՝ որդի փահանայապետին Վրթանայ], այլ կասկածէր նա ի տեսնենէ՞ զոր ետես, եթէ ընդէ՛ր բնաւ ի նմանէ այնպիսի զաւակ անպիտան ծնանիցի: Քանզի ոչ երկրաւոր զաւակի ցանկացեալ էր, այլ այնպիսումն՝ որ ի սպասաւորութիւն սպասու պաշտաման ծառայութեան տեառն Աստուծոյ կացցեն»; “[It was] not that he [Yusik, the son of

Female asceticism in early Christian Armenia is one of the aspects of Armenian Christianity about which only circumstantial evidence has survived. In order to shed some light on this issue scholars have focused on several passages found in fifth- and sixth-century literary sources which, with the exception of Agat'angelos's *History*, make only brief remarks about women (and men) who chose to live a life of permanent sexual abstinence. Unfortunately, as it has been stressed recently,³ in the absence of archaeological research in this field it is virtually impossible to draw any definitive conclusion concerning the existence of structured coenobitic establishments in Armenia in the fourth–fifth centuries by relying only on the written sources. Regardless of the latter fact, the textual representation of female monasticism and ascetic practices in the fifth-century texts provides a unique insight into new social roles and functions which became available to Armenian women after Christianisation.

In the first part of this chapter I shall briefly discuss the origins of Armenian asceticism and examine the representation of ascetic women's agency and experience. The second part will be dedicated to the *virgines subintroductae* in Armenian Christianity, a topic which, to the best of my knowledge, has not received any scholarly attention so far. The representation of these different forms of female asceticism in Armenian sources suggests its Syriac origin, though at a later period Greek influence is also traceable. The sources indicate, however, that the society which had been worshiping female fertility for centuries was not in favour of this practice. This is apparently the primary reason why female ascetic communities did

high-priest Vrt'anēs of St Gregories family] considered marriage polluting, but that he was in doubt from the vision he had seen as to the reason that such an unworthy child should ever be born from him; for he longed not for earthly children but for such as would stand in the service and ministry of the Lord God."

³ Pogossian 2012, p. 175; Garsoïan 2005–2007, p. 183.

not flourish in Armenia in contrast to men's monastic orders which proliferated especially in later periods.

2. Female Asceticism in the Fifth-Century Texts

2.1 General Overview

On the basis of the examination of Armenian sources Garsoïan has concluded that “during the IVth, Vth and probably the major part of the VIth centuries Armenian ascetic life ... displayed primarily an eremitic and peripatetic model, rather than one of regular settled and permanent monastic communities.”⁴ This was one of the characteristic features of early Christian asceticism found in different parts of the Christian world.⁵ Yet, early Christian Armenian authors mention only male ascetics who lead a peripatetic and eremitic lifestyle. With the exception of the Hrip‘simian virgins’ alleged journey from Rome to Armenia prompted by Diocletian’s persecutions, none of the references to women ascetics implied any sort of travel or movement. On the contrary, they seemed to live in communities in special places which medieval authors call *argelavan kusanac’*,⁶ *kusastank*,⁷ and *menanoc’*,⁸ rendered in English as “convent”, “dwelling-of-virgins”, and “monastery” respectively. However, it has rightly been emphasised that it would be anachronistic to perceive these establishments as “structured and well-organised coenobitic

⁴ Garsoïan 2005–2007, p. 217.

⁵ See Caner 2002, pp. 1–82; Vööbus 1958, pp. 85–86.

⁶ *Aa* §138.

⁷ *EH*, V.xxxi.

⁸ *Elišē*, p. 103 [52].

monasteries”,⁹ for no evidence supports this view. Therefore, to understand the nature of female asceticism in the fourth- and fifth-century Armenia, it is helpful to retrace the route through which this practice was initially introduced among the Christian Armenians.

A comparative study of the representations of the first monastic establishments in the Armenian and Syriac traditions has led scholars to assume that the origins of Armenian monasticism most likely lie in the Syriac tradition.¹⁰ This has been supported by the contextual analysis of the terms used to describe ascetic practices in early Christian Armenia, for we may observe striking parallels between the accounts of Armenian and Syriac authors. Thus, the descriptions of holy men dwelling on their own, or in small groups, in the mountains, or uninhabited areas found in Armenian sources¹¹ recall similar accounts in contemporary Syriac literature.¹² Of special interest is the complex concept of *uxt* (covenant, vow, pact, congregation) found in most Armenian texts of the fifth century,¹³ for in the meaning of the “covenant of the faith” it seems to correspond to the Syriac *qyāmā*.¹⁴

The latter term, in particular in the phrase *bnāt qyāmā*, usually rendered as the “daughters of the covenant”,¹⁵ is very important for the present study. The *bnāt qyāmā* were ascetic women who dedicated their lives to “virginity and continence”

⁹ Pogossian 2012, p. 178. The same conclusion has been reached by scholars of Syriac studies for similar references in contemporary Syriac literature (see, for instance, Brock 1973, pp. 11–12).

¹⁰ Pogossian 2012, pp. 185–189; Garsoïan 2005–2007, pp. 194–204; Vööbus 1958, pp. vi–vii.

¹¹ See Garsoïan 2005–2007, pp. 194–196 and *EH*, p. 319, n. 2 in V.xxv, pp. 506–507, 547, 566–567.

¹² See Brock 1973, pp. 11–12 and Vööbus 1958, pp. 221–223.

¹³ For the use of *uxt* in the *Epic Histories*, see *EH*, pp. 555–556; in Elišē’s *History*, see Thomson’s Introduction, 1982, pp. 9–12.

¹⁴ Garsoïan 2005–2007, pp. 196–197. For an overview of the concept of *qyāmā*, see Vööbus 1958, pp. 97–103, 197–208; for a relatively recent discussion of all the connotations of *qyāmā*, see Griffith 1998, pp. 229–234 and Jarkins 2008, pp. 81–89.

¹⁵ Griffith 1998, p. 229.

and who perceived themselves as “betrothed to Christ”.¹⁶ These virgins mainly “lived in great communities as well as in the congregations in smaller towns, villages and hamlets.”¹⁷ They used to wear distinctive clothing that indicated their belonging to this specific group of believers,¹⁸ but they did not seclude themselves from the rest of the world and took part in the life of a larger community. The *bnāt qyāmā* also sang “psalms and various kinds of hymns in certain liturgical celebrations of the civic churches,”¹⁹ which was apparently linked to their service “as assistants to the deacons”.²⁰

This brief summary of the representation of the *bnāt qyāmā* does not cover all aspects of their activity and experience. However, the aforementioned characteristic features allow us to reveal considerable similarities between this group of Syriac women and the Armenian consecrated virgins (*kusankʿ*) alongside ‘believing’ women (*hawatawor kanaykʿ*, *kanaykʿ kʿristosakan hawatoy*). As the subsequent analysis will demonstrate, the fifth-century Armenian texts featuring the life of ascetic women contain all the aforementioned elements of representation of the *bnāt qyāmā*, except for references to their function as the deacons’ assistants.²¹

The surviving material on the congregations of ascetic women in early Christian Armenia is fragmentary, which is why only a partial reconstruction of women’s experience within these communities is feasible. The analysis of the terms

¹⁶ Vööbus 1958, p. 199.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 203.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 206.

¹⁹ Harvey 2005, p. 128.

²⁰ Vööbus 1958, p. 207.

²¹ It is worth mentioning that in later sources we come across many references to the existence of female diaconate in the Armenian Church (see Arat 2000). Furthermore, in Syriac tradition “[a]fter the seventh century, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between the offices of deaconess and Daughter of the Covenant, whose roles and functions seem eventually combined into a skeleton of their earlier duties” (Harvey 2005, p. 135). For deaconesses in Syriac tradition, see Brock 1996.

deployed by the authors to allude to these women suggests that ascetic communities were open not only to young virgins (*kusank'*), but also to older, perhaps even married, women and widows (*hawatawor kanayk'*) who chose to take on a life of sexual continence.²² The evidence that we have at our disposal additionally supports the view that such communities existed before the rebellion of 450–451 but after it they seem to have ceased to exist.²³

2.2 Female Asceticism in Agat'angelos's *History*

The most detailed description of ascetic women's experience is found in Agat'angelos's *History*, but it also contains many inconsistencies. Pogossian has already underscored the problems that arise when interpreting the representation of the Hrip'simian virgins: should we treat Agat'angelos's account as a rendering of orally transmitted stories and memories? Is he borrowing his details from Greco-Roman sources, or should we accept Hac'uni's suggestion that the author relies on a contemporary monastic establishment to describe one that existed about a century and a half before?²⁴ In the absence of any concrete evidence it is not possible to accept fully any of these hypotheses, though most probably Agat'angelos's knowledge of female ascetic establishments was acquired from various sources, rather than from direct experience. If there were functioning communities of consecrated virgins at the time of writing (*ca* 460s), as a cleric Agat'angelos would know better their internal structure, and his description would not be so inconsistent and, sometimes, vague. Therefore, it seems more justified to treat his account as reflecting his general knowledge and understanding of the functioning of female ascetic communities which

²² Pogossian 2012, p. 178, quoting Hac'uni.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 192–193.

were based on his memories from the pre-Avarayr period, as well as on contemporary literary and oral sources.

The initial description of the place where the Hrip'simian virgins dwelt, namely the *argelavank' kusanac'* is of great interest.

Then they [Diocletian's soldiers] came and found in the city of Rome a convent of virgins, living solitary hermetic lives, eating vegetables, sober, modest, and pure women of the Christian faith, who day and night and the whole time by praising and blessing were worthy to raise to God in the heights their perfect prayers. Their leader was called Gaiane, and her protégée, who was descended from pious and royal lineage, was called Rhipsimé.²⁵

Thomson has translated the *argelavank' kusanac'* as “a convent of virgins”, but in the comments he has also highlighted that *argelavank'* literally means “enclosure” attested according to the *NBHL* only in this text.²⁶ Pogossian prefers to render that phrase as “an encloistered dwelling-place of virgins”.²⁷ Both scholars, most importantly, stress the fact that the compound noun *argelavank'* denotes a restricted area inhabited, in this case, by the *kusank'* – the virgins. Although this dwelling-place is allegedly located in Rome, one of the largest contemporary cities, the community is described as *mianjnakan leṛnakan*, literally ‘solitary mountain-dwelling’. Through such an inconsistent representation the author consciously attempts to establish a direct link between Rome and Armenian Christianity, at the same time enhancing the prestige of this congregation by describing them as ‘mountain-dwellers’.²⁸

²⁵ *Aa* §138: «Թայն ժամանակի եկեալ գտանին ի քաղաքին Հռոմայեցոց արգելավանս մի կուսանաց՝ միանձնական լեռնական, ընդակերս, զգաստացեալս, պարկեշտական, սրբամատոյց կանայս քրիստոսական հաւատոց, որ զցայգ եւ զցերեկ եւ յամենայն ժամանակի փառաւորութեամբ եւ օրհնութեամբ զկատարեալ աղօթսն իւրեանց առ Աստուած առաքել ի բարձունս արժանի լինէին: Որոյ անուն էր զլիտարին Գայիանէ, եւ սան նորին՝ ի դստերաց ուրումն յաստուածապաշտ եւ ի քաղակալ տոհմէ, զի անուն էր նորա Հռիփսիմէ».

²⁶ *Ibid.*, §138; Thomson 2010, pp. 213–214.

²⁷ Pogossian 2012, pp. 191 and 193.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

Agat'angelos further mentions a second place where the virgins take refuge from Diocletian's men. After fleeing to Armenia they reside in the vat-stores of the vineyard (*i hnjanaharks aygestanwoyn*), which were situated on the outskirts of the capital city Vałaršapat.²⁹ Thomson believes that "a more symbolic hiding-place would be difficult to find," for the vat-store symbolises the church, as it "is widely attested in patristic exegesis", both Greek and Syriac, and it is a site where after the martyrdom of the virgins one of the first chapels is built.³⁰

The two references to the dwelling-places of the Hrip'simian virgins reveal important similarities. In both cases the virgins were residing in a designated building and it was located on the edge of, or perhaps slightly outside, the city. This fact provides further support to the assumption that the early congregations of ascetic women in Armenia were allocated, or possessed, a specific physical space in the immediate vicinity of inhabited areas, where they could cloister themselves to pray and live a life of chastity and abstinence, without fully detaching themselves from the milieu to which they belonged.

Another passage also implies that these women did not lose connection with their families. Agat'angelos writes that when the virgins learnt about Diocletian's plan to marry Hrip'simē, "they left the land of their birth, their possessions and

²⁹ *Aa* §150: «Յայնմ ժամանակի գային հասանէին յերկիրն Հայոց, յԱյրարատ գաւառ, ի Վաղարշապատ քաղաք, զոր եւ Նորափառքն կոչեն, ի նիստս թագաւորացն Հայոց: Այնուհետեւ եկեալ մտանէին ի հնձանայարկս այգեստանայն, որ կան շինեալ ի հիւսիսոյ յարեւելից կուսէ»; "Then they arrived in the land of Armenia, in the province of Ayrarat, in the city of Vałaršapat which is also called Nor K'alak', the residence of the Armenian kings. They entered the vat-stores of the vineyard which were constructed to the North-East..." Although in *Aa* §158, this place is described as «ի նմին թագաւորականին ի Վաղարշապատ քաղաքի» ("in the same royal city of Vałaršapat"), in §166 it is found outside the city: «... հնձանին, ուր էին վանք նոցա արտաքոյ քաղաքին»; "... the vat-store, where they had been dwelling outside the city."

³⁰ Thomson 1979, p. 114.

property and close relations and families for the sake of the divine commandment.”³¹ This is a clear indication that they did not withdraw completely from society and could still own some property.

Agat‘angelos writes little about the internal structure and organisation of these communities. However, the portrayal of the relationships between Hrip‘simē and Gayianē may provide remarkable insights into it. The overall representation of the interaction between the two is strongly reminiscent of the relationships between the *dayeak* (nurse or tutor) and the *san* (nursling or pupil). The *dayeakut‘iwn* was a well-established social institution in Arsacid Armenia, according to which the children of a noble family were normally raised by another family, though such cases are attested only for boys.³² Throughout the narrative Gayianē, presented as *glxawor* (leader, headmistress),³³ *dayeak*,³⁴ *mayr* (mother), and *glux* (head),³⁵ supports and advises Hrip‘simē, who is referred to as her *san*.³⁶ A rudimentary structure of the ascetic community that emerges is the one consisting of a leader and her pupils.³⁷ The absence of a specific terminology that would define the figure of authority in the congregation may, nevertheless, imply that in the 460s, when Agat‘angelos was ostensibly writing, no structured female ascetic communities were in existence, or even if they were still operating, their organisation varied from place to place.

³¹ *Aa* §149: «քողեալ գերկիր ծննդեան իւրեանց, զինչս եւ գտաացուածս եւ զմերձաւոր զազգակիցս եւ զտոհմականս վասն աստուածական հրամանին».

³² For more details on the institution of *dayeakut‘iwn* in Armenia, see Traina 2004, and Bedrosian 1984.

³³ See above *Aa* §138.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, §168: «Իբրեւ ետես սուրբն Հռիփսիմէ գայն ամենայն ամբոխս չարաց, եւ գոր լուսն ի գայեկէն [Գայիանէ] իւրմէ՝ վառեցաւ իբրեւ զինու Հոգւոյն զօրութեամբ Տեառն իւրոյ»; “when the holy Rhipsime saw all this crowd of evil men and heard her governess [Gayianē], she was armed with the weapons of the Spirit through the power of her Lord.”

³⁵ *Ibid.*, §201: «մայրն մեր եւ գլուխ Գայիանէ»; “our mother and leader.”

³⁶ *Ibid.*, §§138, 149, 167.

³⁷ Pogossian 2012, p. 194.

We are also informed that while residing in the vat-stores the virgins earn their living by making and selling glass pearls because they did not have any other source of *t'ošak* (wages, stipend): “they lived by their own money from the market in the city. They had no other source of income, save that one of them possessed the skill of glassmaking and could make glass pearls, which paid for their daily sustenance.”³⁸ This reference suggests that the members of the early ascetic communities in Armenia sustained themselves either by receiving some stipend, most likely from their families and charities, or they would earn their living by selling something they made in the community. In this case, the mention of glass objects does not seem accidental, for there is ample archaeological evidence confirming the existence and popularity of glassblowing in ancient Armenia.³⁹ Furthermore, the fact that only one of them was skilled in a craft suggests that most virgins within the congregation were of noble origin and were not accustomed to manual work.

To sum up, Agat'angelos's representation of female ascetic communities seems to imply that they had not survived in the aftermath of the Armenian rebellion of 450–451 and that the author of the *History* had to rely on his memory and on different other sources in his attempt to describe the community of virgins he claimed to have travelled to Armenia from Rome. In his understanding, these communities were usually established in the vicinity of urban centres, evidently in an enclosed area, and they were funded by the families of the virgins, or they sustained themselves by practising crafts. As for its internal structure, a senior member of the congregation

³⁸ *Aa* §150: «կերակրէին ընչիւմ իւրեանց ի վաճառաց քաղաքին. եւ ոչ ինչ այլ ինչ գոյր թռակ ընդ նոսա զոր ունէին, բայց մի ոմն ի նոցանէ ունէր արուեստ ապակագործութեան՝ առնել ուլունս ապակեղէնս, եւ տալ գինս ընդ կերակրոյ աւուրն պարենի ռոնկի».

³⁹ For the history of glassmaking in ancient Armenia, see Xachatryan 1967. It is worth mentioning that there is much more information on women glassblowers and merchants selling objects from glass in the Roman Empire (see, for instance, Stern 1999, p. 457).

would instruct younger virgins. The accounts of other fifth-century Armenian authors, as we will see, appear to concur with this representation.

2.3 Female Asceticism in the *Epic Histories*

The next source that provides valuable, though fragmentary, information about ascetic communities in early Christian Armenia is the *Epic Histories*. Different groups of ascetic people, primarily leading an eremitic or peripatetic lifestyle, and their dwelling places are mentioned in this compilation of orally transmitted stories.⁴⁰ Female ascetic communities are alluded to only once, in episode V.xxxi, which relates how King Pap ordered the destruction of all institutions established by the Armenian patriarch St Nersēs the Great in the second half of the fourth century during his endeavours to reform the Armenian Church.⁴¹

The *Epic Histories*' portrayal of the physical space that the consecrated virgins occupied is congruous with Agat'angelos's account and corroborates some of the conclusions drawn above. According to the anonymous compiler of the histories, after having murdered the patriarch, King Pap

began to order openly to the realm the destruction of the asylums-for-widows and for-orphans that Nersēs had built in the various districts, and also the destruction of the walled and fortified dwellings-of-virgins [*kusastank'*] in various districts and towns that the same Nersēs had built for them, for the care of their well-kept vows. For the blessed Nersēs had built these dwellings in every district during his lifetime so that all those who were consecrated virgins⁴² might assemble there in fasting and in prayers,

⁴⁰ See Garsoïan's discussion of each group in *EH*, pp. 506–507 (*anapatawor* / *anapatakan*), p. 540 (*kusastan*), p. 547 (*mianjn* / *mianjnanoc*), and pp. 566–567 (*van(k')* / *vanakan* / *vanerayk'*).

⁴¹ For more details on St Nersēs the Great's reign and reforms, see Garsoïan 1969 and 1983.

⁴² Garsoïan here concurs with Step'an Malxasyanc' and Norayr Biwzandac'i's editorial correction (*EH*, p. 323, n. 4 in V.xxxi), and does not translate the conjunction *ew* (and) in the expression *kusank' ew hawatac'ealk'* (the virgins and the believers), although it is found in several manuscripts. As a result, *hawatac'ealk'* functions as an epithet and literally the phrase means 'believing virgins'. Pogossian (2012, p. 185), on the other hand, proposes an

and receive their food from the world and their own families. King Pap ordered to destroy them and ordered the consecrated virgins handed over to foul intercourse.⁴³

This brief account confirms that female ascetic communities were situated within urban areas and that they received financial support from the families of the virgins, though public donations as an additional source of funding is also mentioned. Furthermore, it stresses the fact that the physical space which was allocated to them was an enclosure defended by walls. About their lifestyle we only learn that after having taken vows of abstinence the virgins would dedicate themselves to praying and fasting.

Pogossian has underscored that this passage contains an apparent inconsistency, for it describes a seemingly permanent “walled and fortified” construction, though the consecrated virgins do not appear to reside there continuously but would gather “in fasting and in prayers”.⁴⁴ On the other hand, she assumes that “the construction of walls and fortifications ... would not make sense if the consecrated virgins appeared in the building from time to time only, as opposed to living there permanently”.⁴⁵ This lack of consistency seems to confirm that there were

alternative, and perhaps a more precise reading of the phrase: she keeps the conjunction and renders the phrase as “[consecrated] virgins and believing [women]”. Since both versions are attested in manuscripts it is not easy to decide whether *ew* is an interpolation. The mention of *kusank' hawatac'ealk'* (in its accusative form) as one phrase in the next sentence seems to imply that we are dealing with one group of women rather than two. Yet, as I argue below, the content of the entire passage suggests that Pogossian's translation is more accurate.

⁴³ *EH*, V.xxi: «Իսկ թագաւորն Հայոց Պապ, զի թէպէտ եւ սպան զհայրապետն աշխարհին Հայոց գ'երսէս, սակայն ոչ յագեցաւ մահուամբ նորա, այլ ջանայր այսպէս՝ թէ զինչ միանգամ կարգք իցեն ուղղութեան ի Ներսիսէ եղեալ յեկեղեցւոյն, եղծեցէ եւ խանգարեցէ: Եւ սկսաւ նախանձ վարել ընդդէմ յառաջագոյն կանոնելոցն ի նմանէ. եւ սկսաւ հրաման տալ յայտնապէս յաշխարհին աւերել զայրեւոցսն եւ զորբանոցսն՝ զոր շինեալ էր Ներսէս ի գաւառս գաւառս, եւ աւերել զկուսաստանսն ի գաւառս գաւառս եւ յաւանս յաւանս պարսպեալս եւ ամրացեալս, որ նորին Ներսիսի էր շինեալ վասն ամրապահս առանգացն զգուշութեան: Փանգի յիւրում կենդանութեան երանելոյն Ներսիսի էր շինեալ. շինեաց զայս կուսաստանս յամենայն գաւառս, զի որ միանգամ կուսանք [եւ] հաւատացեալք իցեն՝ անդր ժողովեցին ի պահս եւ յաղօրս, եւ կերակրել յաշխարհէ եւ յիւրաքանչիւր ընտանեաց: Զայն աւերել հրամայէր Պապ թագաւորն, եւ զկուսանսն հաւատացեալս տայր հրաման ի խառնակութիւն պղծութեան».

⁴⁴ Pogossian 2012, p. 187.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

indeed, as suggested above,⁴⁶ two groups of women – the consecrated virgins who resided in the premises of the described buildings, and believing women who attended these establishments, perhaps during religious holidays. The account of Elišē, as we shall see below, supports this interpretation.

The last sentence of the passage mentioning King Pap's orders to destroy the *kusastank'* and to subject the virgins "to foul intercourse" (*i xaṛnakutiwn plcut'ean*) should also be discussed. Garsoïan believes that the destruction of these institutions resulted in forcing the virgins into prostitution.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Pogossian's interpretation that the virgins were most likely compelled to marry appears to be more convincing. She points out that the wording used in this passage is reminiscent of Agat'angelos's description of Diocletian and Trdat's attempts to marry Hrip'simē, which in its turn was most likely influenced by the *Acts of the Apostle Thomas*.⁴⁸

On the whole, the representation of female ascetic practices in early Christian Armenia according to the *Epic Histories* is consistent with Agat'angelos's slightly earlier account. Both authors seem to have been acquainted with the same organisational structure of these communities, which strongly resembled the Syriac *bnāt qyāmā*. In addition, the *Epic Histories* hints at the presence of two groups of ascetic women – the consecrated virgins who resided in the specially built dwelling-places, and the believing women who would occasionally join the virgins probably during religious feasts.

⁴⁶ See above 2.1 and n. 22.

⁴⁷ Garsoïan 2005–2007, p. 209.

⁴⁸ Pogossian 2012, pp. 188–189 and 209.

2.4 Female Asceticism in Elishē's *History*

Elishē's *History* contains a valuable testimony to the existence of female ascetic institutions in Armenia before the battle of Avarayr. Despite its brevity, it is generally consonant with the descriptions found in the aforementioned sources. What is of great interest in Elishē's account is the reference to the special garment worn by ascetic women, which reminds of the *bnāt qyāmā*, who were also dressed in distinctive clothes.⁴⁹

Elishē speaks of women who lead an ascetic lifestyle on two occasions. The first mention is within the context of the Persian attack on Armenian ecclesiastical foundations. Amongst the great turmoil, when the magi and the Persian soldiers accompanying them are plundering the treasures of churches, the chief magus pronounces the following words: “Priests shall not be allowed to instruct the people in their own homes, and the believers in Christ, men and women who dwell each in their own monasteries [*menanoc* ‘s’], shall change their garments for secular attire.”⁵⁰ The second allusion is found in virtually the same context when “even the wives of the Lifeguards dared to extinguish the church lamps on Sunday and tear the garments of the nuns [*hawatawor kananc* ‘n’].”⁵¹

Garsoïan supports Thomson's alternative translations of the terms which he provides in the footnotes⁵² and more precisely renders *menanoc* ‘k’ as “hermitages” and *hawatawor kanayk* ‘ as “faithful or consecrated women”,⁵³ though the latter can also be construed as ‘women with faith’ or ‘believing women’. This approach is

⁴⁹ See n. 18.

⁵⁰ *Elišē*, p. 103 [52]: «Քահանայք մի՛ իշխեսցեն ի տուն իւրեանց ուսուցանել զժողովուրդս, եւ հաւատացեալքն ի Քրիստոս՝ արք եւ կանայք, որ բնակեալ են յիւրաքանչիւր մենանոցս, փոխեսցեն զհանդերձս իւրեանց ըստ աշխարհական կարգաց».

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 115 [65]: «յանդգնեցան եւ եւս կանայք փառիպանացն յաւուր կիւրակէի մնցուցանել զհրազունս եկեղեցւոյն եւ պատռել զհանդերձս հաւատաւոր կանանցն».

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 76 [22] n. 12, 103 [52] n. 4, and p. 115 [65] n. 2.

⁵³ Garsoïan 2005–2007, pp. 209–210.

intended to highlight the eremitic, rather than coenobitic, origins of these institutions.⁵⁴ Most significantly, the use of ‘faithful’ or ‘believing’ women instead of the general term ‘nuns’ enables us to perceive the difference between this group of women and the consecrated virgins (*kusank*’).

The first account describes believing women (*hawatac’ēal kanayk*’) who dwell in hermitages, separately from men, and wear special clothes by which they are different from the lay population. The wording is generic and it does not allow us to determine the age and marital status of these women. The second reference does not provide any clarification either, though an additional element is added to the overall image: the context suggests that these events were taking place in an urban environment and the fact that ‘the faithful women’ attended a Sunday mass implies some participation in the life of a wider community.

Thus, Elišē substantiates our previously made assumptions about the female ascetic institutions in early Christian Armenia and supplies an essential detail regarding the special garments worn by consecrated virgins and believing women.

2.5 Ascetic Practices outside Ascetic Communities

The fifth-century texts also contain passages describing women who lead an ascetic lifestyle within the confines of their estates and none of them, as pointed out by Pogossian,⁵⁵ lives in a community of ascetics. Elišē and Łazar locate them in their households,⁵⁶ whereas Šušanik is said to cloister herself in a hut, initially near the

⁵⁴ “The ‘monastic’ vocabulary may seem familiar but not its setting which is altogether eremitical” (ibid., p. 210). See also the discussion above.

⁵⁵ Pogossian 2012, p. 199.

⁵⁶ *Elišē*, pp. 244–248 [200–203]; *ŁP*, p. 161 [109–110].

church and then in the vicinity of the manor house.⁵⁷ They are not referred to as *kusank*‘ or *hawatawor kanayk*‘: they are women of high social standing who are compelled to renounce earthly pleasures due to exceptional circumstances. Elišē and Lazar focus on the wives and widows of Armenian nobles in the immediate aftermath of the Battle of Avarayr and in their encomia portray their deprivations by using vocabulary characteristic of texts on ascetic practices. Similar descriptions are found in the account of the martyrdom of Šušanik, who protests against the apostasy of her husband *bdeašx* Vazgen and dedicates herself to praying and fasting. It must be mentioned, however, that even though the renunciation of earthly pleasures is foregrounded and commended, these narratives do not contain any criticism of conjugal bonds.⁵⁸

2.5.1 Elišē’s Description

Elišē’s portrayal of women who bear the consequences of the Armenian revolt is very elaborate and aims to exert a moralising effect on the audience. It comprises a detailed description of women’s everyday routine enhanced by images from the Bible, as well as from patristic and hagiographic literature. Although Elišē’s initial account of women’s hardships implies that they consciously inflicted all these sufferings upon themselves as a sign of piety and of their love of God, he subsequently presents additional information that confirms the existence of objective reasons for such a destitute lifestyle. It appears that the Persian court sanctioned the confiscation of the properties of the *naxarars* that had rebelled.⁵⁹ This left their families with virtually no

⁵⁷ Muradyan 1996, p. 20 (II) and p. 26 (VI).

⁵⁸ Pogossian 2012, p. 205.

⁵⁹ *Elišē*, p. 245 [201]: «անկան կործանեցան ապարանք նոցա, եւ տապալեալ աւերեցան ամուրք ապաստանի նոցա: ... Այսօք իւրեանց տեսին գլխաւորապէս արարաց իւրեանց, եւ տկանջօք իւրեանց լուսն գշարչարանս վաւից սիրելեաց իւրեանց. առան գանձք իւրեանց յարքունիս, եւ ոչ մնացին ամենեւին զարդք երեսաց իւրեանց»;

means to sustain themselves, as a result of which they were forced to toil and earn their daily bread.⁶⁰

Elišē's choice of words and imagery reveals his objective to glorify the devout lifestyle of the noblewomen. He praises all of them, young and old alike, for they were "clothed with a single virtuous faith"⁶¹ and "like laboring men used to peasant tasks they endured the toils of country life, and even more than their husbands accepted and sustained such labors."⁶² Their way of life is also favourably compared with that of the solitary monks,⁶³ because they do not indulge in earthly pleasures and luxury. Alluding to Philo's *De Vita Contemplativa*,⁶⁴ Elišē further likens them to "bloodless grasshoppers who exist without food by the sweetness of their song and live by merely breathing the air, the likeness of the incorporeal beings".⁶⁵

As highlighted by Thomson, in the following passage Elišē relies heavily on biblical allusions⁶⁶ and describes the onerous daily routine of women:

The delicate women of Armenia ... regularly attended the houses of prayer without shoes and on foot, begging with tireless entreaties that they might be able to endure their great tribulation. Those who from their childhood had been raised on the marrow of steers and the dainty parts of game, most joyfully ate grass, living like wild animals and not at all mindful of their accustomed luxury. The skin of their

"Their palaces crumbled and fell; the fortresses of their refuge were demolished and razed. ... With their own eyes they saw the ravaging of their property; with their own ears they heard the torments and sufferings of their dear ones. Their treasures were confiscated by the court, and there remained no ornaments at all for their faces." See also below *Chapter IV*, n. 61.

⁶⁰ Elišē, p. 247 [202]: «Մատմբ իւրեանց վաստակեցին եւ կերակրեցան»; "With their own fingers they toiled and sustained themselves".

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 244 [200]: «Բանգի եթէ աւագացոյնք էին եւ եթէ մանկացոյնք, զմի առաքինութիւն հաւատոյ զգեցան».

⁶² Ibid.: «Իբրեւ մարդք, որ վատմբերք լեալ իցեն անգստին ի շինական սովորութեանցն, տանջելով վարեալ զկեանս աշխարհիս, անդրադոյնք եւս խոն գնոստ յանձն առին զհամբերութիւն վատաց» (*my italics*).

⁶³ Ibid., p. 245 [200]: "The Friday evening [fast] they observed like solitaries who dwell in the deserts"; «Շաբաթամուտն ըստ կարգի միայնակեաց, որ յանապատս բնակեալ են».

⁶⁴ See Thomson's comment in *Elišē*, p. 247 [202] n. 13.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 247 [202]: «Անարիւն հիպոանց նմանեցին, որ երգոյն քաղցրութեամբ առանց կերակրանց կեան, եւ կենդանի են միայն զօդն ծծելով, զանմարմնոցն բերեն զմանութիւն».

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 246 nn. 7, 9, 12, and 13.

bodies turned black in color, for by day they were burned by the sun, and the whole night they lay on the ground.⁶⁷

Imagery recurrent in the depiction of ascetics is deployed here and a specific message is presented to the audience. The author unequivocally mentions that abstinence is an effective way for women “to endure their great tribulations”. Likewise, several lines later he stresses that through ascetic practices women managed to overcome “their feminine weakness and became men heroic at spiritual warfare”;⁶⁸ they fought against “the gravest sins” and “[b]y their prayers they opened the closed gates of heaven; and by their pious supplications brought down angels for salvation”.⁶⁹ Hence, not only does Elišē’s representation of the deprivations which noblewomen experienced extol women’s actions under these adverse circumstances, but it also suggests that abstinence from worldly pleasures is conducive to overcoming sins and attaining eternal salvation.

2.5.2 *Łazar’s Description*

In his encomium Łazar also makes use of the images of ascetic piety to extol the virtue and resilience of Armenian women in the face of adversity. His account is quite brief, without many rhetorical embellishments, and in his approach he is more realistic than Elišē, for Łazar’s main objective is not to moralise the behaviour of women in this period of privation but rather to portray the devastating effects of the Armenian defeat at Avarayr. Therefore, in contrast to Elišē, Łazar does not strive to

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 246 [201]: «Տիկնայք փափկասունք Հայոց աշխարհին ... հաճապագ բոկ էւ հետի երբային ի տուն աղօթից, անձանձրոյք խնդրեալ ուխտիւք, զի համբերել կարացեն մեծի նեղութեանն: Որ ի մանկութենէ իւրեանց սնեալ էին ուղղով զուարակաց եւ ամնով էրէոց, խոտաբուս կենօք իբրեւ զվայրենիս ընդունէին զկերակուրն մեծաւ խնդութեամբ, եւ ոչ յիշէին ամենեւին զսովորական փափկութիւնն: Սեւացեալ ներկան մորթք մարմնոյ նոցա, վասն զի ցերեկ արեւակէզք էին եւ զամենայն գիշերսն գետնաբեկք».

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 246 [202]: «Մոռացան զկանացի տկարութիւն, եւ եղեն արուք առաքինիք ի հոգեւոր պատերազմին».

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*: «մարտ եղեալ կռուեցան ընդ մեզսն կարեւորս ... Աղօթիւք բացին զփակեալ դուռնս երկնից, եւ սուրբ խնդրուածով իջուցին զերեստակս ի փրկութիւն».

present the destitute conditions of women as a deliberate act of renunciation of worldly pleasures.

According to Łazar, the wives and widows of Armenian nobles not only “surpassed each other in purity and virtue, dying every day to their bodily passions”, but “[r]endering the natural weakness of women’s bodies stronger than men’s, they were gloriously victorious”.⁷⁰ How their life changed is presented in the subsequent lines:

Delicate women, daughters of princes and wives of nobles, would eat millet instead of fine wheat flour, would drink water in moderation instead of pure wine, would wear rough wool instead of silken garments embroidered with gold, would lie on the ground on brushwood instead of in elaborate beds. Those who formerly slept late became sleepless like celestial beings. They did not anoint themselves with perfume, they did not arrange the hair of their heads with combs.⁷¹

As is the case in Elišē, Łazar stresses the absence of previous luxuries to which the “delicate women” were accustomed. There are many parallels between this account and the description of analogous deprivations in John Chrysostom’s *In Epistulam ad Ephesios* (Hom. 13.3):

Damsels not yet twenty years old, who have spent their whole time in inner chambers, and in a delicate and effeminate mode of life, in inner chambers full of sweet ointments and perfumes, reclining on soft couches, themselves soft in their nature, and rendered yet more tender by their over indulgence, ... who wore soft raiment softer than their skin, fine linen and delicate, who reveled continually in roses and such like sweet odors.... These then, these very tender damsels ... have brought themselves to such a degree of severe training, that they will wrap the coarsest horsehair about their own naked bodies, and go with those tender soles unsandaled,

⁷⁰ ŁP, p. 161 [109]: «Նոյնպէս եւ կանայք, որոց նահապետեալ մարտիրոսացան արքն, եւ այլոց կանանց, որոց էին ի կապանս արքն ի Հրեւ՝ բազում պարկեւտասէր առաքինութեամբ մի գմիով ելեւելաւ առնէին, զոր ամենայն մեռանելով ամենայն ախտից. ... առ որս յաղթի բան՝ առեւ որոշողութեամբ զսաստիկ վարուցն նոցա հզնութիւնս, որք անցուցին զբազում արամբք, եւ զբնական տկարութիւն մարմնոյ կանանց զօրացուցեալ առաւել քան զարանց՝ քաջահաղորդեղեն».

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 161 [109–110]: «Կանայք փափուկք, դստերք նախարարացն եւ կանայք աւագաց, փոխանակ նաեւոյ կորեակ ուտէին, եւ փոխանակ պարզ գինւոյ ջուր չափով ըմպէին. Փոխանակ կերպասեայ ոսկէհուռ զգեստուցն խոշոր բրդեայ զգեստիւն, եւ փոխանակ բազմադիմի անկողնոցն փրիսայիւք ի վերայ երկրի գետնատարածք լինէին. եւ որք յառաջագույն յամբանային ի բուն՝ նմանեալ վերնոցն անհունք եղեն: Չօծան իւղով, չյարմարեցին սանտրով գիւնք գլխոյն իւրեանց ...».

and will lie upon a bed of leaves: nay more, that they watch the greater part of the night, and that they take no heed of perfumes nor of any other of their old delights, but will even let their head, once so carefully dressed, go without special care, with the hair just plainly and simply bound up, so as not to fall into unseemliness. And their only meal is in the evening, a meal not even of herbs nor of bread, but of flour and beans and pulse and olives and figs.⁷²

Both extracts focus on virtually the same material goods that women have relinquished, namely delicious food, elegant clothes, warm and comfortable beds, sweet fragrances; they pay no attention to their hair and their carefree nights have turned into vigils. It is highly likely that Łazar was acquainted with Chrysostom's commentary, but the context in which these accounts are found is distinctly different. In contrast to Łazar, Chrysostom's primary aim here is, as Clark argues, to "shame men by the examples of ascetic women,"⁷³ for he challenges his male audience saying,

how can it be, when tender damsels surpass us by so great a distance? Let us be ashamed of ourselves, I entreat you; for in worldly matters, to be sure, we in no point yield to them, neither in wars, nor in games; but in the spiritual contest they get the advantage of us ...⁷⁴

Łazar, however, is not concerned with humiliating men: in fact, the sacrifices of Armenian women are put on the same scale as the sufferings of imprisoned nobles,

⁷² John Chrysostom 1994, pp. 115–116; *PG* 62, p. 98: "κόραι εικοστὸν ἔτος οὕτω γενόμεναι, ἐν θαλάμοις καὶ ἐν σκιατροφίᾳ τὸν ἅπαντα διατελέσασαι χρόνον, [ἐν] θαλάμοις μύρων γέμουσαι καὶ θυριαμάτων, ἐπὶ στρωμνῆς ἀπαλῆς κατακείμεναι, ἀπαλαὶ καὶ αὐταὶ τὴν φύσιν, καὶ τῇ πολλῇ θεραπείᾳ μαλακώτεραι γινόμεναι, ... ἱμάτια ἔχουσαι μαλακὰ τοῦ σώματος μαλακώτερα, λεπτὰς ὀθόνας καὶ τρυφεράς, ἐν ῥόδοις καὶ ταῖς τοιαύταις εὐωδίαις διηνεκῶς ἀσχολούμεναι ... Ταύτας δὴ τὰς οὕτως ἀπαλὰς κόρας ... εἰς τοσαύτην σκληραγωγίαν ἑαυτὰς ἤγαγον, ὡς τὰ τραχύτερα τῶν τριχίνων περιθέσθαι ἑαυτῶν τοῖς σώμασι γεγυμνωμένοις, καὶ ἀνυποδῆτους εἶναι τὰς ἀπαλὰς πτέρνας ἐκείνας, καὶ ἐπὶ στιβάδος κατακεῖσθαι· μᾶλλον δὲ τὸ πλέον ἐγρηγορέναι τῆς νυκτός, καὶ οὔτε μύρου, οὔτε ἄλλου τινὸς τῶν παλαιῶν πρόνοιαν ποιεῖσθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν οὕτω θεραπευομένην κεφαλὴν ἀτημέλητον ἔχειν, ἀπλῶς καὶ εἰκὴ τὰς τρίχας ἐνδεδεμένην, ὥστε μὴ εἰς ἀσχημοσύνην ἐμπεσεῖν. Τράπεζα δὲ αὐταῖς ἐστὶν ἐσπερινὴ μόνη, τράπεζα οὐδὲ λαχάνου οὐδὲ ἄρτου, ἀλλὰ σεμιδάλης καὶ κύαμος καὶ ἐρέβινθος, καὶ ἐλαία καὶ σύκα."

⁷³ Clark 1991, p. 233.

⁷⁴ John Chrysostom 1994, p. 116; *PG* 62, 99: «πῶς γὰρ, ἔνθα κόραι ἀπαλαὶ ἐκ πολλοῦ τοῦ διαστήματος ἡμᾶς παρελαύνουσιν; Αἰσχυνθῶμεν, παρακαλῶ, ὅτι ἐν μὲν τοῖς κοσμικοῖς οὐδαμοῦ παραχωροῦμεν αὐταῖς, οὐκ ἐν πολέμοις, οὐκ ἐν ἄθλοις· ἐν δὲ τοῖς πνευματικοῖς γῶσι πλέον ἡμῶν φέρονται».

the “sons of light and children of the kingdom”.⁷⁵ Since it is most probable that both Elišē and Lazar have drawn on Chrysostom’s commentary, it is particularly notable that the Armenian authors use this imagery to achieve a different effect.

2.5.3 *St Šušanik’s Abstinence*

The descriptions of Šušanik’s passionate devotion to the Christian faith, her tortures, sufferings, and eventual martyrdom form the essential core of the anonymous author’s narrative. As Pogossian mentioned, certain details of this hagiographic text “can give us hints as to the expectations from a high-level wife and attitudes towards her choice of devoting herself to ascetic life within her social environment”.⁷⁶

When the news about *bdeašx* Vazgen’s apostasy reaches her, Šušanik goes into the state of mourning and desolation, which is emphasised at the beginning of the narrative by references to her grief and lamentation.⁷⁷ Therefore, Šušanik’s initial cloistering herself in a hut, her spending the night in prayer, and refusing to consume any food⁷⁸ should be perceived as a manifestation of intense sorrow over the spiritual death of her husband and the potential threat that it posed to her children and the entire community of Christians.

⁷⁵ *LP*, p. 161 [109]: «որդիս լուսոյ եւ մանկուն արքայութեան».

⁷⁶ Pogossian 2012, p. 206.

⁷⁷ For instance, people who show empathy and compassion to Šušanik are called *sgakic’k’*, ‘fellow mourners’ (Muradyan 1996, p. 20 (II)); she also confirms her state of mourning by saying that due to her husband’s unrighteousness she will “prolong her grief” («յերկարեմ գաւզն»); and by asking rhetorically “[w]ho will not lament over the news of such losses?” («Ո՞վ ոչ ողբացէ զայսօքան կորստեան համբաւ», *ibid.*, p. 22 (III))

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20 (II): «Եւ նա [Շուշանիկ] յարուցեալ մտանէր ի սնիկ մի փոքրիկ, որ էր մերձ յեկեղեցին. եւ կայր յաղաւթս առ Աստուած՝ լալով եւ ողբալով զգիւտերն ամենայն եւ ի դառնութենէն անհանգիստ լեալ եւ ոչ ինչ հաւակեալ»; “And she [Šušanik] entered a small hut which was by the church, and by weeping and lamenting throughout the night she stood in prayer to God, and because of bitterness remained restless and ate nothing” (my translation).

For seven years Šušanik was subjected to repeated brutal beatings and torture for her disobedience to her husband's will,⁷⁹ which are described in a language characteristic of hagiographic texts. Elements of the imagery associated with an ascetic lifestyle, such as fervent praying and rigorous fasting, are also deployed by the anonymous author. The most important passage in this regard is Šušanik's prayer in which she draws an analogy between her position and St Hrip'simē's ordeals:

You, my God and Lord, father and instructor, do not deprive your maid of your care and mercy. But empower me to complete my course through persecutions⁸⁰ like my forefathers [did] so that I could share their inheritance in death. And now with you my hope lies, for you saved the holy Hrip'simē from the tyranny of the king and shamed that giant-like soldier. Deliver me, unworthy [one], from the tyranny of the apostate, for thine is the victory, and through you I shall be victorious; and thine [is] the glory, for ever. Amen.⁸¹

Šušanik identifies herself with Hrip'simē, and her apostate husband with the pagan King Trdat. She hopes to receive the same support from God so that she can humble the tyrant. Subsequently in the narrative the audience is informed by an unnamed priest that Šušanik's expectations are fulfilled, for she managed to defeat her unrighteous husband and to inherit "the name and the spirit"⁸² like St Hrip'simē did.⁸³ The crucial difference between Hrip'simē and Šušanik is nevertheless the fact that the

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 38 (XV): «Եւ ի մտանել եւրներորդի ամի հարուածոցն նորա եւ կապանացն, եւ բանտին, հիւանդանայր երանելին յանհնարին չարչարանացն եւ ի սաստիկ նզուրթանցն, զոր կրեաց սուրբ աղակինն Քրիստոսի»; "At the beginning of the seventh year, having been beaten, bound and imprisoned, the blessed [Šušanik] falls sick due to unbearable tortures and extremely austere life, which the holy maid of Christ endured" (my translation). See also ibid., pp. 28 (VI–VII), 32 (VIII–IX), 34 (X), and 36 (XII).

⁸⁰ Cf. Acts 14:22: "It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God."

⁸¹ Muradyan 1996, p. 26 (V): «Դու, Աստուած իմ եւ տէր, հայր եւ ուղիչ, մի՛ թողուր զաղախին քո ի խնամոց քոց եւ յողորմութենէ: Այլ տուր ինձ զաւրութիւն կատարել զընթացս իմ նեղութեամբ՝ նմանութեամբ հարցն իմոց, զի եւ նոցա մասին հանգստեան ժառանգորդ գտայց: Եւ արդ ի քեզ եմ յուսացեալ, որ զսուրբն Հովսիսիմէ փրկեցեր ի բռնութենէ թագաւորին եւ յամառ արարեր զսկիայագարն. եւ զիս՝ զանաթմանս աղբեցս ի բռնութենէ ուրացողին, զի քո է յաղորդիւն եւ քեզ յաղթեցից: Եւ քեզ փառք յաւիտեանս. ամէն» (my translation).

⁸² Cf. 1 Cor. 6:11: "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."

⁸³ Muradyan 1996, p. 34 (X): «յուսովն Աստուծոյ վանեցեր զամբարիշտն եւ զանուն եւ զոգի ժառանգեցեր ըստ նմանութեան սրբոյն Հովսիսիմէի».

former is a consecrated virgin, while the latter is a married woman with four children.⁸⁴ Šušānik clearly understands this discrepancy, for she declares that she is

not worthy of crowns and blessings of the Saint [Hrip‘simē], who did not approach an impious man but remained in purity [or holiness] and battling for the sake of purity [or holiness] overcame evil and became the most pure [or the holiest] by [shedding] her pure [or saintly] blood along with her saintly companions.⁸⁵

Purity (or holiness) appears to be the main attribute of the virginal state. In order to achieve it, Šušānik needs to cleanse herself of the blemish of her marriage “by means of tortures and iron shackles”.⁸⁶ Indeed, we should not forget that Šušānik speaks of her marriage to an apostate and not about marriage in general, for she laments the fact that she “dwelt with an impious man and gave birth to children who would be wasted and corrupted by the hand of the wicked man”.⁸⁷

Another interesting detail of the *Martyrdom of St Šušānik* related to the topic of this discussion is a reference to the clothes that Šušānik wears while in seclusion. When one of her children dies as a result of an accident, the Georgian magnates visit *bdeašx* Vazgen to offer their condolences. Probably wishing to demonstrate that everything is under control in his dominions,⁸⁸ Vazgen orders that Šušānik be removed from her prison and be brought to the house until the magnates’ departure. She obeys the order with joy and presents herself to people dressed in the clothes of a

⁸⁴ Pogossian 2012, p. 209.

⁸⁵ Muradyan 1996, p. 34 (X): «Ես ոչ եմ արժանի պսակաց եւ երանութեանց սրբոյն, որ ոչ մերձեցաւ յայր ամբարիւտ, այլ սրբութեամբ կացեալ եւ վասն սրբութեան ընդդիմամարտեալ յաղթեաց չարին եւ սրբագոյն եւս լինէր սուրբ արեամբն իւրով սուրբ ընկերաւն հանդերձ» (Pogossian’s translation, 2012, p. 209).

⁸⁶ Muradyan 1996, p. 34 (X): «Ի ձեռն չարչարանաց եւ երկաթի կապանաց սրբեցայ ի մերձաւորութենէ ուրացողին» (Pogossian’s translation, 2012, p. 209). For the same approach, see Muradyan 1996, p. 30 (VII).

⁸⁷ Muradyan 1996, p. 34 (X): «Եւ ես բնակեալ ընդ տուն ամբարտի ծնայ որդիս ի կորուստ եւ յապականութիւն ի ձեռն տուն ժանտի» (my translation). See also, Pogossian 2012, p. 210.

⁸⁸ Pogossian 2012, p. 211.

religious person,⁸⁹ apparently of an ascetic woman. According to the narrator, her appearance and saintly behaviour astonish everyone, though most likely the guests were shocked to see the spouse of *bdeašx* dressed like an ascetic. Thus, Šušanik's 'religious clothes' remind us of Elišē's similar reference and one more time show resemblance between the Armenian (and ostensibly the Georgian) ascetic women and the Syriac *bnāt qyāmā*.

Finally, as pointed out by Pogossian, Šušanik's rebellion against her husband and her choice to live in seclusion cause considerable tensions within her family and society in general.⁹⁰ This is not only amply demonstrated by the animosity of Vazgen towards his wife, but also by the reaction of people who show compassion towards Šušanik. Thus, the bishop, accompanied by Vazgen's brother Jojik, implores Šušanik to return to her husband, because otherwise people may incur their master's wrath.⁹¹ It appears that the bishop perceives Šušanik's attempt to dissolve her marriage as more dangerous for the social order than Vazgen's apostasy. Jojik, on his behalf, constantly offers Šušanik considerable support and genuine sympathy⁹² but he is unable to go against Vazgen's will.

As Pogossian has succinctly pointed out, Šušanik's *vita* clearly demonstrates that "the 'ascetic option' was available to women but the social context did not necessarily whole-heartedly support it, and at times could even violently oppose it".⁹³

⁸⁹ Muradyan 1996, p. 30 (VII): «Եւ նա խնդութեամբ կատարէր զհրամանն տոն ամբարշտի: Եւ նորա երբեալ անցի, զանձն կրտսնաւորական զգեստիւ...»; "And she carried out the order of the unrighteous man with joy. And she went there in the dress of a religious person."

⁹⁰ Pogossian 2012, p. 211.

⁹¹ Muradyan 1996, p. 24 (V): «Ասէ եպիսկոպոսն. «... այս գնտաւ պարտ է ածել, քէ գուցէ [անհնազանդութեամբ քն] յառաւել բարկութիւն եւ ի նախանձ յուզիցի եւ յարուցանէ չար ի վերայ չարի վերակացույց եւ ժողովրդոց...»»; "The Bishop said, '... you have to bear in mind that perhaps [by your disobedience] you will further provoke his anger and rancour, and inflict great evil on governors and people...' (my translation).

⁹² See *ibid.*, pp. 24–26 (V), 26–28 (VI), 34 (X), 38 (XVI).

⁹³ Pogossian 2012, p. 212.

3. *Subintroductae*: An Alternative Form of Female Asceticism

Rightfully described as “one of the most fascinating groups of women encountered anywhere in the annals of church history”,⁹⁴ the *subintroductae* (Gk. συνείσακτοι) have attracted the attention of scholars since the beginning of the twentieth century.⁹⁵ Occasionally referred to as *agapētae*, the *subintroductae* formed a special group of “female Christian ascetics who lived together with men, although both parties had taken the vow of continency, and were animated with the earnest desire to keep it.”⁹⁶ Despite the fact that the Church Fathers vehemently condemned this practice,⁹⁷ a large number of references to syneisaktism⁹⁸ in early Christian sources bespeak the ubiquitous nature of this practice in virtually all corners of the Christian world,⁹⁹ and Armenia was not an exception. However, scholarship has not yet addressed this aspect of Armenian Christianity. In this section I shall attempt to partly fill this lacuna by discussing the representations of syneisaktism in fifth-century Armenian sources.

There are two mentions of the practice of syneisaktism in the fifth-century Armenian texts. One reference is found in the following remark by Łazar, in which he speaks about syneisaktism as of a widespread phenomenon amongst the Syrian Christians:

Then the Armenian princes sought from the court a Catholicos for themselves, and king Vřam gave them a certain Brkiřo, a Syrian. He came to Armenia with his compatriots. They lived a dissolute life, having brought wives with them from Syria

⁹⁴ Clark 1977, p. 171.

⁹⁵ See, for instance, Achelis 1902, and 1908, pp. 177-180; de Labriolle 1921, pp. 204-225; Reynolds 1968, pp. 547-566; Miller 2005, pp. 117-150.

⁹⁶ Achelis 1908, p. 177; also quoted in Clark 1977, p. 171.

⁹⁷ See Clark 1977, pp. 171-175.

⁹⁸ Hereinafter, the terms “syneisaktism” or “spiritual marriage” commonly used in contemporary scholarly literature will be applied to refer to this practice.

⁹⁹ See Achelis 1902, pp. vii-viii. According to Achelis (1908, p. 177), “the custom [of syneisaktism] was widespread during the whole of Christian antiquity”, and its traces can still be found “till late in the Middle Ages”. For references to studies covering different geographic areas, see Clark 1977, p. 173, especially, nn. 23-27.

according to the custom of their land. They did not live in accordance with the holy and unsullied religion that the saintly champion Gregory had established and organised in all the churches of Armenia.¹⁰⁰

There is no compelling reason to disagree with Thomson that the women who accompanied the Syrian priests to Armenia should be identified with *subintroductae*,¹⁰¹ for the word *tantiknayk*, which Łazar uses to characterise these women, besides its primary meaning of the ‘mistress of the house’,¹⁰² is also found in at least two other texts: in the Armenian version of Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Ecclesiastical History*, where it renders the phrase *syneisaktous gynaikas* with the phrase *k’ors tantiknays* (literally, ‘sister mistresses of the house’),¹⁰³ and in the *Armenian Book of Laws*,¹⁰⁴ in a canon condemning syneisaktism.¹⁰⁵ Łazar’s stance in this passage accords with the cannon and the views of the Church Fathers, and leaves

¹⁰⁰ *ŁP*, p. 61 [26]: «Խնդրեցին այնուհետեւ իւրեանց նախարարին Հայոց յարժանուստ կարողիլոս, եւ քաղաւորն Վռամ ետ նոցա զԲրբիւշոյ զմնն անուն, այր յազգէ Ասորոց. Որ եկեալ յաշխարհն Հայոց իւրով զաւատակցօք, որք կէին լոյծ կրօնիւք, եկեալք ընդ նմա յԱսորեստանէ, ըստ սովորութեան իւրեանց աշխարհին՝ տանտիկնօք. եւ ոչ կէին ըստ սուրբ եւ ամբիծ կրօնիցն, զոր եղեալ էր եւ կարգեալ յամենայն եկեղեցիս Հայոց՝ սրբոյն նահատակին Գրիգորի».

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61 n. 4.

¹⁰² See *Chapter I*, 2.2.1.

¹⁰³ The clause “τάς δὲ συνεισάκτους αὐτοῦ γυναικάς, ὡς Ἀντιοχείς ὀνομάζουσιν” is rendered in Armenian as *zkanaysn` worpēs Antiok`ac`ik` kočen, k’ors tantiknays* («զկանայսն՝ որպէս Անտիոքացիք կոչեն, հորս տանտիկնայս» (VII, 30)). In his quotation Thomson has missed the word *k’ors* and instead has “*kanaysn tantiknays*”.

¹⁰⁴ The *Book of Laws* (*Kanonagirk*) was compiled at the beginning of the eighth century by Catholicos Hovhannes of Ojun and edited in the tenth–eleventh centuries by a number of authors (Hakobyan 1971, p. vii). See also Mardirossian 2004, pp. 253–281.

¹⁰⁵ Thomson refers to a canon which is attributed to Epiphanius of Cyprus (flourished in the fourth century) and was, in fact, added to the original *Book of Laws* only in the tenth–eleventh centuries (Hakobyan 1971, pp. vii, xviii–xxv). Hakobyan 1971, p. 62: «Եպիսկոպոս կամ երէց կամ սարկաւազ որ տանտիկին ունիցի ի տանն ըստ հեթանոսական սովորութեանց, լուծցին յիրաքանչիւր աշտինանէ, բայց ի հանույ կամ ի մարէ կամ ի քերց»;
“If a bishop or a priest or a deacon following pagan traditions keeps a mistress of the house that is not [his] grandmother, mother or sister, he shall be stripped of all his ranks” (my translation). However, as I will discuss below, there is a fifth-century canon (Canon XIV of Šahapivan) also criticising the practice of spiritual marriage.

no doubt that in the fifth century syneisaktism was denounced by the Armenian clergy.¹⁰⁶

Łazar's dismissal of syneisaktism as "the custom of their land" implies that it arrived in Armenia from Syria.¹⁰⁷ It is corroborated by the fact that Łazar refers to the events that occurred after the abolition of the Arsacid rule in 428, which coincides with deposition of the Armenian patriarch St Sahak and transfer of the administration of the patriarchal see to Syrian priests (428–437).¹⁰⁸ Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that within a decade of their successive control of the patriarchate the Syrian "anti-patriarchs"¹⁰⁹ Surmak, Brkišo, and Šmuel practised and most likely encouraged syneisaktism.

When the Syriac control of the patriarchate was removed, the Armenian Church leaders issued *Canon XIV* of the Šahapivan Council (444), which attacked syneisaktism as an iniquitous practice of the Messalians:¹¹⁰

Let no bishop, priest, deacon or anyone from amongst the clergy or congregation keep a *subintroducta*, as is the custom among the Messalians. But if anyone does, and evidence regarding it emerges, then, irrespective of his position, he shall be stripped

¹⁰⁶ As highlighted by Clark (1977, p. 173), "[a]t least six church councils of the fourth century, including the famous Council of Nicaea in 325, banned the practice, which must nonetheless have continued to flourish, for decrees were pronounced against it into the early middle ages." Moreover, as Clark discusses in the same article, the practice of spiritual marriage was heavily criticised by John Chrysostom, whose works are known to have extended profound influence on the development of Armenian religious thought.

¹⁰⁷ It is highly unlikely that Łazar's account of this event was prompted by the recent developments in the Church of the East, when the Synod of Seleucia–Ctesiphon in 486 validated the marriage of the clergy, "even at the episcopal rank and even in the instance of widowhood" (Harvey 1990, p. 646). What supports this view is the fact that there is no explicit or implicit criticism directed at the marriage of the clergy in Łazar's *History*, and Łazar himself, without disapprobation, draws our attention to the fact that the Armenian patriarchs used to marry and have children (see, for instance, *ŁP*, 88 [50], 90 [51], 91 [52], 96 [56], 129 [83], 162 [110]).

¹⁰⁸ See Ormanian 1955, pp. 20–21.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹¹⁰ In Armenian the adjective *mcłneac* (Messalian) became synonymous to "filthy, profane, impious" and was associated with a variety of sects condemned by the Armenian Church (*NBHL* 2:284).

of [his rank] and be denounced as unrighteous and as a tax collector, for the Holy Church and the Lord's Holy Communion welcome the pure in order that the impure be redeemed with the help of the pure.¹¹¹

Defining syneisaktism as the practice of the Messalians concords with Łazar's attribution of it to the Syrians, for the Messalian movement indeed flourished in Syria and adjacent territories at the beginning of the fifth century despite the efforts of the ecclesiastical authorities to suppress it.¹¹² It seems that the Messalians revived the ancient practice of the spiritual marriage, which was criticised in the works of the fourth-century Syriac fathers.¹¹³

There is additional evidence endorsing the view that the practice of syneisaktism had grown in popularity in Armenia not long before the Council of Šahapivan. The first piece of information that should be discussed in this respect is the Armenian translation of the canons of the Council of Nicaea (325 CE), which was made in the first quarter of the fifth century.¹¹⁴ The version of the Armenian text that has reached us is not identical to the extant Greek one.¹¹⁵ In particular, *Canon III* that interests us here has the following notable discrepancy: in its Greek version it condemns syneisaktism declaring that “[t]he great Synod has stringently forbidden any bishop, presbyter, deacon, or any one of the clergy whatever, to have a

¹¹¹ Hakobyan 1964, p. 450: «Նպիսկոպոս ոք կամ երէց կամ սարկաւազ կամ ով եւ իցէ ոք ի պաշտօնէից կամ յուխտէ, տանտիկին կին զոք մի՛ իշխեսցէ ունել, որպէս եւ սովորութիւն է մծղնէից: Ապա երէ ոք ունիցի եւ վկայութեամբ յայտնեսցեն, ի կարգէն յորում եւ իցէ, մերժեսցի ի բաց եւ համարեալ եղիցի, որպէս զամպարիւտ, որպէս զմախաւոր, զի սուրբ եկեղեցի եւ սուրբ խորհուրդ տէրունական զանաբաստն ընդունի, զի արատաւորք ի ձեռն անարատիցն փրկեսցին» (my translation). As we can observe, here, too, the word *tantikin* followed by *kin* is used to refer to a *subintroducta*.

¹¹² See Vööbus 1960, pp. 127–139.

¹¹³ Vööbus 1958, pp. 199–200. For a specific example, see Aphrahat VI:4.

¹¹⁴ Koriwn, XIX: «Որոց յետ այնորիկ հաստատուն արինակաւ մասնաժառուր գրոցն եւ բազում շնորհազիր հարց յետ այնր աւանդութեամբք, եւ Նիկիական եւ Նիքեոսական կանոնաւք, գային [քարգմանիչք] երեւելով աշխարհին Հայոց, եւ առաջի դնէին հարցն զբերեալ կտակարանսն եկեղեցւոյ սրբոյ»; “Then they [the translators] came to the land of Armenia, having brought authentic copies of the God-given book and many subsequent traditions of the worthy church fathers, along with the canons of Nicaea and Ephesus, and placed before the fathers the testaments of the Holy Church which they had brought with them.”

¹¹⁵ For details, see Hakobyan 1964, pp. 560–568.

subintroducta dwelling with him, except only a mother, or sister, or aunt, or such persons only as are beyond all suspicion.”¹¹⁶ The Armenian canon, however, is an elaboration of 2 Tim. 5.22 instead,¹¹⁷ warning about the peril of ordaining unworthy people. A question arises: was this alteration made by Hovhannes of Ojun or by another editor before him?

I am inclined to believe that the modification was introduced in the initial translation of the canons. The primary reason for this supposition lies in the fact that the Šahapivan Council adopted a canon that denounced syneisaktism a decade or two after the canons of Nicaea had been translated into Armenian: if in 444 the Armenian clergy had the original Nicene *Canon III* at their disposal, they would hardly consider it essential to dedicate to the same issue one out of the twenty canons that they eventually promulgated. In addition, the prologue to the Šahapivan canons, as mentioned earlier, explicitly states that the following canons were to be applied along with the Apostolic and Nicene ones in order to address those local problems and issues, which were not sufficiently covered by the two.¹¹⁸ Thus, at Šahapivan the Armenian clergy did not possess the Nicene *Canon III* and for that reason they were compelled to add *Canon XIV*.

We may conclude that when at the beginning of the fifth century the Nicene canons were translated into Armenian, syneisaktism was a rare, or perhaps a non-existent, practice in the country and it was deemed more practical to substitute its condemnation by the mention of a more burning issue. In the subsequent decades the rise of the Messalian movement in the region and the active practice of syneisaktism by the Syrian clergy who assumed control over the Armenian patriarchate encouraged

¹¹⁶ “The First Ecumenical Council” 1995, p. 11.

¹¹⁷ Hakobyan 1964, p. 118.

¹¹⁸ See the *Introduction*, 4.2.7 and, in particular, n. 94.

the spread of this practice in Armenia. When in 444 the patriarchal throne was returned to the Armenian clergy, the leaders of the Church felt obliged to address immediately the issue of spiritual marriage by direct legislative intervention.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of the literary representation of female ascetic practices in fifth-century Armenian literature allows us to draw some preliminary conclusions. There is compelling evidence which suggests that the first female ascetic communities in Armenia were modelled on the Syriac *bnāt qyāmā*. These communities were predominantly established within or close to urban centres and were housed in fenced buildings. There were two categories of women who belonged to an ascetic community: consecrated virgins, who apparently lived in the community permanently, and believing women, who seem to have been married women or widows that joined the virgins during some religious feasts. Ascetic women wore distinctive clothes and were easily recognisable in public. Their families would normally provide the means to sustain these establishments, though they received money from charities, too. Furthermore, it is highly likely that in some communities virgins practised different crafts and sold their products in local markets to support themselves.

In the first half of the fifth century the ideas of the Messalian sect seem to have gained some popularity in Armenia. As a result, women ascetics were offered an additional option of sharing a dwelling with male ascetics and living a life of continence with them. This practice of spiritual marriage, however, was denounced by the ecclesiastical authorities and harsh punishments were imposed on those among the clergy who would encourage it.

Even though the attitude of early Christian Armenian authors to female ascetics is invariably positive, certain fragments of information evince the divergence of public opinion. In the pre-Christian mentality of the Armenian people fertility was a fundamental concept from both religious and socio-political perspectives;¹¹⁹ therefore, female asceticism failed to appeal to the broad mass of the population, especially the nobility, for in the *naxarar* society women not only ensured the continuation of one's lineage, but they were also involved in the establishment of political alliances which were indispensable for the survival and welfare of each *naxarar* family in the region.

¹¹⁹ Pogossian 2012, p. 188.

Chapter IV

Women in Society: Spaces, Roles, and Everyday Life

1. Introduction

Due to fifth-century Armenian authors' preoccupation with the public space, a largely male domain, and their focus on the political, therefore predominantly male-centred processes, it is challenging to acquire any understanding of the extent of women's agency and of the social roles that they held in early Christian Armenia. However, fragments of information found in a number of texts enable us to reach some conclusions and extend our knowledge of women's agency and experience in fifth-century Armenia.

In this chapter the fragmented representation of women's everyday life, the physical spaces to which they had access, and the social roles that the Christian authors deemed worthy of mentioning and promoting will be examined. In particular, I shall argue that women's mobility in public and domestic spaces depended on their status in the extended family and was restricted to specific areas. The abstract boundaries were most likely delineated by customary law and were known to all members of the society. However, under exceptional circumstances women could overcome these restrictions and move from one space to another without subverting the existing order. Furthermore, I shall demonstrate that one of the main roles of women in society was to raise their children in religious faith and to supervise the process of their education. Finally, by deconstructing Elišē and Łazar's depiction of

the deprivations experienced by noble women I shall explore some aspects of their everyday life.

2. Physical Spaces

2.1 “Men and Women”

Virtually all fifth-century texts under scrutiny make references to events in which men and women participate together. Taking into account the religious background of the authors one might assume that the phrase “men and women”, found in various declensions and combinations, is a mere literary topos taken from Biblical models,¹ and does not necessarily imply the involvement of the entire community in a specific event. The converse nevertheless seems more feasible: there are many explicit passages with specific details that refer to representatives of the nobility and to the commoners, men and women alike, who join together on special occasions, such as a religious ceremony² or feast,³ or celebration of a memorable event.⁴ Furthermore, a closer look at the contexts in which the phrase “men and women” appears enables us

¹ Cf., for instance, 1 Chron. 16:3, 2 Chron. 15:13, Esth. 7:4, Acts 22:4.

² For example, *Aa* §725: «Իսկ նո՛ւա ժողովեալի կուտեալի հասեալի անթիւ մարդկանն, զմիմեանք դուրսեալ՝ խնոյս կացուցանէին՝ ունկնդրութեան վարդապետութեանն [Գրիգորի] մատուցանել զլսելիս. բազմութիւնք անհունք անշափութեամբ, անհնարին շատութեամբ ժողովեալի ի հոչակէն, տեսանել եւ լսել զանպայման սքանչելիս Աստուածութեանն»; “They were gathered together in a numberless assemblage of men, jostling each other and forming a crowd, to give their attention to the teaching [i.e. Gregory’s sermon]. Men, women, and children had gathered in vast numbers from the report in order to see and hear the amazing miracles of the Godhead.”

³ For instance, *LP*, p. 51 [17]: «յորդորեցան բազմութիւնք արանց եւ կանանց ժողովրդոց ի տօնս Փրկչին եւ ի ժողովս մարտիրոսաց»; “Crowds of men and women in the congregation were stimulated at the festivals of the Saviour and the commemorations of the martyrs.”

⁴ When, for example, the blessed Abraham returns to Armenia after many years in exile having helped the imprisoned Armenian princes, he is met by “men and women, the greatest and the least, all the multitude of nobles and peasants”; «արք եւ կանայք, մեծամեծք եւ փոքունք, եւ ամենայն բազմութիւն ազատաց եւ շինականաց» (*Elišē*, p. 235 [190]).

to discern several layers of meaning, which support the view that women indeed participated in social gatherings alongside men.

Most commonly the authors present women and men side by side when they describe tumultuous events in the face of which all members of the community are expected to unite. War, funerals, religious oppression, and danger of apostasy are the most common occasions. The first notable example is found in Agat'angelos's *History*, when the author describes the burial of the Hrip'simian virgins which, besides the king and his entourage, is also attended by "the queen and the royal princesses and the nobles' wives and magnates' daughters."⁵

In Elišē's *History* we read that upon hearing the news of the princes' apostasy the bishops "urged the populace to assemble – the men and women, peasants and nobles, priests and monks. They exhorted and strengthened them, and made them all soldiers of Christ."⁶ Similarly, after the battle of Avarayr, "[y]oung men and maidens and the whole populace of men and women went out and occupied the safe parts of the desert and the secure places of numerous mountains. They considered it better to live like beasts in caves but in piety, than to live luxuriously in their own houses but in apostasy."⁷

⁵ *Aa* §761: «Իսկ քաղաւորն եւ արքայազունքն ամենայն եւ մեծամեծքն եւ նախարարքն եւ ազատքն եւ զօրքն ամենայն՝ իւրաքանչիւր բերէին իւզս անուշունս եւ խունկս ազնիւս, եւ զգունագոյն նաբօտս պատանաց, զմետաքսաւէչս ոսկերէլս կերպասուց: Եւ կին քաղաւորին եւ օրիորդք քաղաւորազունք եւ կանայք պատուականացն եւ մեծամեծացն դստերք՝ բերէին ծիրանիս եւ զոսկեհուն զիպակն եւ զերկնագոյնն, եւ զսպիտակ իբրեւ զծիւն հանդերձանս սրբոցն».

⁶ *Elišē*, p. 108 [57]: «Յայնմ ժամանակի սփռեցան եպիսկոպոսքն յիւրաքանչիւր իշխանութիւնս, եւ առաքեցին զհոբելիսկոպոսս ի գեօղս եւ յագարակս եւ ի բազում ամուրս լեռնային գաւառացն: Դրդեցին ժողովեցին զբազմութիւն արանց եւ կանանց, շինականաց եւ ազատաց, զհաւանայից եւ զմենակեցաց. խրատ եղին, պնդեցին եւ արարին զամենեւեան զինուորս Քրիստոսի».

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 176 [124]: «Երբային երիտասարդք եւ կուսանք եւ ամենայն բազմութիւն արանց եւ կանանց, հասեալ ունէին զամուրս անապատին եւ զանխաբ տեղիս բազում լեռանց: Լաւ համարէին զգազանաբար բնակութիւնն աստուածապաշտութեամբ ի քարանձաւս կելոյ, քան ուրացութեամբ փափկանալ յիւրաքանչիւր շինուածս».

An interesting shade of meaning of the phrase “men and women” is found in Lazar’s *History*. The author seems to have a specific agenda in mind, for the phrase is on several occasions accompanied by the words *miasin* (together), *miaban* (unanimously) or *miabanut’eamb* (in unanimity). These expressions reveal the author’s determination to emphasise the significance of unity and to demonstrate that men and women join together to affirm, in one way or another, their faith in Christ. Thus, for instance, when foreigners were installed on the throne of the Armenian patriarch, “the greater nobility, all the clergy of the church, and the people, *men and women alike*, gathered together and bewailed the holy, unspotted, and apostolic teaching that had been sown and promulgated among them by saint Gregory and his descendants.”⁸ Elsewhere the reader is informed that “men and women in joyful harmony”⁹ confess their faith in the face of imminent danger of forced conversion to Zoroastrianism.¹⁰ There are other examples, too, which follow this same pattern.¹¹

⁸ *LP*, p. 62 [26]: «ժողովեալ աւագ սեպուհեացն եւ բովանդակ բազմութեան ուխտին եկեղեցոյ եւ ժողովոյոց /*միասին արանց եւ կանանց*՝ ողբային զսուրբ եւ զանարատ եւ զառաքելաւորի վարդա պետութիւնն, զոր սերմանեալ անեցոյց ի նոսա սուրբն Գրիգորիոս եւ նորին զաւակք» (*my italics*).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 102 [61]: «այլ եւ կին միաբան խնդալիցք».

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 103 [62]: «Եւ ասացեալ զամենայն խոստովանութիւն զօրհնութեանն եւ զանիծիցն միաբանութեամբ ամենայն բազմութեանն ի ձայն մեծ արանց եւ կանանց՝ հնչեաց երկիրն ամենայն ի բարբառոյ զօրացն բազմութեան»;
“As the entire host of men and women uttered this unanimous confession of blessing and curses in a loud voice, the whole earth resounded at the clamour of the army.”

¹¹ See *ibid.*, p. 161 [110]: «Թորոց խնդրուածս եւ ի վաստակս ի միասին արանց եւ կանանց ամենաողորմն Աստուած հայեցեալ՝ յիշեաց զնահատակութիւն վկայելոց քահանայիցն Աստուծոյ, շնորհեալ պարգեւեաց դառնալ կապելոցն յաշխարհս Հայոց»;
“The all-merciful God looked down on the prayers and labour of these men and women together; recalling the heroism of saint Vardan and of all those united with him and the intercession of the martyred priests of God, he gracefully permitted the prisoners to return to Armenia”; *ibid.*, p. 188 [131]: «Եւ էր այնուհետեւ լսել յամենայն եկեղեցիս Հայաստանեայց աշխարհիս, ի վկայարանս սրբոց, ի տօնս եւ ի ժողովմունս միաբանութեան, ի բերանոյ քահանայիցն եւ միաբան ամենայն ժողովոյոց, յարանց եւ ի կանանց առ հասարակ, թէ «Զի՞նչ բարի, կամ զի՞նչ վայելուչ, այլ բնակել եղբարց ի միասին»»;
“Then one could hear in all the churches of Armenia, in the martyria of the saints, during the feasts and reunions of congregations, from the mouths of priests and all the people in unison, men and women together: “What is better or finer than for brothers to dwell together?”

If we consider the aims of Łazar's work and the historical context¹² in which he was writing, that is about half a century after Avarayr and a decade or so after Vahan Mamikonean's rebellion, it becomes evident that he consciously underscores the importance of the communal and spiritual unity of men and women. On the one hand, Łazar makes a clear reference to the recent heroic past – namely the rebellion of 482–484 – when by virtue of a joint effort the Armenians emerged victorious in the struggle for the preservation of their religion; on the other hand, we observe an indirect allusion to the tenet of the customary law of the Armenians¹³ that the two sexes are partners in the struggle against evil forces.

The examples discussed here demonstrate that women were able to transcend the boundaries of the household and to contribute to public life in certain situations without transgressing the law (*awrēnk*). However, it is still not clear whether all women, irrespective of their age and social status, had this access to the public sphere, or if it was only the prerogative of a certain group. The answer to this question seems to be found in Łazar's *History*.

2.2 Women and their Spaces

Łazar provides a unique and extremely valuable description of spaces that women would normally occupy according to their age and status in the family. When the apostatised *naxarars* return to their estates, they witness the members of their household grieving over their renunciation of the Christian faith: “Because of all this, the wives of the great nobles broke into mournful laments, as did the widows in public squares, and the young married women, and the maidens in locked chambers,

¹² See section 2 of the *Introduction*.

¹³ See the discussion in *Chapter I*, sections 3 and 4.1.

and the brides in boudoirs.”¹⁴ Thus, Łazar differentiates three categories of women and places them in three different spaces: the senior female members of the family and the widows are found outside, in the public space, whereas young married women alongside young unmarried virgins – within the confines of the house; finally, the brides, who have recently entered the family, seem to occupy a space in the room specifically allocated to the new couple.

This appears to be a general overview of the spaces which women, depending on their status, age, and position in the family, would normally occupy. It is important to establish to what extent the representation of women in other early Armenian texts reflects Łazar’s categorisation. In Agat’angelos and the *Epic Histories*, for instance, senior women (Queen Ašxēn, Xosroviduxt,¹⁵ the wives of the *naxarars*¹⁶) and widows (mourning P’arānjem,¹⁷ Queen Zarmanduxt¹⁸) are indeed seen in the public space. As for “the brides in boudoirs”, they are also attested in Elišē, who describes their life of privation after Avarayr: “The hangings and bed curtains of the newly married brides became dusty and sooty, spiders’ webs were spun in their nuptial chambers.”¹⁹

¹⁴ *ŁP*, p. 96 [56]: «Վասն ամենայնի այսորիկ սուգ առեալ կռծէին կանայք աւագ ազատացն եւ այբիք ի հրապարակս, մանկամարդ տոնականայք եւ օրիորդք ի սրահս դռնափակեալս, հարստոնք ի սենեակս». The difference between *mankamard ainakanayk’* and *harsn* is not quite clear but I assume that the latter referred to recently married women, whereas the former to those who were still young but already living in marriage for several years.

¹⁵ There is no direct reference to Xosroviduxt’s marital status in Agat’angelos’s *History*, but we can assume that when she appears in public, Xosroviduxt is not young anymore (see the storyline of *Aa* §§18-47, which implies a period of several decades between Xosroviduxt’s father’s murder and Armenia’s Christianisation). In one passage (*Aa* §800) Agat’angelos refers to her as *oriord mec Xosroviduxt*, that is ‘great maiden Xosroviduxt,’ with the epithet *mec* indicating that Xosroviduxt had a high status in the society, and with the word *oriord* implying her unmarried state.

¹⁶ See above n. 5.

¹⁷ *EH*, IV.xv.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, V.xxxvii–xxxviii.

¹⁹ *Elišē*, p. 245 [201]: «Փռուտեցան եւ ծխուտեցան սրահակք եւ արկապանք նորեկ հարսանց, եւ սարդի ոտայնք ձգեցան ի սենեակս առագաստաց նոցա».

Łazar refers to the brides once more in his work and provides an invaluable view on their position within the new family. It is mentioned in the episode when Vahan Mamikonean receives the edict confirming his appointment as *marzpan* of Armenia:

When the populace in the city heard this, they all rushed in a great hurry to the church – princes and nobles, *ostaniks* and commoners, men and women, old and young, *even brides from their nuptial chambers, forgetting for a while in their joy the modesty of their situation.*²⁰

I am inclined to believe that “their situation” here refers to a certain probation period, perhaps to prove one’s fertility, which a recently married woman was to pass in the new family, for a similar practice was still observed in Armenian families in several regions at the beginning of the twentieth century.²¹ The concept of *amawt’ harsnut’ean* (literally, ‘bridal abashment’) seems to have involved a specific mode of behaviour when the bride was obliged to display modesty and cover her face with a veil in the presence of the members of her husband’s family, being allowed to remove it only after giving birth to a child or children.²²

Young married women and young unmarried virgins seem to occupy an intermediate position between these two groups of women, for although the space they are most commonly depicted in is the confines of their house, they sometimes cross the boundary and appear in public. When Efišē²³ and Łazar²⁴ describe the

²⁰ *ŁP*, p. 240 [178]: «Եւ լուեալ զայս մարդիանն որ ի քաղաքին էին, զրոհ տուեալ առ հասարակ ամենայն մարդոյ, նախարարաց եւ ազատաց, ոստանկաց եւ ռամկաց, արանց եւ կանանց, ծերոց եւ տղայոց, *այլ եւ հարսունք տեղամ յառազաստաց, մոռացեալ առ վայր մի առ խնդին զամօք հարսնութեան՝ դիմեալ ընթանային յեկեղեցիներ*» (my italics).

²¹ Nahapetyan 2009, p. 81.

²² *Ibid.* A reference to such a veil is made by Łazar on p. 161 [110]; see also n. 27 of the present chapter.

²³ *Efišē*, pp. 243–244 [199–200]: «Իսկ կանայք երանելի տառիներացն եւ կապելոցն եւ անկելոցն ի պատերազմին ... եինգ հարիւրով չափ յականէ յանուանէ նանաչեմ. ոչ միայն որ առագագոյնքն էին, այլ զբազումս ի կրօնաբազումաց անտի»; “As for the wives of the blessed heroes and prisoners and of those who

deprivations of noble women after the devastating consequences of the battle of Avarayr, both authors locate them, young and old alike, in their estates, whereas Agat'angelos mentions "magnates' daughters"²⁵ attending the burial of the Hrip'simian virgins.²⁶ The latter example, as well as our discussion of the use of the phrase "men and women", suggests that on the occasion of communal events such as funerals or public festivities these women were able to transcend the boundaries of the space they would normally occupy. Lazar seems to have this particular category of women in mind when he mentions the veil covering the faces of women who flirted with men.²⁷

It can be concluded that the hierarchal division of female members of the *tohm* into three distinct groups implied the existence of limitations to the spaces to which women had access. The absence of similar categorisation in early Christian texts which could have influenced the discourse of the Armenian authors evinces the pre-Christian roots of this phenomenon in Armenia, which was perpetuated through customary practice in Christian times.

fell in the war ... I am personally acquainted with five hundred, not only older [women] but many of the younger generation. All of them without exception exhibited a heavenly zeal, appearing no different from those who have not experienced the world."

²⁴ *LP*, p. 161 [109–110]: «Կանայք փափուկ, դստեր՝ նախարարացն եւ կանայք աւագաց, փոխանակ նաւոյ կորեակ ուտէին, եւ փոխանակ կերպասեայ ոսկեհուռ զգեստուցն խոշոր բրդեայս զգենուին, եւ փոխանակ բազմադիմի անկողնոցն փրխայիւք եւ վերայ երկրի գետնատարածք լինէին»; "Delicate women, daughters of princes and wives of nobles, would eat millet instead of fine wheat flour, would drink water in moderation instead of pure wine, would wear rough wool instead of silken garments embroidered with gold, would lie on the ground on brushwood instead of in elaborate beds."

²⁵ There can be little doubt that the author here refers to unmarried virgins, for if they were married, they would be part of their husband's family.

²⁶ See above n. 5.

²⁷ *LP*, p. 161 [110]: «ընդ ֆողով այսր անդր հայեցողութեան զաչս յածելոյ»; "frequent turning of the eyes this way and that from under a veil".

3. Women as Educators

The prevailing attitude of the Greek Church Fathers towards women who taught or preached was distinctly negative. The justification for this was usually found in the scriptures, either in 1 Tim. 2:11–12,²⁸ or in the fact that Christ had not commanded women to teach.²⁹ Strict restrictions, however, seem to have been imposed only on women in the public sphere and referred to preaching rather than teaching in general,³⁰ for certain references to women teaching within the confines of a monastery³¹ or in private conversations³² have also reached us.

As compared to the Greek Fathers, in Syriac Christian tradition there is a reference to women through whom religious teaching was spread. A panegyric

²⁸ “Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent”; «Կին մարդ՝ ցածուքեա՛մբ ուսցի՛, ամենայն հնազանդութեամբ: Այլ ուսուցանել կնոջ մարդոյ ո՛չ հրամայեմ, և ո՛չ ճոխարան լինել քան զայր մարդ. այլ ՚ի լռութեան կալ».

²⁹ See, for example, John Chrysostom, *Discourse 4 on Genesis 1* «Ἀκουσον πῶς καὶ Παῦλος περὶ ταύτης λέγει τῆς ὑποταγῆς, ἵνα μάθῃς πάλιν Παλαιᾶς καὶ Καινῆς τὴν συμφωνίαν. Γυνή, φησὶν, ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ μανθανέτω ἐν πάσῃ ὑποταγῇ. Εἶδες καὶ αὐτὸν ὑποτάξαντα τῷ ἀνδρὶ τὴν γυναῖκα; Ἀλλ’ ἀνάμεινον, καὶ τὴν αἰτίαν ἀκούσῃ. Διὰ τί, Ἐν πάσῃ ὑποταγῇ; Γυναῖκα γὰρ, φησὶ, διδάσκειν οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω. Διὰ τί; Ἐδίδαξε γὰρ ἅπαξ κακῶς τὸν Ἀδάμ. Οὐδὲ αὐθεντεῖν τοῦ ἀνδρός» (PG 54, p. 594); “Listen to how Paul speaks of this subjection, so that you may again be instructed on the agreement of the Old and the New Testaments. Paul says, “Let the woman learn in silence, in all subjection.” Do you see how he, too, submits the woman to the man? Hold on, and you will hear the reason. Why does Paul say, “in all subjection”? He asserts, “I do not permit a woman to teach a man.” Why not? Because she taught Adam once and for all, and taught him badly” (Miler 2005, p. 30). See also *Didascalia Apostolorum* 3.6: “It is neither right nor necessary therefore that women should be teachers, and especially concerning the name of Christ and the redemption of his passion. For you have not been appointed to this, O women, and especially widows, that you should teach, but that you should pray and entreat the Lord God. ... For if it were required that women should teach, our Master himself would have commanded these [the three Marys] to give instructions with us [the apostles]” (Miler 2005, p. 31).

³⁰ Origen of Alexandria’s following remark appears to reflect a widespread belief among the leaders of the Church: “It is shameful for a woman to speak in church’ [1 Cor. 14:35], whatever she says, even if she says something excellent or holy, because it comes from the mouth of a woman” (Miler 2005, p. 29).

³¹ See, for instance, the *Life of Melania the Younger* (Gerontius 1962, 42–48, pp. 206–218).

³² A notable example is found in Gregory of Nyssa’s biographical remarks about his sister Macrina in “Vita Sanctae Macrinae” (PG 46, pp. 959–1000) and “Dialogus de anima et resurrectione” (PG 46, pp. 11–160).

homily dedicated to St Ephrem Syrus composed by Jacob of Serug (*ca* 449–521) and the sixth-century anonymous *Vita Ephraemi* describe ladies' choirs which instructed the congregation of believers by singing "a variety of hymnography: doctrinal hymns (*madrashe*), antiphons ('*ounyatha*), and other kinds of songs (*seblatha* and *qinyatha*)".³³ According to the *Vita Ephraemi* these women were from amongst the Daughters of the Covenant (*bnāt qyāmā*),³⁴ "whom Ephrem convened for the morning and evening services in the church at Edessa and at the memorial services of saints and martyrs".³⁵ This evidence suggests that the audience for which the *bnāt qyāmā* sang was quite wide including members of all social layers.

Furthermore, according to the Syriac *Didascalia Apostolorum* the deaconesses were also entitled to teach.³⁶ This would normally occur after the baptism of women whom the deaconess would anoint.³⁷ In contrast to the Daughters of the Covenant, however, the deaconesses appears to have been allowed to teach only women.³⁸

The stance of early Christian Armenian authors on women who taught and preached is distinctly positive. The teaching of children in particular is presented as one of the most important social functions that women performed. In addition, women preaching in public, as discussed earlier,³⁹ were not frowned upon either. Since there is no evidence suggesting that such an approach was prompted by Christian influence, I shall argue that it has roots in the pre-Christian culture and customary practices of the Armenians.

³³ Harvey 2005, pp. 133–134.

³⁴ See *Chapter III*, 2.1.

³⁵ Harvey 2005, p. 133.

³⁶ Brock 1996, p. 206.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Harvey 2005, p. 130.

³⁹ See *Chapter II*, 3.2.

A clear division of social roles in Zoroastrian Armenia, where men's main occupations were hunting and participation in military campaigns,⁴⁰ and where women were in charge of the household, presupposed that women spent more time with their children. These habits persisted into the Christian period. Several passages in the early Christian Armenian literary tradition, as noted by Pogossian, bespeak mothers' involvement in the education of their children and, more specifically, their pivotal role in transmitting Christian beliefs.⁴¹ In this section some of the sources to which Pogossian has drawn our attention will be discussed in more detail and additional evidence which supports Pogossian's conclusion will be provided.

The authorisation to teach and preach is given in Agat'angelos's *Teaching* by St Gregory: "Not only by men, but also by holy women the gospel of life was preached throughout the whole world. For women also were blessed on account of the virgin birth which was from among them."⁴² This appears to be the response of Armenian clerics to early Christian authors insisting that women must not preach. Although other Armenian texts do not directly refer to this passage, their authors clearly feel comfortable to describe women's participation in providing religious education.

One of the most important sources on this issue is Łazar P'arpec'i's *History* and his *Letter*. These texts mention the names of two women from the noble Arcruni family: Juik, the mother of Vahan Mamikonean, and his aunt Anušvřam, Juik's sister. Juik was the widow of Hmayeak Mamikonean, the brother of St Vardan, who also

⁴⁰ For hunting, see, for instance, Garsořian 1976, pp. 27–31 and for engagement of Armenian men in the military, see Adontz 1970, pp. 183–234.

⁴¹ Pogossian 2003, pp. 373–375.

⁴² Aa §684: «Զի ոչ միայն ի ձեռն արանց, այլ եւ ի ձեռն կանանց սրբոց քարոզեցաւ Աւետարանն կենդանութեան ընդ տիեզերս ամենայն. զի եւ կանայք օրհնեցան վասն կուսանիւն ծննդեանն որ ի նոցանէն». As mentioned earlier (*Chapter II*, 3.2), in the other Christianisation narrative Sanduxt is also found preaching the word of God to the masses.

perished during the 450–451 rebellion, while Anušvram was the wife of the Georgian prince Ašušay. After Ašušay rescues her children from Persian captivity,⁴³ Juik joins her sister's family and at Ašušay's court raises her three sons Vahan, Vasak, and Artasēs, while her youngest son, Vard, for an unspecified reason remains in the province of Tayk' with his tutors.⁴⁴ Both women play modest roles in the structure of the entire narrative, for their agency is confined to the domestic sphere and has no direct influence on the masculine world of politics in which Łazar is particularly interested. Their representation nevertheless bears remarkable testimony to the duty of noble women in fifth-century Armenia to provide education to the young members of family.

After the disastrous effects of the battle of Avarayr most noble families were left without a *tanutēr* or other senior male family member. As a consequence, the *tantiknayk'* – the senior women of each family – temporarily assumed additional responsibilities until the legitimate heirs came of age.⁴⁵ In this respect, the passage in which Juik and Anušvram are introduced is highly revealing, for it highlights the contribution of women to the instruction of the young:

The sons of those martyred with saint Vardan, of the same Mamikonean family or of the Kamsarakan family or of other clans, were still in their youth. They were instructed and taught and educated with great solicitude by the wives of the martyrs and of the prisoners at court, despite their tribulation. These were not carefree and frivolous women but like brave men they took care of the whole education of these children in useful and noble accomplishments. The most notable was the wife of the martyr Hmayeak Mamikonean, brother of saint Vardan, who was a renowned woman and the most virtuous and the wisest of all the women in Armenia. She raised and educated her own sons in Georgia, in the house of Ašušay, the *bdeašx* of Georgia. These were the ones that Ašušay, *bdeašx* of Georgia, had requested from Yazkert king of Persia, as we described above, and had restored to their mother, whose name was Juik. For Ašušay, *bdeašx* of Georgia, had married Juik's sister, who was called

⁴³ *ŁP*, p. 158 [107].

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 163 [111].

⁴⁵ A similar pattern when the wife assumes additional authority in the absence of her husband is observed in the case of Queen P'aňanjem (see below *Chapter VI*, 4).

Anušvram. So her children were brought up and educated here, made great progress, and became famous.⁴⁶

Łazar explicitly mentions that noble women were involved in some aspects of education (*usuc'eal, xrateal*), and hired tutors⁴⁷ for others (*usuc'anel tueal*). Even though from this passage it is unclear what the “whole education” consisted of, it is reasonable to surmise that it was all-round education which included *inter alia* moral and religious edification along with thorough military preparation.⁴⁸ This supposition is supported by that part of the *Letter*, in which Łazar describes representatives of the Armenian nobility: “These three men had a common upbringing and education, *spiritually* and *physically*, and a knowledge of the orthodox faith from your blessed

⁴⁶ *ŁP*, pp. 162–163 [110–111]: «Եւ զմնացեալ դեռեալ ի տղայութեան հասակի զորդիս նահատակելոցն ընդ սրբոյն Վարդանայ, որք ի նոյն տոհմէ Մամիկոնէիցն էին եւ կամ որք ի տոհմէ Կամսարականացն եւ կամ յայլ ազգաց, կանայք նահատակելոցն արանց եւ կապելոց ի դրանն, թէպէտ եւ ի նեղութեան էին, սակայն ուսուցեալ եւ բազում հոգողութեամբ ուսուցանել տուեալ եւ խրատեալ՝ ոչ իբրեւ զանկոյրս եւ զանպիտան կանայս, այլ իբրեւ զհաջայրս՝ զառաջիկայ զօգտաբեր շէղաբար հրահանգս մանկանցն հոգացեալ լնուին: Եւ մանաւանդ կին նահատակին Հմայեկայ Մամիկոնէի եղբօր սրբոյն Վարդանայ, որ եղեւ կին անուանի եւ առաւելեալ ամենայն լաւ եւ մտաւոր մասամբ յամենայն կանայս ի Հայաստան աշխարհիս. որ սնոյն եւ խրատեաց զորդիսն իւր յաշխարհին Վրաց, ի տան Աւուռայի Վրաց բդեթի, զորս բդեթին Վրաց Աւուռայ խնդրեաց պարգեւս ի յարքայէն Պարսից Յազկերտէ, ըստ առաջագրելոցն կարգի, եւ ածեալ ետ ցմայրն իւրեանց, որում անուն էր Զուլիկ. վասն զի զնոյրն Զուլկայ ունէր ի կնութեան բդեթին Վրաց Աւուռայ, որում անուն էր Անուշվրամ: Եւ սնուցեալ անդ մանկունքն եւ ուսեալ՝ յառաջադէմք էին յամենայնի եւ հռչակաւորք»։ There is a reference to the same events in the *Letter* (ibid., p. 250 [188]), where Łazar again extols the contributions made by Juik and Anušvram in the education of children, amongst whom was Łazar himself: «սնուցանէ մայրն ձեր օրինեալ եւ Անուշ-Վրամ ըստ իւրեանց հոգեսիրութեանն եւ զմեզ ընդ ձեզ՝ որպէս եւ զձեզ»; “your blessed mother, then, and Anuš-Vram in their devotion raised me with you and in the same fashion.”

⁴⁷ «դայեակ» or «դաստիարակ»; see, for instance, *ŁP*, p. 95 [56]. See also above *Chapter III*, 2.2.

⁴⁸ In this respect, the late Sasanian text “King Husrav and his Boy” (Unvala 1921; see also above *Chapter I*, 4.1) is of great interest, for it supplies fine details about the type of education that noblemen received in Iranian society. The boy claims that he has been instructed in religious texts, literature, history and rhetoric (Unvala 1921, §§9–10), he has practised military skills (§§11–12), played musical instruments (§13), he has studied astrology (§14), chess and other board games (§15); he also demonstrates excellent knowledge of gastronomy (§§20–59) and so on. Due to the conservative nature of education as a social institution and the long-standing cultural ties between the Armenian and Persian nobility (see *Chapter I*), it is likely that the system of education in Armenia had a similar structure, though a further investigation into this is required.

mother and your lordship.”⁴⁹ In addition to mentioning the spiritual and physical aspects of education, the narrator once again highlights the participation of the Mamikonean *tantikin* in the process of religious edification of the noblemen.

Furthermore, Łazar informs us that when the Armenian *naxarars* feigned apostasy at the court of Yazkert, the Persian king and his entourage “commanded that in the three lands [Armenia, Georgia, and Albania] schools of deceit be established and that everyone equally, men and women, be instructed in the teaching of the magi.”⁵⁰ To this account Elišē adds that the Persian officials banned priests from entering the households and instructing people,⁵¹ which may refer to the way women would normally be educated. However, in Armenia “the nobles’ wives, whom the magi had expected to instruct, abhorred even to set eyes on them and firmly commanded tutors never to let their sons or daughters come near them.”⁵²

These excerpts clearly demonstrate that women had access to religious education and that they personally oversaw the instruction their children received. It is also worth stressing that Łazar’s emphatic language reveals a certain degree of

⁴⁹ ŁP, p. 257 [195]: «Եւ ունին երեւեան արքայ զամենայն սննդեան եւ խրատու մասն եւ զիրահանգ *հոգեպէս* եւ մարմնապէս, զծանօթութիւնս ուղղափառ հաւատոյ՝ յօրհնելոյ ի մօրէն քունմէ եւ ի քէն ի տեսունէ» (*my italics*).

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 93 [54]: «[Երազարսն Պարսից եւ ամենայն մեծամեծք դրանն եւ մոգք] պատուէր տային՝ յերեսին յաշխարհսն [ի Հայս, ի Վիրս եւ յԱղուանս] կարգել զխաբէտութեան դպրոցս եւ ուսուցանել առ հասարակ զբնաս, զարս եւ զկանայս, զուսմունս մոգուցն»։ The same is attested by Elišē (p. 103 [52]), according to whom the chief-magus pronounces the orders of the king in front of his people saying that “the wives of the [Armenian] princes shall receive the magi’s instruction. Sons and daughters of the nobility and peasantry shall study the precepts of these same magi”; «կանայք նախարարացն կալցին զուսումն վարդապետութեան մոգացն։ Ուստեք եւ դստեք ազատաց եւ շինականաց կրթեցին ի քրահանգս նոցուն մոգաց»։

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 103 [52]: «Քահանայք մի՛ իւրեւցեն ի տունս իւրեանց ուսուցանել զժողովուրդս...»; “Priests shall not be allowed to instruct the people in their own homes...”

⁵² ŁP, p. 101 [60]: «կանայք նախարարացն, զորս կարծէին մոգքն աշակերտել՝ այնք եւ տեսանել անգամ զարեւին զնոսա, այլ զորդիս իւրեանց եւ զդստերս՝ պատուիրէին ստէպ դաստիարակացն՝ չանցուցանել երբեք առ նոքոք մօտ»։

authority that these women exercised in their household; the hostile welcome that was extended to apostatised *naxarars* was the result of their agency.⁵³

Other passages, too, point to women's association with religious practices in which the minors also participated. In the words attributed to Yazkert, for instance, the king warns his soldiers to execute the Armenian priests in a place where their bodies will not be found, for

those who belong to the erring sect of the Christians ... say about the bones of those who die for their god, that if anyone has in his house even a small fragment of them no harm or evil machination touches him or his house or his dear ones. ... their wives, sons, and daughters, when brought by anyone ornaments of gold, silver, or pearls, if the smallest piece of these dead men's bones is given them, think this to be the most estimable and precious. ... The wives of these Christians think nothing of taking off and giving away the ornaments of their fathers and mothers made with great labour in their memory, necklaces or strings of very valuable pearls, in order to buy fragments of such people's bones.⁵⁴

The “wives, sons, and daughters” who display enormous devotion to the relics of Christian saints, are mentioned here as one category of people within a *naxarar*

⁵³ There are two other episodes that support this conclusion. First, when the apostatised *naxarars* entered their households, their children fled from them “in consternation, thinking them transformed; and not seeing the familiar figures they were terrified. Looking steadfastly at the faces of their mothers, they saw them to be continually wailing and shedding torrents of tears”; «աղայք անձկոտք ի գրկաց հարց իւրեանց պակուցեալք փախչէին, կարծելով այլափոխեալս իմն, եւ ոչ գնոյնս նկատելով կերպարանս՝ զարհուրէին, ստէպ հայելով յերեսս մարցն, զորս տեսանէին կողկողագինս միշտ եւ արտօսաբուլիս. յաղագս որոյ եւ ինքեանք յարտասուս հարեալ տղայքն ...» (ibid., p. 95 [56]). The boys subvert their fathers' authority by avoiding them, and require reassurance from their mothers. In addition to this, everyone refuses to share food with the apostatised *tanutēr*: “neither wife nor child, nor free-man, serf, or servant”; «ոչ կին, ոչ որդի, ոչ ազատ, ոչ ծառայ ոք եւ ոչ սպասաւորք» (ibid., p. 96 [56]), which implies a general revolt in the household most likely prompted by the *tantikin*.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 135 [88]: «որք ի մուար աղանդն են քրիստոնէից ... ասեն, թէ ոսկերք այնոցիկ, որք յաղագս Աստուծոյն իւրեանց մեռանին, եւ որ ոք, ասէ, յիւրում տանն ունիցի ինչ անտի, թէ եւ փոքր խրխր ինչ ունի՝ ի վատ ինչ եւ խորամանկ ի նա եւ ի նորա տունս եւ ի սիրելիս ոչ մերձեանայ: ... կանայք նոցա, ռստերք եւ դստերք, եւ զգարդս ոսկւոյ եւ արծաթոյ եւ մարգարտոյ տարեալք ուրով նոցա, թէ կարի փոքր ինչ յոսկերաց այնր մեռելոց տայր նոցա՝ զայն մեծարգոյ եւ պատուական համարին: ... եւ զհարց եւ զմարց զարդս, զոր յանուն նոցա արարեալ է մեծաւ աշխատութեամբ, ճիտակս եւ կամ գտակս ինչ մարգարտոյ կարի մեծագնոյ՝ կանայք քրիստոնէիցդ չհամարին ինչ հանել յանձանց եւ տալ եւ գնել փխրանս ինչ յոսկերաց այնպիսեացն»». Such an attitude of non-Christians to the cult of saints and their bones is widely attested in other contemporary sources, too (see Brown 1981, pp. 6–9).

household.⁵⁵ The devoutness of women is especially stressed, and the fact of their involvement with children's edification suggests that women would endeavour to instil religious values into their children.

In the *Epic Histories*, as suggested by Pogossian,⁵⁶ there is an episode which also points to the involvement of mothers in the religious education of their children. For the medieval compiler of the histories there is only one explanation of King Pap's iniquitous behaviour: "unrighteous" P'aranjem, Pap's mother, is accused of consecrating him to the forces of evil, "and so he was filled with *dews* from childhood."⁵⁷ The 'consecration' here must refer to the upbringing of Pap, in which P'aranjem had an active participation.

Another example comes from the *Martyrdom of St Šušanik*. When the son of *bdeašx* Ašušay, Vazgen, returns from Persia to Georgia after having apostatised and adopted Zoroastrianism, his wife Šušanik, the daughter of the Armenian *sparapet* Vardan Mamikonean, repudiates his renunciation of the Christian faith: "after many laments and groans she rose and went to the church taking with her her children, for she had three sons and one daughter."⁵⁸ Šušanik falls on her knees in front of the altar and prays for the salvation of her children from the hands of the apostate.⁵⁹ Although this evidence is circumstantial and no direct reference to teaching is made, this passage paints a picture of familial worship in which the children accompany their

⁵⁵ As I have mentioned earlier (*Chapter I*, 2.2.1), in Armenian society, like in that of the Sasanians, women and minors were indeed considered as one category which was legally in the subordinate position to the adult male members of the family.

⁵⁶ Pogossian 2003, p. 374.

⁵⁷ *EH*, V.xxii: «ձօնեաց զնա դիւաց անօրէն մայրն Փառանձեն, եւ վասն այնորիկ լի էր դիւօք ի տղայութենէ իւրմէ». The same information is found earlier in *EH* IV.xliv.

⁵⁸ Muradyan 1996, p. 18 (II): «յետ բազում ողբոց եւ հառաչանաց յարուցեալ երթայր յեկեղեցին եւ գորդիսն ընդ իւր տանէր, զի էին նորա որդիք երեք եւ դուստր մի» (my translation).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 18–20 (II).

mother into the church. Taking into account all the aforementioned examples, this excerpt appears to represent a common rather than an isolated practice.⁶⁰

The last example that I would like to discuss in this respect comes from Elishē's *History*. To describe the tribulations of Armenian women after the battle of Avarayr, the fifth-century cleric uses an unusual simile by comparing the current lifestyle of Armenian women to the death of the martyrs: "The wives of the prisoners willingly chained the desires of the flesh and shared the torments of the holy prisoners; in their lifetimes they resembled the valiant martyrs in their death ..." This latter circumstance authorises them to become "consoling teachers for the imprisoned."⁶¹ Despite the use of hagiographic topoi in this account, the use of the word 'teacher' (*vardapet*) in connection with women is compelling in itself, for *vardapet* was an honorary title in the Church, primarily referring to a priest with excellent theological education that entitled him to teach.⁶² Elishē's characterisation of women by this title, which was to become solely men's prerogative in the subsequent centuries, is in agreement with our earlier observations.

⁶⁰ Interestingly, there is a piece of evidence supporting our argument in the Syriac *Life of Peter the Iberian*, attributed to John Rufus, an anti-Chalcedonian cleric (Horn and Phenix 2008, pp. lviii-lxiii), who was Łazar's contemporary. The description of Peter's childhood years vouchsafes remarkable details about the education he received in Georgia, which socially and culturally shared many common elements with Armenia. Rufus writes that "[i]t was a holy and famous woman, whose name was Zuzo, who raised Peter" (p. 11 (§9)). Zuzo's piety is corroborated by the description of her habit to pray at night (p. 21 (§17)). Peter was nurtured and educated by Zuzo and her husband Khuranios together with their own children, and Rufus is convinced that besides Peter's noble and virtuous ancestry, his "holy root", it was the upbringing of his "God-fearing foster-parents" that set Peter on the path of righteousness (p. 23 (§20)). Thus, Rufus' portrayal of Peter's early years of life is consistent with the narratives of Armenian authors about raising children.

⁶¹ *Elišē*, p. 247 [202]: «Իսկ կանայք կապելոցն կամօք կապեցին զմարմնաւոր ցանկութիւնս, եւ եղեն կցորդ չարչարանաց սուրբ կապելոցն. ի կեանս իւրեանց նմանեցին քոջ նահատակացն մահուամբ, եւ ի հեռաստանէ եղեն վարդապետք միջիբարիչք բանաորգեկեացն».

⁶² Ačariyan 1971–1979, 4:319; see also Thomson 1962, p. 367.

In Armenian *vardapet* was primarily used to render the Greek διδάσκαλος: for example, in Matt. 9:11,⁶³ in which it refers to Christ.⁶⁴ In patristic literature some women saints are also deemed worthy of this title: for instance, in the fourth century Gregory of Nyssa, whose works were among the earliest texts translated into Armenian,⁶⁵ calls his sister Macrina διδάσκαλος in two of his works. Gregory presents Macrina as an authoritative figure who elaborates on various theological and eschatological issues.⁶⁶ Similarly, in the fifth-century *Life of Melania the Younger* Gerontius refers to Melania as θεόπνευστον διδάσκαλον⁶⁷ (divinely inspired teacher), describing how she instructed and taught both women and men.⁶⁸

In Syriac tradition, too, there are women who receive the honorary title of *malpānithā* (teacher), the feminine form of *malpānā*, which was applied to such important figures of Syriac Christianity as St Ephrem and Jacob of Serug.⁶⁹ It is important to mention that *malpānā* was “one of the most revered titles in Syriac tradition, indicating not only the teaching of the Syriac language, but further, its proper (doctrinal) understanding”.⁷⁰ Jacob of Serug employs the term *malpānyāthā* to refer to members of the women’s choirs mentioned above, thus stressing their significant role in the community.

⁶³ «Իբրև տեսին փարիսեցիքն՝ ասէն ցառակերտս նորա. Հնդէ՞ք ընդ մաքսաւորս և ընդ մեղաւորս ուտէ վարդապետն ձեր»); “When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’”

⁶⁴ For other uses, see Thomson 1962, pp. 369–370.

⁶⁵ Thomson 1975, p. 464.

⁶⁶ “Vita Sanctae Macrinae,” *PG* 46, pp. 959–1000; “Dialogus de anima et resurrectione,” *PG* 46, pp. 11–160. For Patricia Wilson-Kastner (1979, p.105) Gregory portrays Macrina “as the ideal Christian teacher and philosopher, seeking God with her whole heart and mind”. Elizabeth Clark (2004, p. 179), however, believes that Macrina’s character is merely “a tool with which Gregory can reflect on various troubling intellectual and theological problems of his day”.

⁶⁷ Gerontius 1962, 64, p. 256.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 54, pp. 232–234.

⁶⁹ Payne Smith 1903, p. 278.

⁷⁰ Harvey 2005, p. 133.

4. Glimpses of Everyday Life

The *encomia* of Elišē and Łazar dedicated to the wives and daughters of the *naxarar* families provide unique insights into the everyday life of noble women in fifth-century Armenia. Elišē's praise is considerably longer than Łazar's but they share the same argument as far as the women are concerned. In the aftermath of the defeat at Avarayr many *naxarar* families were left without their leading members, for they either perished on the battlefield or were taken to Persia as captives. Their wives and daughters witnessed the country's devastation and had to experience severe deprivation,⁷¹ during which they displayed high moral qualities and an exemplary behaviour. The enumeration of the amenities they lost and the mention of practices they had to abandon enable us to reconstruct certain aspects of noble women's common habits and practices before the rebellion.

The representation of women's tribulations contains two layers of narrative – hagiographic and factual, which are intertwined in such a way that it is not easy to differentiate between them. The authors describe women and their experience in terms that were commonly used in hagiographic texts, but at the same time they provide important information about women's everyday life. If we read beyond this rhetorically embellished depiction, we may establish intriguing details of women's everyday life and catch a glimpse of the reality on the ground, in particular, in the domestic sphere which commonly remained in the dark.

⁷¹ Evidence suggests that the standards of living indeed deteriorated after the revolt. Besides the account of the impoverishment of the *naxarar* estates, both Elišē (p. 234 [188]) and Łazar (pp. 156–157 [106]) stress the importance of Abraham the priest's charitable activity in Northern Mesopotamia, by which he endeavoured to support financially the imprisoned Armenian nobles. In order to raise funds, Abraham does not turn to their families but instead for twelve years he has to rely on the donations provided by the local Christian population. See also *Chapter III*, n. 59.

In the initial part of the encomium Elišē's account sounds quite realistic: by the frequent use of negative words and particles Elišē emphasises the lack of common luxuries to which the women were accustomed.

For although they each had their domestic servants, none could be distinguished among them as being mistress or maid. ... They had no confectioners for individual delicacies nor separate bakers to serve them in accordance with their noble rank, but they shared all they had. ... No one poured water over another's hands; the younger did not offer older towels. The delicate women did not use soap, nor were they offered oil for merry feasting. Immaculate dishes were not set before them, nor plates for jollity. No butler stood at their door, and no illustrious men were invited to their homes. ... the vessels for their banquets were broken. ... Their flower gardens dried up and turned to sand; the wine-bearing stocks of their vineyards were uprooted.⁷²

This passage amply shows that within the household there was a specific hierarchy which included not only mistress–servant relationships, but also a clear ranking and distribution of responsibilities among the noblewomen depending on the age and perhaps status in the family. Noble women, as one would expect, were attended by a group of servants who carried out a variety of domestic chores. One form of entertainment that they enjoyed was the visits of prominent men which were most likely accompanied by banquets in their honour. The allusion to “their” (*noc‘a*) beautiful flower gardens and vineyards in this context may suggest that women would normally oversee the process of cultivating plants and perhaps even winemaking.⁷³

⁷² *Elišē*, pp. 244–245 [200–201]: «Զի քեպէտ եւ ունէին զիւրաքանչիւր ձեռնասուն սպասուորս, ոչ ոք երեւէր ի նոցանէ՝ քէ ո՛ր տիկինն իցէ եւ կամ ո՛ր նաժիւտն. ... Ոչ գոյր նոցա խախտմո՞ւմ անուշաբար առանձինն, եւ ոչ հացաբարձ որոշեալ ի պէտս սպասու ըստ ազատաց կարգի, այլ հասարակաց էր: ... Ոչ ոք ունէ՞ ջուր ի ձեռս արկանէր, եւ ոչ կրտսերք աւագաց դաստառակս մատուցանէին. չանկաւ օճեան ի ձեռս փափկասուն կանանց, եւ ոչ մատուցաւ եղ ի գուարբորին խրախուրեան: Չեղան առաջի սուրբ սկտեղֆ, եւ ոչ անկան բաժակակալ յուրախորին. չեկաց ուրո՞ք նոցա նուիրակ առ դուրս, եւ ոչ կոչեցան պատուական յարանց ի տաճարս նոցա. ... եւ խանգարեցան սպասք երախանաց նոցա: ... Չուրացան ազագեցան բուրաստանք ծաղկոցաց նոցա, եւ տաւտախիլ եղեն որք զինեքեր այգեաց նոցա».

⁷³ Cf. Prov. 31:16 about the ideal wife: “She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.”

Amongst the lost attributes of a luxurious lifestyle Elišē also mentions the “chairs of honor in their [women’s] houses.”⁷⁴ Considering the fact that in *naxarar* Armenia the word *gah* (throne, chair) also referred to the position and status of a *naxarar* in the society, this reference may indicate the existence of a similar stratification within the *naxarar*’s household, where the wife of the *paterfamilias* held a respected position. The existence of the throne of honour of the *materfamilias* is further supported by a passage in the *Epic Histories*, in which the wife of the *sparapet* Vardan Mamikonean is portrayed “on her throne on the fortress up above” when she hears “the mournful clamour” announcing her husband’s death.⁷⁵

A similar account is presented by Łazar, who lists a number of worldly pleasures of which noblewomen were deprived: “fine wheat flour [bread]”, “pure wine”, “silken garments embroidered with gold”, “elaborate beds” and “perfume”.⁷⁶

Elišē’s encomium also contains the first reference in Armenian literature to women sponsoring memorials. According to the author, those who perished in the battlefield or were held in the Persian prison “were recalled only by commemoration, and no yearly festivals brought them back from afar. ... Many columns were set up in their memory, and the names of each one were inscribed thereon.”⁷⁷ This type of social activity is better attested in later sources which testify to noblewomen’s

⁷⁴ *Elišē*, p. 245 [201]: «Կարծանեցան բարձրագահ տաճարաց նոցա».

⁷⁵ *EH*, IV.xviii: «Եւ կինն նորա [Վարդանայ] յղի էր, եւ հասեալ էին աւուրք ծննդեան իւրոյ: Մինչ դեռ ի վեր ի բերդին նստէր ի գահոյս իւրում, եղև գոյժ սաստիկ. իսկ նա իբրեւ գժայն գուժոյն լսէր, վազէր ի գահոյից անտի, եւ ընդ վազելն ծնանէր գմանուկն».

⁷⁶ *ŁP*, p. 161 [109–110]: «Կանայք փափուկք, դասերք նախարարացն եւ կանայք աւագաց, փոխանակ նաւեոյ կորեակ ուտէին, եւ փոխանակ պարզ գինւոյ ջուր չափով ըմպէին. Փոխանակ կերպասեայ ոսկէհուռ զգեստուցն խոռոբ բրդեայս զգենուին, եւ փոխանակ բազմաղինի անկողնոցն փրիսայիւք ի վերայ երկրի գետնատարածք լինէին».

⁷⁷ *Elišē*, p. 247 [203]: «Բնագրօք յիշատակեցան նոքա, եւ ոչ մի տօնք տարեկանաց ոչ ածին զնոսա ի հեռաստանէ. ... Բազում արձանք կանգնեալ էին յանուն նոցա, եւ անուանք իւրաքանչիւր նշանակեալ ի նոսա».

involvement in the construction of monasteries and churches, as well as their sponsoring of manuscripts.⁷⁸

5. Conclusion

The reconstruction of women's daily life from the extant sources reveals only certain aspects of female agency and experience in early Christian Armenia. The image that is created is incomplete, yet some general conclusions can nevertheless be drawn. On the representation level women were portrayed positively, with the exception of occasional references to women's "natural weakness".⁷⁹ They were endowed with active agency, could appear in public and have some influence on social processes. One of the main roles that senior women in noble households would assume was that of an educator which involved both some teaching and supervision of children's education.

Beyond this representation, however, we can perceive distinct hierarchical relationships which limited the extent of female agency and experience primarily to the domestic sphere. Women's status within the family largely determined the responsibilities they had in the household, as well as the spaces to which they had access. The boundaries of these spaces were clearly defined, though under special circumstances they could be crossed.

⁷⁸ See Rapti 2014 (I would like to thank Ioanna Rapti for allowing me access to this article prior to its publication).

⁷⁹ See, for instance, *Elišē*, p. 246 [202] and *LP*, p. 161 [109] (*Chapter III*, 2.5.1 and 2.5.2).

Chapter V

Marriage in Early Christian Armenia

1. Introduction

One of the most characteristic features of marriage traditions and customs is conservatism. The old rituals and customary practices do not usually fade away with the emergence of a new socio-political reality but they are often modified to fit the new ideological framework. The primary mechanisms include substitution of an old ritual by its symbolic representation, and reinterpretation of the practice through the discourse of the emerging power. Some of the customs, nevertheless, are deemed unacceptable and therefore attempts are made to eradicate them.¹ The literary sources of the fifth century contain depictions of these processes in early Christian Armenia, the study of which will be conducive to our understanding of the institution of marriage in Armenia before and after Christianisation.

This chapter will explore the existing scholarship on the topic and challenge some of its current assumptions. In particular, I shall discuss Alessandro Orenco's classification of conjugal bonds in early Christian Armenia, for much of which the author adduces are valid arguments, though more precise definitions of the types of marriage are required. I shall also argue that the Armenian nobility followed primarily Iranian marriage practices, while the lower classes preferred local customs. Furthermore, as a case study, I will focus on the representation of Queen P'aranjem's

¹ For examples of these mechanisms applied in Armenian tradition throughout centuries, see Samuëlean 1904, pp. 51–68.

marriages to Gnel Aršakuni and King Aršak, and will demonstrate that she entered into her second marriage according to the Iranian *stūr* practice, rather than in accordance with marriage “for a definite period”, as Garsoïan has recently suggested. Finally, the representation of widowhood in the fifth-century sources will be examined.

2. Different Traditions

After Armenia’s Christianisation the Church devoted considerable effort to prohibit all the practices concerning marriage that did not comply with the Christian teachings.² Most of these practices nevertheless were so deeply rooted in the customs and traditions of the people that even harsh punishments imposed by the Church authorities would not act as a deterrent. In order to understand the nature of these practices I shall refer to the Iranian marriage models discussed in *Chapter I*, as well as to those canons of the Council of Šahapivan (444),³ which dealt with undesirable practices.

Orengo has noted that some of the marriage practices condemned by the canons of Šahapivan seem to have ancient roots, for they have also been attested among different Indo-European peoples, whereas certain marriage patterns appear to be of Iranian origin and are well-documented in the Sasanian law-code *Mātakdān ī hazār dādastān* (*The Book of a Thousand Judgements*).⁴ I shall go one step further and argue that the elite of the Armenian nobility primarily upheld the Iranian marriage

² The first attested evidence is found in the *Epic Histories*, which recounts the reforms introduced by St Nersēs during his reign as patriarch of Greater Armenia in *ca* 353–373 (*EH* IV.iv, V.xxi and xxxi).

³ For the Council of Šahapivan, see Hakobyan 1964, pp. 627–635; Arevshatian 1959, pp. 334–337; Akinean 1949, pp. 79–140.

⁴ Orengo 2009, p. 648.

traditions, whereas local marriage customs were more popular among the general population. My observation relies on the fact that fifth-century Armenian historians,⁵ predominantly writing for and about the nobles, allude to conjugal relationships of the *naxarars*, which bear an unmistakable Iranian (Zoroastrian) trace. In contrast to it, on the basis of the canons of Šahapivan it becomes clear that the *azats* and *šinakans* alongside certain Zoroastrian practices also followed local marriage customs which were decried by the Church.⁶

Political, economic, and cultural factors lay behind this divergence of attitude. The centuries-long political and cultural affiliations with the Persian court, the constant need for preserving the old and forging new alliances, and sharing the same religious beliefs were conducive to strengthening ties between the Armenian and Iranian elite. However, with the establishment of the Sassanid dynasty in 224 CE in Persia the process of political alienation of the Armenian nobility from the Persians began, and with Armenia's Christianisation at the beginning of the fourth century the foundation for a cultural breach was laid. This was, undoubtedly, a slow process, and in the fourth and fifth centuries we can still observe the manifestations of the Iranian substratum of Armenian culture in the works of historians. As for the economic significance of these ties, the Iranian system of agnatic family relationships enabled the preservation of the dynastic property and ensured a family's influential position in the society.⁷ These factors, however, could not have had profound effect on the lifestyle of the *azats* and *šinakans* due to their lower status and insignificant political weight in society.

⁵ An exception might be Xorenac'i, if we place him in the fifth century, who relates the epic story of the Armenian King Artasēs and the Albanian Princess Sat'īnik discussed below.

⁶ Orengo 2009, p. 648 and 2004, pp. 534–536.

⁷ For more details, see *Chapter I*, 2.2.1.

In general, marriages attracted the attention of fifth-century Armenian historians exclusively if they had major social and political consequences. Therefore, it is not surprising that primarily information about the conjugal bonds of the elite has been preserved. A close examination of extant sources, especially of the *Epic Histories*, reveals many elements of Iranian types of marriage, which constitutes another piece of evidence for the continuity of Iranian mentality in Armenia after Christianisation. The strident criticism that some of the customs received in religious and historical writing enables us today to research into practices that continued in the new socio-political reality.

3. Local Customs

Based on his reading of *Canons VI* and *VII* of Šahapivan, Orengo points to three ways in which one could get a wife: a) the future husband paid a “compenso” (fee, compensation) to the girl’s family; b) “ottenere per ratto”, obtaining wife through rape/abduction, and c) “unioni di fatto”, when a couple lived together without being formally married.⁸ This classification seems to reflect the actual situation in society, yet more precise definitions of each type should be provided. Thus, Orengo’s first type of conjugal bonds is well known to Armenian sources as marriage by *varjank*‘ (payment, dowry), whereas the second type should be more accurately referred to as ‘marriage by abduction,’ rather than ‘by rape’.⁹ Finally, the “unioni di

⁸ Orengo 2009, pp. 646–647.

⁹ The Italian word “ratto” can be rendered as both ‘abduction’ and ‘rape’, but Orengo in his earlier English language study refers to this type of marriage as “by way of rape” (2004, p. 534). The Armenian «տեւանկ անկիցեն» from *Canon VII* (see below), on which Orengo bases his conclusion, signifies abduction rather than rape: according to *NBHL* (1:302) «տեւանկ» or «տեւանկ» renders Greek ἀππαγή, Latin *rapina*, *raptus* and means “seizing and fleeing,” as well as “abducting a girl, or a stranger’s wife.” Therefore, I believe that the canons of

fatto” are most likely references to *stūr* marriages. A discussion of the representation of each type of marriage in the literary texts and church canons enables us to understand the basic structure of the institution of marriage in early Christian Armenia.

3.1 Marriage by *Varjank*⁹

The most common and socially acceptable type of marriage was the one achieved through mutual agreement of the families of future husband and wife, accompanied by the symbolic payment of a bride price – *varjank*⁹ – by the man’s family to the family of the bride. It was legally a complete marriage corresponding to the Iranian *pātixšāyīh* type, which was usually negotiated between the man or his father if he was alive, and the woman’s father or guardian. It was considered unacceptable to force the girl to marry someone she did not want to.¹⁰ Yet, taking into account the patriarchal nature of the Armenian family, we should not be too optimistic about the alternatives that a woman had: it is more likely that, being under absolute control of the *tanutēr* and not having many options, she would eventually give in to coercions.¹¹

The events preceding the wedding are interesting by themselves for they involved customs some of which have been preserved until our days. In order to

Šahapivan are seriously concerned with bride theft rather than rape. Another piece of evidence that supports this view is found in the same canon, for it discusses different attitudes to the marriage of the abductor and the abducted girl depending on whether “they have fornicated earlier,” or not, which clearly implies that the abduction was not necessarily accompanied by intercourse or rape. Arevshatian, too, translates «անեամնի աննիցեն» into Russian with the word ‘abduct’ – «Если похитят девицу» (1959, p. 342).

¹⁰ Perikhanian 1983a, p. 647. See also *Canon XXVII* attributed to St Sahak, which forbids the marriage of young people if they have not seen each other before and/or if they are forced to marry against their will (Hakobyan 1964, p. 382).

¹¹ Cf. Treggiari 1982, discussing a similar situation in Roman society.

arrange the union of two people, the family of the man would send a delegation to the future bride's house to negotiate the marriage. The Armenian word for bride, *harsn*, is etymologically connected to the verb *hartsnel*, which means 'to ask, inquire'.¹² Thus, the delegates would come to the girl's house and ask for her hand,¹³ and a customary ritual of refusal by the girl's relatives and persuasion by the man's representatives would follow. Eventually, after having provided gifts and money (*varjank'*) to the girl's family, an agreement would be reached,¹⁴ which meant that the girl was officially betrothed to the man. Soon, the wedding would be arranged and the couple would go to the church to receive the nuptial blessings, after which the bride would pass under the protection of her husband's family that was now responsible for her welfare.¹⁵ This meant losing her position in her family and acquiring a new status in the clan of her husband. It also entailed certain duties and responsibilities which depended on the bride's position in the family hierarchy.¹⁶

The presents and money given to the bride's family did not represent the price of purchase of the girl, although it could have been the case originally, but a symbolic gesture meant to prevent blood vengeance which would take place in the case of abducting the girl without prior betrothal.¹⁷ Gift-giving had its benefits, for it would

¹² See Martirosyan 2010, pp. 395–396, Mahé 2000, p. 694, Ačaryan 1971–1979, 3:62–63, and Hübschmann 1897, pp. 464–465.

¹³ In modern eastern Armenian this act is described by the phrase գնալ աղջիկ ուզելու (literally, 'go to ask for the girl').

¹⁴ See Mahé 2000, pp. 694–695, quoting Xorenac'i, Darinsky, Lalayan and Charachidze.

¹⁵ For details of wedding customs in different Armenian communities, see Samuëlean 1904, pp. 51–62.

¹⁶ Also see *Chapter I*, 2.2.2 and *Chapter IV*, 2.2.

¹⁷ This is an observation made by Mahé based on Darinsky's study of traditions and habits of mountainous peoples of the Caucasus (Mahé 2000, p. 695 n. 92); see also Samuëlean 1904, pp. 64–68. This is how *NBHL* (2:796) explains *varjank'*: «Φερνή. Dos. δόμα, donum. Վարձ հարսին կամ հարսնությանն ի փեսայէ եւ ի տանէ նորա»; "Payment towards the bride or marriage provided by the bridegroom and his family" (my translation).

have helped the man to bring his wife back, had she decided to run away from him.¹⁸ Thus, *Canon VI* of Šahapivan states that “[i]f the wife abandons her husband, let her be seized and brought back to him, especially if she was taken by means of payment [*varjank*] and not like a harlot.”¹⁹

For the wedding, the bride’s family was obliged to provide a dowry, *awžit*, which, depending on the socio-economic status of the family, could consist of possessions from personal jewellery to tracts of land.²⁰ However, this property was inalienable and still belonged to the wife’s *tohm* in the case of divorce,²¹ which meant that potentially the wife had some means at her disposal and could use them independently.²²

In the Iranian tradition divorce was normally achieved by mutual agreement, but if the woman was barren or displayed deviant behaviour, primarily adultery, the husband could dissolve the union by himself.²³ The extant evidence suggests that the situation was not different in Zoroastrian and early Christian Armenia. Xorenac‘i, for instance, describes the separation of Gregory (St. Gregory the Illuminator) and his wife Mariam in the following terms: “But when the child [Gregory] reached maturity,

¹⁸ Orengo 2009, p. 647.

¹⁹ Hakobyan 1964, p. 438: «Եթե կին ու յառնէ ելանիցէ, կալցին եւ անդրէն յայր իւր տացեն, եւ մանաւանդ զոր վարձանաւ իցէ վարձեալ եւ ոչ բողաբար» (my translation).

²⁰ See below *Canon V* of Šahapivan, where as a dowry “a maid, cattle, silver” are mentioned.

²¹ Mahé 2000, p. 695; Adoyan 1965, p. 55. For the inalienable property of the Iranian family, see Pigulevskaya 1956, pp. 178–179, 181, 183–184. It is noteworthy that in contemporary Armenia the concept of ‘inalienability’ of dowry still exists, for it should be returned to the woman’s family, if the couple gets divorced.

²² Although the fifth-century sources do not contain evidence of women’s freedom to manage their own possessions, the financial support that women provided during the construction of churches in a slightly later period (see Rapti 2014) points in that direction.

²³ Perikhanian 1983a, p. 648.

a certain Christian called David married him to his daughter Mariam. After the birth of two sons in three years, they both willingly separated from each other.”²⁴

Canon V of Šahapivan provides further insights into the divorce practice:

If one takes a wife who turns out to be barren, and the man leaves her because of her infertility, the woman is entitled to take back all the belongings she has brought with her to [her husband's] house – a maid, cattle, garments, silver – and leave. And if besides infertility, the woman has no other defects, the husband must also pay the woman a fine for insult: if he is *azat* – 1200 dram; if he is *šinakan* – 600.²⁵

This canon seems to be congruous with the Iranian divorce law according to which “when divorce occurred the woman took away with her, besides her dowry, her personal possessions and her *kāpēn* (*donatio propter nuptial*)”.²⁶ In addition, it clearly states that infertility was considered to be a defect (*arat*), albeit not a very serious one, for the husband was obliged to repair the moral damage caused by the divorce because of infertility.

To summarise, the marriage by *varjank*‘ was the most acceptable type of marriage, approved by the communities and religious authorities. If no breach of *awrēnk*‘ was detected, the priest would marry the couple in the church and their marriage would be perceived as a chaste union.²⁷

²⁴ *MX*, II.lxxx: «Բայց յարբունս հասակի հասեալ մանկանն [Գրիգորի]՝ փեսայացուցանէ հաւատացեալ ոմն այր, որում անուն էր Դաւիթ, ի դուստր իւր Մարիամ. որ յետ երկց ամաց երկուց որպէս լինելոյ, ի կամաց երկուցունց մեկնեալ ի միմեանց գատչին».

²⁵ Hakobyan 1964, pp. 436–437: «Եթե կին ոք արար եւ ամուլ պատահեաց, եւ այրն հանցէ զնա վասն ամուլքեանն, որ ինչ կնոջն կարասի բերեալ է ի տուն, թէ աղախին թէ անասուն, եթէ հանդէրծ եթէ արծաթ՝ առնուլ ի շէնցէ եւ զնայ: Եւ եթէ քան զամուլքիւնն այլ արատ չգուցէ ի [կինն]՝ մարդն տուգան եւս տացէ կնոջն, վասն անարգանացն, թէ ազատ է՝ ՌՄ դրամ, եւ եթէ շինական՝ Ո» (my translation).

²⁶ Perikhanian 1983a, p. 648.

²⁷ Cf. Hakobyan 1964, p. 432; the rendering of Heb. 13:4 in *Canon III* of Šahapivan: «Պատուական է ամուսնութիւն եւ անարատ անկողինք, որ սրբութեամբ գուգին»; “Honourable is the marriage and undefiled is the bed [of those] who married in chastity.”

3.2 Marriage by Abduction

The practice of abducting a girl for marriage purposes goes back to ancient times and has been attested in many societies,²⁸ including the Armenian one. From the fifth century onwards, the Armenian Church authorities made constant efforts to ban this practice, but its survival until today clearly indicates that this ancient custom was very much approved of by the general populace.

Recent anthropological studies have shown that the basic pattern of this practice does not differ much from one society to another. Here is the brief summary of its main features:

The would-be abductor gathers together male companions of his own age. The raiding party may waylay the intended bride outside her home while she is going about her daily chores, for instance at the well, or they may break into her house and seize her. Often violence ensues. The girl's father and brothers will attempt to defend her; the conflict may result in death, particularly for the abductor.

If the abduction is successful, the girl is taken to a place outside the village, perhaps in the woods, where she cannot be found. She may then be raped by her prospective husband, but not necessarily; what is important is that her reputation will be irreversibly damaged, since it will be assumed by her family and by the community that she is no longer a virgin. ... she knows she will not be able to make a good marriage with anyone else after her reputation has been so compromised.

The girl's family will be very angry for a while, perhaps for as long as several years. Eventually, however, there will be a reconciliation, particularly if the couple have a baby.²⁹

In some cases, the girl has a prior agreement with her abductors and facilitates her own abduction: in other words, she elopes with the man for whom she feels affection. This usually happens because the girl's family is against her marriage to the

²⁸ See, for instance, the special issue of *Anthropological Quarterly* (47:3 (1974)) entitled "Kidnapping and Elopement as Alternative Systems of Marriage."

²⁹ Evans-Grubbs 1989, p. 62. A similar pattern is described by Samuëlean (1904, pp. 47–51), who provides examples of this practice in various Armenian communities.

specific person.³⁰ Another reason for abducting a girl is her unwillingness to marry that man, though after the abduction she is left with virtually no alternative.

Although we possess little information about the abduction practice in early Christian Armenia, it is still sufficient to suggest that the Armenian pattern was not different from the one described above. I shall limit myself to a discussion of two references to kidnapping women: one – the condemnation of this practice in the canons of Šahapivan, and the second – the fragment of an epic of Artasēs and Sat‘inik preserved in Xorenac‘i’s *History*.

3.2.1 Canon VII

The Šahapivan *Canon VII* provides valuable information about the practice of bride theft, for it mentions all the parties involved in it and the punishment that will be imposed on the offenders. Therefore, it is worth citing it in its entirety:

Let those who committed the abduction seize the woman and return her to her father and mother, and pay a fine to them for insult: if [the abductor is] *azat* – 1200 dram, if *šinakan* – 600. And the gang that assisted the pseudo-bridegroom, each must pay a fine of 100 dram, half of which will be given to the Church, and the other half to the destitute. If the pseudo-bridegroom has committed fornication with the girl without marrying her, he must pay 100 dram to the Church; for showing disrespect to the nuptial blessing, he must live 3 years in repentance. If a priest married them without the girl’s mother and father, let he be stripped off his priesthood and pay 100 dram to the destitute, and the marriage must be considered invalid. And even if, after this trouble and punishment, the girl and her parents reach an agreement [with the man], their union must not be blessed if they have fornicated earlier, but it must be treated as second marriage and [twigs of] willow must be put on their heads in the form of the cross. But if they remained virgins, their marriage must be blessed according to the law. This applies to both *azats* and *šinakans*.³¹

³⁰ Evans-Grubbs 1989, pp. 62–63.

³¹ Hakobyan 1964, pp. 439–440: «Որք առեաւորս առնիցեն, կալցին զկիսն եւ անդէն տացեն ցհայր եւ ցմայր իւր եւ տուգան տացեն փոխանակ անարգանացն երէ ազատ է՝ ՌՄ դրամ, երէ շինական է՝ Ո: Եւ որք հրոսն երթեալ էին ազնականք սուտ փեսային՝ առ այրն ձ դրամ տուգանեացին, եւ զհրոսին դրամն զկէսն յեկեղեցի տացեն եւ զկէսն կարասեւոյ: Ապա երէ սուտ փեսայն ընդ աղջկանն պոռնկեցաւ առանց պսակ դնելոյ՝ յեկեղեցի տուգան կալցին ձ դրամ. զի զպսակն արհնութեան անարգեաց, Գ ամս յապաշխարութեան կացցէ: Ապա երէ երիցու ուրուք գաղտ պսակ եղեալ իցէ, առանց հուր եւ մուր աղջկանն, երէցն գաւհանայութիւնն չիշխէ պաշտել եւ ձ դրամ տուգան կալցին եւ կարասեւոյ տացեն եւ պսակ, զոր եղ, անվաւեր լիցի: Ապա երէ յետ այսր խոովութեան եւ

The general pattern of how an abduction is organised appears virtually identical to the one described above. It is clear that the bridegroom always acted with a group of accomplices (*hros*), and there were priests who would marry the young couple, regardless of whether a fornication had taken place or not.

Two allusions to extramarital intercourse suggest that it was a common practice deeply troubling the Church authorities. The canon stresses that if the couple had lost their virginity before the sacred ceremony, their marriage was treated as a second one, which appears to have been socially inferior to the marriage of virgins.³² It is further supported by *Canon III*, which additionally discusses the case when only one of the couple was a virgin, notably without discriminating whether it was the man or the woman.³³

Moreover, the mention of both parents of the girl, rather than only of the father, bespeaks the active participation of the mother in the issues regarding her daughter's marriage.

Unfortunately, no particulars are provided concerning the agreement that could be reached by the parties, but presumably the girl's parents would demand sufficient compensation for damaging their family's reputation and might even refuse

տուգանաց, դարձեալ ի հաւանութիւն զան կամաւ աղջկանն եւ ծնողացն, եւ թէ յառաջ պոռնկեալ են՝ պսակ մի՛ արինեացի, այլ իբրեւ գերկակին ուռ տեառնազրեալ դիցի ի գլուխ. Ապա եթէ կուսան կացեալ էն՝ ըստ արինին պսակ արինեացի: Եթէ ազատ եւ եթէ շինական՝ կանոն այդ կացցէ» (my translation).

³² Cf. Hakobyan 1964, p. 432: *Canon II* forbids the second marriage of widowed priest or his wife.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 434: «Եթէ ոք յառաջ քան զամուսնութիւնն ի պոռնկութեան գտաւ ... մի՛ իբրեւ կուսանաց պսակ արինեացեն, այլ իբրեւ երկակին տեառնազրեացեն լոկ: ... Ապա եթէ մինն սուրբ կուսան եւ մինն պոռնկեալ՝ կուսանին իբրեւ կուսանի արինեացի, եւ պոռնկացելոյն որպէս երկակին՝ ուռ տեառնազրել վասն յաղթութեան թշնամոյն ի գլուխ դիցի»; "if anyone fornicated before marriage ... their union must not be blessed as that of virgins, but it must only be signed with the cross as in the second marriage. ... But if one [of the couple] is a chaste virgin and the other is not, the virgin must be blessed as virgin, and the fornicator must be treated as marrying the second time and [branches of] willow must be put on their head in the form of the cross as a sign of victory over the enemy" (my translation).

to provide their daughter with any dowry.³⁴ It should also be noted that the canon does not differentiate between the abduction without the girl's consent and the girl's elopement, for in both cases the reputation of the girl and her family could suffer.

The fact that the canon does not impose any punishment on the girl is particularly revealing, especially if we compare it with the *Edict IX. 24. I* of the Emperor Constantine against bride theft.³⁵ According to the latter, the girl shared with the abductors the responsibility for her abduction, and she was to receive the same punishment with them, which most probably was the death penalty.³⁶ Only if the girl could prove that she had indeed endeavoured to stop the offenders, would her punishment include only loss of the right to legal succession to her parents.³⁷

The practice of bride theft has survived until today in a number of Armenian communities, especially in rural areas. It still remains a criminal offence and is

³⁴ According to Evans-Grubbs (1989, p. 63), "[i]n societies where the bride in a properly arranged marriage is expected to bring a substantial dowry to her husband, marriage by abduction even has certain advantages for the girl's family, since no dowry can be demanded by an abductor." This observation relies on the evidence provided by Campbell (1974, p. 131), who writes about the community of Greek Sarakatsan: "The bride's family are extremely angry at the time [after abduction] but their reputation is not unduly damaged; the original assertion of their greater worth, which the refusal to give the girl implied, still carries some of its force and there is considerable material compensation in the fact that no dowry need be handed over."

³⁵ It dates back to 326 CE and was included in the *Codex Theodosianus* published on 15 February 438 ("Codex Theodosianus" 1991, p. 475).

³⁶ Evans-Grubbs 1989, p. 64.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 59–60: "si voluntatis adsensio detegitur in virgine, eadem qua raptor severitate plectatur, cum neque his impunitas praestanda sit, quae rapiuntur invitae, cum et domi se usque ad coniunctionis diem servare potuerint et, si fores raptoris frangerentur audacia, vicinorum opem clamoribus quaerere seque omnibus tueri conatibus. Sed his poenam leviolem inponimus, solamque eis parentum negari successionem praecipimus"; "if voluntary assent is revealed in the virgin, she shall be struck with the same severity as her abductor; impunity shall not be offered to those girls who are abducted against their will either, since they too could have kept themselves at home till their marriage day and, if the doors were broken down by the abductor's audacity, they could have sought help from the neighbours by their cries and could have defended themselves with all their efforts. But we impose a lighter penalty on these girls, and order that only legal succession to their parents is to be denied them."

persecuted under the *Article 131* (“Kidnapping”) of the Penal Code of the Republic of Armenia.³⁸

3.2.2 *Artašēs and Sat‘inik*

Although historical writings that can safely be dated back to the fifth century do not contain any reference to marriage by abduction, the *History* of Movsēs Xorenac‘i has preserved an ancient epic tale of *Artašēs and Sat‘inik*, which provides a beautiful poetic account of bride theft. Xorenac‘i claims that the histories about King Artašēs (2nd c. BCE) were related by minstrels in the region of Gołt‘n, and that he intends to explain them to the reader because they are allegories.³⁹

According to Xorenac‘i, in the reign of Artašēs war breaks out between the Armenians and the Alans (Caucasian Albanians), and the two armies, advancing towards each other, camp on the opposite sides of the River Kura. Under unspecified circumstances, the Armenians capture the young Albanian prince, and his sister, Princess Sat‘inik, approaching the riverbank, through interpreters asks Artašēs to free her brother:

I say to you, valiant Artašēs, that you have conquered the brave nation of the Alans. Come, consent to the request of the beautiful-eyed Alan princess to give up the youth. For it is not right for heroes to take the lives of the progeny of other heroes for the sake of vengeance, or by subjecting them to keep them in the rank of slaves and perpetuate eternal enmity between two brave nations.⁴⁰

³⁸ “Glux 17: Anji Azatut‘yan, Patvi ew Aržanapatvut‘yan dem Ułvac Hanc‘agorcut‘iwnnerē” (Chapter 17: Crimes against Person’s Freedom, Honour and Dignity), 2011.

³⁹ *MX*, II.49: «Արտաշէսի վերջնոյ գործք՝ բազում ինչ յայտնի են քեզ ի վիպասանացն, որ պատմին ի Գողթան ... բայց յիշատակեցուք եւ մեք կարնոստիւք, եւ զայլաբանութիւնն նշմարեցուք»; “The deeds of the last Artašēs are mostly revealed to you from the tales told in Gołt‘n [...] But we too shall recall them briefly and give the true meaning of the allegory.”

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, II.50: «Քեզ ասեմ, այր քաջ Արտաշէս, // Որ յարկեցեր քաջ ազգին Ալանաց. // Ե՛կ հաւանեա՛ց բանից աչագեղոյ դստերս Ալանաց՝ // Տալ զպատանիդ. // Զի վասն միոյ քինու ոչ է օրէն դիւցազանց՝ // Զայլոց

Artašēs, allured by the maiden's wise words, comes closer to the riverside, and upon seeing her beauty falls in love with her. What follows resembles the marriage custom described above: a delegation of the Armenian king is sent to the Alans to ask for Sat'inik's hand. The king of the Alans expresses doubts that "the brave Artašēs" can "give a thousand thousands and a myriad myriads in return for the noble-born princess of the Alans."⁴¹ The narration here continues with Xorenac'i quoting the song of minstrels:

Noble King Artašēs mounted a beautiful black horse,
and taking a strap of red leather with golden rings
and crossing the river like a swift-winged eagle
and throwing the strap of red leather with golden rings
he cast it around the waist of the Alan princess,
greatly paining the tender maiden's waist;
and he quickly brought her to his camp.⁴²

Due to his distrust of epic tales as historical sources, Xorenac'i treats these lines as an allegory, and explains that 'red leather' and 'golden rings' represent the payment (*varjank'*) that Artašēs made for the bride.⁴³ Some scholars, on the other hand, understand it literally as a description of bride theft.⁴⁴ It is beyond the scope of this study to decide which interpretation is more accurate, but what matters here is that both of them reflect the marriage customs which the Armenians observed, namely

դիւցազանց զարմից բառնալ զկենդանութիւն, // Կամ ծառայեցուցանելով ի ստրկաց կարգի պահել, // Եւ թշնամութիւն յաւիտեանական // Ի մէջ երկոցունց ազգաց քաջաց հաստատել».

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, II.50: «Եւ ուստի՞ տացէ քաջն Արտաշէս հազարս ի հազարաց եւ բիւրս ի բիւրուց ընդ քաջագգույ կոյս օրիորդիս Ալանաց».

⁴² *Ibid.*: «Հեծաւ արի արքայն Արտաշէս ի սեւան գեղեցիկ, // Եւ հանեալ գոսկէօղ շիկափով պարանն, // Եւ անցեալ որպէս զարծուի սրաքել ընդ գետն, // Եւ ձգեալ գոսկէօղ շիկափով պարանն՝ // Հնկէց ի մէջ օրիորդին Ալանաց, // Եւ շատ ցուեցոյց զմէջք փափով օրիորդին, // Արագ հասուցանելով ի բանակն իւրե».

⁴³ *Ibid.*: «Որ եւ նշմարտութեամբ ունի այսպէս: Քանզի պատուեալ է առ Ալանս մոլոր կարմիր՝ լայքա շատ եւ ոսկի բազում տուեալ ի վարձանս՝ առնու գոիկին օրիորդն Սարինիկ: Այս է ոսկէօղ շիկափով պարանն», "The truth is as follows. Because red leather is greatly prized among the Alans, he gave much lac and gold as payment and received the maiden Sat'inik – this is the strap of red leather with gold rings."

⁴⁴ Abelyan 1968, pp. 68–69, 301; Samuëlean 1904, p. 43.

marriage by mutual agreement accompanied by the payment made to the bride's family and by abduction of the bride.

Xorenac'i also provides a compelling piece of information about the wedding ceremony. He quotes the minstrels singing: "A shower of gold rained down at the marriage of Artašēs; // it rained pearls at the wedding of Sat'inik."⁴⁵ The historian explains that the Armenian "kings had the custom of going to the door of the palace at a marriage and scattering gold coins like the Roman consuls. So too the queens [scattered] pearls in the bridal chamber."⁴⁶ Abelyan mentioned that a similar custom was observed in his times: in the towns when the "queen" and the "king" (as the Armenians are accustomed to call the bride and the groom on their wedding day) came out of the church, people would throw minor coins in their direction, whereas in the villages the coins were substituted by raisins, pieces of fruit and wheat.⁴⁷

The vivid description of bride theft in the epic tale *Artašēs and Sat'inik* has survived in the communal memory through the songs and stories of minstrels. The fact that the tale glorifies the deeds of an Armenian king, who lived in the second century BCE, may be an indication that the Armenians were acquainted with this practice before the Christianisation. The Šahapivan *Canon VII* condemning it leaves no doubt that in the fifth century bride theft was an observable phenomenon which became a serious cause for concern to the Church authorities.

⁴⁵ *MX*, II.50: «Տեղ ոսկի տեղայր // Ի փեսայութեանն Արտաշիսի, // Տեղայր մարգարիտ // Ի հարսնութեան Սաթինկանն».

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*: «սովորութիւն իսկ էր թագաւորացն մերոց, փեսայութեամբ ի դուռն տաճարին հասանել՝ դռնէկանս նաղաղել իբրեւ զհիւպատեանն Հռոմայեցոց. սապէս եւ թագուհեացն յառազատին՝ մարգարիտ».

⁴⁷ Abelyan 1968, p. 69.

3.2.3 Cohabitation without Formal Marriage: *Stūr Marriage*

An allusion to this type of conjugal bond is only found in *Canon VI* of the Šahapivan collection of canons, which highlights how differently a woman married by *varjank*‘ should be treated as compared to the one married ‘like a harlot’ (*bozabar*).⁴⁸ Orengo believes that marriage ‘like a harlot’ refers to a cohabitation of two people devoid of additional formalities,⁴⁹ but he does not explain why it is characterised in such derogatory terms as *bozabar*. The extant sources, unfortunately, do not provide sufficient information to help us understand the exact nature of this sort of union. However, one passage in the *Epic Histories* may serve as a hint that the *bozabar* marriage refers to *stūr* type of marriage.

In a curious episode which describes the defence of the besieged fortress of Artagers, when only P‘aranjem and two serving women have survived, what the author calls, “divine blows”,⁵⁰ the *hayr mardpet*⁵¹ enters the fortress through a secret passage and, according to the compiler, shows disrespect towards the queen and deeply insults her “as though she were a harlot.”⁵² Then, he continues by inveighing against “the clan of Aršakuni for being men of ill-counsel and ill-repute, as well as destroyers of the realm.”⁵³ No reason or explanation for this action is provided.

In general, the representation of P‘aranjem throughout the *Epic Histories* is not dispassionate and the compiler does not miss any opportunity to highlight her

⁴⁸ See above n. 19.

⁴⁹ Orengo 2009, p. 647.

⁵⁰ *EH*, IV.IV: «հարուածոց՝ որ յԱստուծոյ հասին».

⁵¹ The role of the *hayr mardpet* in the Armenian court is not quite clear, except for the fact that he possessed a very high rank, which, presumably, would allow him to treat the queen with disrespect. For more details and references, see *ibid.*, pp. 542–543.

⁵² *Ibid.*, IV.IV: «բռնամանեաց զտիկինն մեծապէս իբրև զբոգ մի».

⁵³ *Ibid.*: «Սկսաւ դնել բռնմանս ազգին արեւելեանց, զի վատախորհուրդք են վատանեանք, կորուսին աշխարհս եւս».

‘iniquity’,⁵⁴ but only in this episode, in which P‘ařanřem shows great courage and virtue, is she compared to a ‘harlot.’ Not a single reference can be found of P‘ařanřem displaying a promiscuous behaviour earlier in the narrative, which suggests that the *hayr mardpet*’s attitude to P‘ařanřem is most likely determined by her second marriage. As I argue below,⁵⁵ after the death of P‘ařanřem’s first husband Gnel, Arřak makes her his wife according to the Iranian *stūr* custom through *čakarih* marriage,⁵⁶ which was vehemently condemned by the ecclesiastical authorities, for it involved marriage of close relatives or in-laws.⁵⁷ Undoubtedly, the Church would not bless this type of union and they would be perceived as concubinage⁵⁸ rather than as marriage. In this context the *hayr mardpet*’s harsh treatment of the queen becomes fairly understandable, for thus he displays his personal disapproval of the ‘pagan’ customs which the Arřakuni family, of which P‘ařanřem had become a member, continued to observe.

The *stūr* marriages were indeed popular in pre-Christian and early Christian Armenia, and were sustained through customary law. This claim is supported by the fact that the Church issued several canons decrying practices such as marriages of in-laws, incestuous, and consanguineous marriages which formed an integral part of *stūr* relationships. Therefore, we can now better understand why a cohabitation of two

⁵⁴ See Zakarian 2013a, pp. 11–19.

⁵⁵ See section 3.2.

⁵⁶ As I have mentioned earlier (see *Chapter I*, 2.2.2), it was the legal, religious (Zoroastrian) and customary obligation of the agnatic group to ensure the continuation of the line of its members by means of *stūr* marriages, that is either through *čakarih* union or the marriage of *epikleros*. Thus, should a man die without leaving an heir, the members of the agnatic group will ensure that a boy be born by the deceased man’s widow, daughter or a woman appointed by the agnates so that he will manage the deceased man’s property and preserve the domestic cult of his ancestors (Perikhanian 1983b, pp. 82–83, and 94; for deviations from this model, see *ibid.* p. 97).

⁵⁷ For consanguineous marriages, see below section 3.1.

⁵⁸ Markwart’s suggestion that initially P‘ařanřem was perhaps Arřak’s concubine (1932, p. 231) is noteworthy.

people without formal blessings was represented in such derogatory terms and why Queen P'aranjem was treated like a harlot by the *hayr mardpet*.

4. The Marriage Patterns of the Armenian Elite

Not all marriage types discussed above are attested among the Armenian elite, and there must have been objective reasons for it besides the ones mentioned earlier. For instance, abducting a *naxarar*'s daughter from their fortified dwellings would have been extremely dangerous, and even if successful, it could result in a full-scale military confrontation and, more so, in the extermination of a whole clan because all the major *naxarar* families had their own army. Marriage by payment, on the other hand, was the most convenient and socially approved way of marrying someone, for all the negotiations between the families prior to marriage would minimise the chances of possible future disputes over property and the right to inherit one's status.

In addition to the marriage by *varjank'*, other conjugal relationships among the members of the upper nobility are also attested. In this section I shall concentrate on polygyny and consanguineous marriages, and shall also discuss the complicated issue of Queen P'aranjem's marriages to Gnel Aršakuni and King Aršak II of Armenia. The former is well attested in Iranian sources too, whereas the latter provides significant insight into conjugal relationships through *stūr* marriage.

4.1 Polygyny and Consanguineous Marriages

One of the first references to the practice of polygyny in ancient Armenia is Plutarch's claim that when Lucullus advanced against the city of Artaxata, there were the young children and the wives of the Armenian King Tigranes the Great (reign *ca*

95–55 BCE).⁵⁹ As mentioned earlier, the practice of consanguineous marriages is attested by Tacitus in his description of the events just before the establishment of Arsacid dynasty in Armenia.⁶⁰ Similar references, as we shall see below, are also made by early Christian Armenian authors, though they are not too keen on talking about it if it is related to a powerful *naxarar* family. This fact bespeaks a certain continuity of these Zoroastrian customs in Christian Armenia, especially amongst the nobility. The study of Armenian sources sheds some light on how widespread these phenomena were and how they functioned in the emerging Christian society.

If we consider the Armenian sources in chronological order, the first allusion to polygyny is found in Agat'angelos's *History*. The pagan King Trdat is informed about the beauty of Hrip'simē and expresses his desire to marry her,⁶¹ even though in the ensuing episodes it is revealed that Trdat is married to Ašxēn, who is the queen of the realm. The author provides no comments on Trdat's intention to take a second wife primarily because he is more concerned with extolling Hrip'simē's determination to preserve her chastity. One might also argue that this episode is an indication of the heterogeneity of Agat'angelos's text, for a Christian author would hardly miss such an opportunity to denounce this pagan practice.

The *Epic Histories* bears witness to several references to polygyny and consanguineous marriages. In one episode the efforts of St Nersēs to eradicate the

⁵⁹ Plutarch 1914, *Lucullus* XXXI.2: «ἐπεὶ δὲ προκαλούμενος εἰς μάχην αὐτοὺς περιταφρεύων τὸν χάρακα καὶ πορθῶν ἐν ὄψει τὴν χώραν οὐκ ἐκίνει πεπληγότας πολλάκις, ἀναστὰς ἐβάδιζεν ἐπ' Ἀρτάξата τὸ Τιγράνου βασιλῆιον, ὅπου καὶ *παῖδες αὐτῷ νήπιοι καὶ γαμεταὶ γυναῖκες*»; “Then he challenged them to battle by encompassing their camp with a moat, and by ravaging their territory before their eyes; but this did not move them, so often had they been defeated. He therefore broke camp and marched against Artaxas, the royal residence of Tigranes, where were *his wives and young children*” (my italics).

⁶⁰ See *Chapter I*, 2.2.2.

⁶¹ *Aa* §166: «Բանգի [Տրդատն] չէւ էր տեսեալ զհա՛ խորհեցաւ կի՛ն տունել զհա, վասն այնորիկ որ պատմեցին զհմանէ վասն վայելչութեան գեղոյ նորա»; “For he [Trdat] had not yet seen her, but planned to take her to wife because of what they had told him about her wonderful beauty.”

practice of incestuous marriages in fourth-century Armenia are described: the compiler mentions Nersēs's zeal to teach people that "above all [they ought] to refrain from incestuous marriages with close family relations within the clan, especially from intimacy with daughters-in-law or anything of the kind."⁶² This seems to be another direct reference to the practice of *stūr* relationships. The same episode is also described by Xorenac'i, who adds a valuable detail to it: "These two things he [St Nersēs] abolished from the princely families: first, the marriage of close relatives, which they practiced to restrict the noble class; and second, the crimes they committed over the dead according to the heathen custom."⁶³ Thomson's "to restrict the noble class" does not fully render the Armenian *vasn agaheloy sephakan azatut'eann arnēin*, which should be understood as 'to restrict the noble class for the sake of accumulating possessions.' This passage implies that these practices were common specifically among the nobility and their main function was to maintain the inalienability of the family property.⁶⁴

There are other, however somewhat equivocal, passages in the *Epic Histories*, which might indicate the preservation of polygyny among the nobility in Armenia. In III.xxi the following lines can be found: "And [the Persian king] made his [Tiran's] son Aršak king over the realm of Armenia at that time. And he returned from captivity the king's women and all the other prisoners, together with their treasures,

⁶² *EH*, IV.iv; «Էւ փախչել աւելի ի մերձաւոր եւ յազգին տոհմակից խառնակութեան ամուսնութենէն. եւ մահաւանդ ի մերձաւորական ի նուոց, եւ որ զամ մի աշսմ նման լեալ էր ինչ».

⁶³ *MX*, III.xx: «Եւ գերկուսս զայսոսիկ յազգաց նախարարացն բառնայ. մի զմերձաւորաց խնամութիւն, զոր վասն ազաւելոյ սեպիական ազատութեանն առնէին. եւ միւս՝ որ ի վերայ մեռելոց գործէին ռհիրս ըստ հեթանոսական սովորութեանն».

⁶⁴ Orengo 2009, pp. 640 and 643.

gifts, and possessions.”⁶⁵ Similarly, in V.xvi we are informed that “[h]e [the *sparapet* Mušel] captured the *bdeašx* of Aljnik‘, killed his wives in front of him, and took their children prisoner.”⁶⁶ Garsoïan, however, underlines the ambiguity in the two meanings of the word *kanayk*‘ used in these episodes: on the one hand, it can refer to a noble’s wives, while on the other hand, to the women who lived in his household and were under his protection.⁶⁷

The next Armenian author who touches upon this topic is Elišē, who attributes the following statement to the Persian King Yazkert II:

The laws of holy matrimony which they [the Armenians] received from their forefathers according to Christian ritual shall be abrogated and abolished; instead of one wife they shall take many, so that the Armenian nation may increase and multiply. Daughters shall be [wives] for fathers, and sisters for brothers. Mothers shall not withdraw from sons, and grandchildren shall ascend the couch of grandparents.⁶⁸

This passage, as many others in Elišē’s narrative, is built on opposing the Persian way of life to the customs and traditions of the Armenian people. As it appears, for the Armenian cleric polygamy and incestuous marriages were a widespread phenomenon in Persia, whereas the ancestral Christian tradition of the Armenians was contrary to it. This concurs with Xorenac‘i’s abovementioned characterisation of this practice as “heathen”.

In the *Martyrdom of St Šušanik* polygyny is also presented as a Persian practice. Šušanik’s husband, the Georgian *bdeašx* Vazgen, apostatises and returns

⁶⁵ *EH*, III.xxi: «Յայնմ ժամանակի [արքայն Պարսից] թագաւորեցուցանէր զԱրշակ որդի նորա [Տիրան] ի վերայ աշխարհին Հայոց. եւ զկանայս թագաւորին եւ զայլ զերին ամենայն, զանձիւք ընծայիւք եւ ստացուածովք հանդերձ, եւ միանգամայն դարձ առնէր ամենայն զերութեան».

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, V.xvi: «Զերբակալ արարեալ [զօրավարն Մուշեղ] զբդեաշխն Աղծնեաց, առ նմին կոտորեցին զկանայս, եւ զորդիս նոցա ի զերութիւն վարեցին».

⁶⁷ For a full discussion, see *ibid.*, p. 267 n. 24, p. 286 n. 40, and p. 316 n. 3.

⁶⁸ *Elišē*, pp. 103–104 [52]: «Կարենացի եւ արգելցին օրէնք սուրբ ամուսնութեան, զոր ունէին ի նախնեաց ըստ կարգի բխտոնէութեանն. այլ փոխանակ ընդ կնոջ միոյ՝ բազում կանայս արացեն. զի անեցեալ բազմացին ազգի Հայոց: Դստերք հարանց լինիցին, եւ բոքք՝ եղբարց. մարք մի՝ ելցեն յորդոց, այլ եւ թոռունք ելցեն յանկողինս հաւուց».

from Persia with the second wife who happens to be the mother of the Persian king's wife.⁶⁹ This episode demonstrates one of the main functions of such marriages – establishment of political alliances.⁷⁰ In addition, it is entirely plausible that by taking a second wife the newly converted person aspired to prove his devotion to Zoroastrian religion.

As regards the issue of close relatives getting married, it was of a great concern to the ecclesiastical authorities, for they earnestly strove to address this problem through religious canons which imposed tough measures against offenders. Thus, *Canon XIII* of Šahapivan reiterates the commandments condemning incestuous relationships, which Moses had received from the Lord⁷¹ and enumerates several, presumably most common, types of such practices in Armenian context: “one must not marry his sister, or his maternal uncle's daughter, or his brother's daughter, or paternal aunt, or anyone else from his clan within four degrees of consanguinity.”⁷² As seen in previous examples, these practices are characterised as “pagan” and “of ungodly, unrighteous nations.”⁷³ The person who commits such a crime “will be banished from the holy Church,”⁷⁴ and the priest who “blesses this union or attends the wedding will become their accomplice in the evil deed and must be removed from

⁶⁹ Muradyan 1996, p. 18 (I).

⁷⁰ A similar episode is described in the *Epic Histories* (IV.I): «եղև նա [Վահան Մամիկոնեանն] այնուհետև սիրելի Շապուհ արքային, եւ ետ նա կին Վահանայ գործիգոյստ քոյր իւր. եւ շնորհեաց նմա բարձ եւ գլխաւիւ՝ որ նոցուն լեալ էր նախնեաց, եւ մտերիմ փեսայ արար զնա իւր թագաւորն»; “he [Vahan Mamikonean] became so dear to King Šapuh that he gave his sister Ormizduxt to Vahan in marriage. He granted him the cushion and diadem that had formerly belonged to his ancestors, and made him his trusted son-in-law.”

⁷¹ Lev. 18:6: “None of you shall approach anyone near of kin to uncover nakedness.” Deut. 27:20 and 22: “Cursed be anyone who lies with his father's wife, because he has violated his father's rights,” and “Cursed be anyone who lies with his sister, whether the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother.”

⁷² Hakobyan 1964, p. 447: «գոյր կամ գեղորդի կամ գեղբարորդի կամ զհարաքոյր կամ զայլ ոք յազգի անդ իւրում մինչեւ ի չորրորդ ծնունդն կին զոք մի՛ խեղտցէ առնել».

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 446: «ըստ սովորութեան հեթանոսաց եւ անաստուած եւ անպարիստ ազգացն».

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 247–248: «եթե ոք ընդդիմացեալ արինացս եւ հաստատեալ կանոնիս ... ընդ նոսին եղիցի եւ բաժին նորա եւ ի սրբոյ եկեղեցւոյ աւարացեալ եղիցի».

his office.”⁷⁵ The canon continues with further measures of punishment for those who have been involved, in one way or another, in such a practice.

Summing up it is safe to conclude that despite the fact that polygamy in Armenia is attested in several sources, the presence of predominantly monogamous relationships in the same sources⁷⁶ suggests that monogamy was the main marriage pattern followed by the Armenians. Polygamy, on the other hand, was a possible marital pattern especially amongst the nobility, who would deploy this practice for establishing alliances, in particular with the Persians. We can also assume that by the second half of the fifth century this practice had virtually disappeared amongst Christian Armenians, for there is no reference to it in the Šahapivan canons or other official documents of the Armenian Church, which would otherwise attack Zoroastrian practices that did not conform with Christian teachings.

The consanguineous marriages and marriages of in-laws, however, persisted, and the Church felt obliged to intervene by introducing legislative measures. The fact that one of the most prominent Armenian intellectual of the twelfth century, Catholicos Nersēs Šnorhali once again addresses this issue in his *General Epistle* and restates the main concepts of the aforementioned canon of Šahapivan⁷⁷ is a strong indication that the efforts of the Church were not completely effective.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 248: «Եթէ ոք այնպիսեացն պսակ տրինեցէ, կամ ի հարսանիս երթիցէ, կցորդ եղիցի չարեաց գործոց նոցա՝ եւ ի կարգէ պաշտօնէից հեռացեալ եղիցի».

⁷⁶ For instance, only one wife of King Trdat – Queen Ašxen – is attested (Aa §761, §§765–766, and §791). In the *Epic Histories* King Pap is also presented as having only one wife – Queen Zarmanduxt (EH, V.xxxvii); in the same source we find Garegin, lord of the district of Rštunik, married to Hamazaspuhi of the Mamikonean family (IV.lix).

⁷⁷ Nersēs Šnorhali 1996, p. 63: “Let him [the priest] not marry relatives whose blood relationship is close, but let them be a full four degrees removed from each other.” Šnorhali then continues by explaining the importance of “four degrees.”

4.2. Queen P‘arānġem’s Marriages

A valuable source of information about marriage customs of the elite in early Christian Armenia is the account of Queen P‘arānġem’s marriages to Gnel Aršakuni and King Aršak. Three texts have preserved it in detail, albeit with variations. The *Epic Histories* has a graphic description of these events embellished with legendary motifs; Xorenac‘i’s interpretation does not differ significantly but it is devoid of the embellishments of the *Epic Histories*; the *Life of St Nersēs*⁷⁸ seems to be a later elaboration of the data provided by the *Epic Histories* but with some notable differences.⁷⁹ All three narratives are familiar with P‘arānġem’s two marriages, to Gnel and to Aršak, and they also mention Aršak’s other wife, a Greek noble woman called Ołompi (Olympias). The Shakespearian–style intrigues and murders⁸⁰ accompanying these marriages have caused confusion over their order and have given rise to various interpretations. Garsoġian’s “Iranian hypothesis,”⁸¹ which attempts to explain the complex situation discussed below by the continuity of Zoroastrian mentality among the Armenian elite, appears to be the most plausible. However, as I shall argue, it should be slightly modified owing to evidence that has so far gone unnoticed.⁸²

⁷⁸ *Patmut‘iwn Srboyn Nersisi Part‘ewi Hayoc‘ Hayrapeti* (The Life of the Armenian Patriarch St Nersēs the Parthian), 1853.

⁷⁹ The absence of a critical edition renders it difficult to date the source, but the text itself suggests a fifth-century core heavily interpolated in the subsequent centuries. The earliest manuscript to which the editors of *Sop‘erk‘* refer is of the twelfth century (*Life of St Nersēs*, p. 8), and the allusion to the Franks and the capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders (*ibid.*, p. 90) indicate that the final redaction of the text took place in the twelfth century.

⁸⁰ Orengo 2009, p. 649.

⁸¹ Garsoġian 2013.

⁸² I have already pointed at this evidence elsewhere (Zakarian 2013a, pp. 11–12, and 14) without, however, elaborating on it.

According to the *Epic Histories*, P‘ařanjem, who was “renowned for her beauty and her modesty;”⁸³ was the daughter of Andovk, one of the *naxarars* of Siwnik‘. She was given in marriage to Gnel, the son of King Arřak’s brother, but because “[t]he fame of maiden’s loveliness spread about, and the renown of her beauty grew, increased, and resounded,”⁸⁴ another nephew of the king, Tirit‘, desired P‘ařanjem and slandered Gnel before King Arřak. The latter issued the order to murder Gnel. At the funeral P‘ařanjem mourned the death of her husband by performing a pagan ritual: “rending her garments and loosening her hair, she lamented with bosom bared among the mourners, she wailed aloud [and] made all weep by the mournful tears of her grievous lament.”⁸⁵ This tantalising ‘performance’ had a great effect on King Arřak, who decided to take P‘ařanjem as his wife.

However, P‘ařanjem soon rejected her new spouse’s love by claiming that Arřak was “hairy of body and dark of color.”⁸⁶ The king used this as a pretext for seeking another wife in the land of the Greeks, and from there they brought for him “a wife of the race of the imperial house” whose name was Ołompi.⁸⁷ Arřak did not divorce P‘ařanjem, who stayed at court along with the new queen. Before long, however, “P‘ařanjem nursed her resentment against Ołompi and she planned to kill

⁸³ *EH*, IV.xv: «Զայնու ժամանակաւ էր դուստր մի գեղեցիկ Անդովկայ ուրումն, մի ի նախարարացն նահապետին Սիւնեաց, որում անուն Փառանձեմ կոչէր. գորմէ կարի անուանեալ էր գեղեցկութեամբ եւ պարկետութեամբ».

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*: «Խամբաւ գեղեցկութեան աղեկանն ընդ վայրսն տարածեցաւ, և խամբաւ գեղոյ նորա յաճախեալ բազմանայր և հնչէր».

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*: «Իսկ կիսն սպանելոյն Փառանձեմն զեանդերծսն պատառեալ, զգէսս արծակեալ, մերկատիտ ի մէջ աշխարանին կոծէր. ձայն արկանելոյ հչէր, յողբս արտասուաց յաղիողորմ գուժի առ հասարակ զամենեւեան լացուցանէր».

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*: «Բաւ է մարմնով, և քուխ է գունով».

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*: «Ապա իբրեւ կիսն ի նա ոչ յանգոյց գմիսս յուր, առաքեաց արքայն Արշակ յերկիրն Յունաց, եւ խնդրեաց էա՞ծ անտի կիսն ի կայսերական տոհմէն ազգաւ, զի անուն էր նորա Ողոմպի»; “Then, when he could in no way win over his wife, King Arřak sent a request to the land of the Greeks and brought from there a wife from the race of the imperial house, whose name was Ołompi.”

her”.⁸⁸ At this point the compiler inserts a remark on P‘ařanjem giving birth to Pap, and then reiterates her grudge against Ołompi using virtually the same words as before.⁸⁹ This repetition can only be attributed to the compiler’s use of several sources which differed in some detail, and the reference to Pap’s birth, as we shall see below, is most likely an interpolation.

P‘ařanjem managed to kill Ołompi by bribing a priest called Mrĵiwnik, who poisoned the bread of the Eucharist and served it to the queen.⁹⁰ There is no evidence that P‘ařanjem received any punishment for her deed. On the contrary, she remained at court and when King Arřak and *sparapet* Vasak Mamikonean were imprisoned in Persia,⁹¹ P‘ařanjem led the Armenian army against the Persian King řapuh and organised the defence of the fortress of Artagers. After a fourteen-month long siege Artagers fell and P‘ařanjem was taken to Persia, where she was condemned to a gruesome death at the hands of the mob.⁹²

The *Life of St Nersēs* is less detailed but concurs with the *Epic Histories* that Arřak married P‘ařanjem after Gnel’s murder and took Ołompi as his wife after P‘ařanjem rejected him.⁹³ It is worth noting that the *Life of St Nersēs* mentions Pap’s birth before Arřak’s marriage to Ołompi.⁹⁴ Xorenac‘i, on the other hand, presents

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, IV.xv: «Էւ կի՛նն Փառանձեմ յխաջաւ ընդ Ողոմպին, Էւ խնդրէր սպանանել զնա».

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*: «Իսկ Փառանձեմն ի մեծ նախանձու և յխուրեամբ զնայր ընդ Ողոմպինոյն, Էւ խնդրէր սպանանել զնա դեղովք»; “But P‘ařanjem nourished a great jealousy and resentment against Ołompinay, and she sought to kill her by poison.”

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*: «ապա դրան երէց ոմն արքունի՝ որ էր ի ժամանակին յայն, որուն անուն Միջիւնիկ, ... զնա ի բանս արկանէր Փառանձեմն անօրէնն ... Ընդ տէրունական ընդ սուրբ ընդ աստուածական մարմինն ընդ հացն օրինաց խառնէին զդեղն սատակման, երէցն Միջիւնիկ անուն, տալով յեկեղեցւոջն Ողոմպիայ տիկնոջն ընձեռել զմահուն գործ, Էւ սպանանէր»; “the iniquitous P‘ařanjem then persuaded a certain priest from the royal court named Mrĵiwnik ... A mortal poison was mixed into the holy and divine Body of the Lord, into the bread of the Eucharist, and in the church the priest named Mrĵiwnik gave [this] death-dealing thing to Queen Ołompi, and so killed her.”

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, IV.liv.

⁹² *Ibid.*, IV.lv; see also below *Chapter VII*, 2.1.

⁹³ *Life of St Nersēs*, pp. 43–51.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

Ołompi as Aršak's first wife;⁹⁵ hence Pap was born after Aršak's marriage to P'aranjem, who became his second wife.

Garsoïan accurately characterises these accounts as a "medley."⁹⁶ A brief comparison of certain facts found in all three histories to Greco-Roman sources, especially to Ammianus Marcellinus' *Rerum Gestarum* (4th c.), demonstrates that there are several obvious anachronisms in these Armenian texts, which do not allow us to establish an accurate chronology of events.⁹⁷ Garsoïan has attempted to reconstruct the sequence of events using all the available sources,⁹⁸ and concluded that most likely Aršak married P'aranjem at the beginning of his reign after which Pap was born; then, he lent his wife to his nephew Gnel according to the Zoroastrian tradition of spouse lending and married Ołompi in 358; after Gnel's death in 359 he took P'aranjem back and Ołompi's assassination followed after her patron Constantius' death in 361.⁹⁹ Unfortunately, this interpretation has several weak points and needs to be revised.

I shall begin with the date of Gnel's return from the Greek court where he was kept as a hostage and of his subsequent murder, for the validity of Garsoïan's hypothesis greatly depends on this. Thus, Garsoïan believes that Gnel's return is related to St Nersēs' mission to the Greek Emperor and "should most likely be dated in A.D. 358,"¹⁰⁰ for this date fits well with Markwart's claim that Gnel was murdered on 29 August 359.¹⁰¹ However, to fix this date Markwart himself relies on the incoherent narratives of the aforementioned Armenian sources which totally confuse

⁹⁵ *MX*, III.xxi and xxiv.

⁹⁶ Garsoïan 2013, p. 61.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 60–65 and Garsoïan 1969.

⁹⁹ Garsoïan 2013, p. 67.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁰¹ Markwart 1932, pp. 174, 221, 231, and 233; Garsoïan 2013, p. 61 and 1969, p. 156.

the names of the Greek emperors and the dates of their reign, as well as disagree with each other over certain details concerning the two Armenian missions to the Greek court. Therefore, a much earlier date of Gnel's return to Armenia and of his assassination, as suggested by the *Life of St Nersēs*,¹⁰² should not be excluded either.¹⁰³

Furthermore and more importantly, it is hard to believe that P'aranjem first married Aršak and then was 'borrowed' by Gnel, for none of the sources supports this claim. On the contrary, P'aranjem is introduced into the narrative by all three Armenian sources just before her marriage to Gnel and the accounts of this episode leave little doubt that we witness a proper marriage rather than a 'lending' ceremony. Thus, the *Epic Histories* relates that "the young nephew of the king, Gnel, took her [P'aranjem] as his wife."¹⁰⁴ Similarly, in the *Life of St Nersēs* we read: "After all this there was a daughter of the prince of Siwnik' Andok, whose name was P'aranjem, and he [Andok] gave her in marriage to Gnel Aršakuni, the son of King Aršak's brother."¹⁰⁵ The latter account clearly demonstrates that it is P'aranjem's father who passes her to her husband, whereas in 'lending' it should be the present husband. Xorenac'i is even more illuminating, for he mentions a grandiose wedding ceremony: "Gnel took as his wife a certain P'arandzem of the Siuni family. He celebrated the marriage royally, giving presents to all the princes."¹⁰⁶ Hardly would such a wedding take place if it were a mere marriage by 'lending.' Furthermore, the reference to

¹⁰² *Life of St Nersēs*, pp. 43–53.

¹⁰³ Manandyan (1978, p. 164) also suggests a possible earlier date for the Armenian mission to the court of the emperor and the return of the princes from captivity.

¹⁰⁴ *EH*, IV.xv: «Գնել պատանեակն եղբորորդին արային էառ զնա [զՓառանձեմ] ի կնութիւն իւր».

¹⁰⁵ *Life of St Nersēs*, p. 43: «Յետ այսր ամենայնի դուստր մի էր Անդոկեայ Սիւնեաց իշխանին, որում անուն կոչիւր Փառանձեմ, եւ տուաւ յամուսնութիւն Գնելոյ Արշակունոյ եղբորորդոյ Արշակայ արայի» (my stranslation).

¹⁰⁶ *MX*, III.xxii: «առնու Գնել իւր կին զՓառանձեմ ոմն յագգէն Սիւնեաց. եւ թագաւորապէս արարեալ հարսանիս, տայ առատապէս պարգեսս ամենեցուն նախարարացն».

P‘ařanĵem as ‘a certain’ (*omn*) does not support Garsořian’s suggestion that she was already the Queen of Armenia.

Garsořian’s statement that “the sources normally treat P‘ařanĵem as Arřak’s wife and the lady/queen (*tikin*)¹⁰⁷ of Armenia”¹⁰⁸ is also problematic, for, on the contrary, the sources amply demonstrate that P‘ařanĵem is referred to as ‘lady’ or ‘queen’ only when King Arřak has been imprisoned and died in Persia.¹⁰⁹ The first notable example is found in IV.xv of the *Epic Histories*: “But as much as King Arřak loved the woman, so much did the woman hate the king ...”¹¹⁰ The asymmetry in the parallel construction of the sentence (*orčap* ‘... noynčap’ / as much as ... so much) is revealing:¹¹¹ ‘the king’ is juxtaposed not with ‘the queen’ but with ‘the woman’. In contrast to this, the Greek Princess Ołompi is called ‘queen’ after her marriage with King Arřak.¹¹² Similarly, several episodes later P‘ařanĵem is referred to as “the king’s wife,”¹¹³ although at the time she is Arřak’s only wife. Only when the Persian King řapuh imprisons King Arřak in the fortress of Anhuř¹¹⁴ and it becomes clear that Arřak will not return, does the compiler call P‘ařanĵem ‘queen’.¹¹⁵

Xorenac‘i’s *History*¹¹⁶ and the *Life of St Nersēs*¹¹⁷ display the same tendency. Initially, they speak of P‘ařanĵem as of Arřak’s wife, whereas after the king’s

¹⁰⁷ For the meaning of *tikin* as ‘lady’ and ‘queen’, see *Chapter I*, 4.2.

¹⁰⁸ Garsořian 2013, p. 65.

¹⁰⁹ Zakarian 2013a, p. 14.

¹¹⁰ *EH*, IV.xv: «Եւ որչափ սիրէր արքայն Արշակ զկիւնն, նոյնչափ ատեաց կիւնն զարքայն Արշակ».

¹¹¹ I would like to thank Prof. Theo van Lint for pointing out this asymmetry.

¹¹² See above n. 90: «Ողոմպիայ տիկնոջն»; “to Queen (Lady) Ołompi”.

¹¹³ *EH*, IV.xviii: «կին թագաւորին».

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, IV.liv.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, IV.lv.

¹¹⁶ *MX*, III.xxiv: «Իսկ Արշակ ոչ զզջացեալ ապաւուտեաց, այլ անամօթեալ, ագահելով ի գանձս սպանելոյն եւ ի ժառանգութիւն՝ յաւել տոնուլ զկինն նորին զՓառանձեմ. յորմէ եղեւ պատանի մի, որ անուանեցաւ Պապ: Այս Փառանձեմ գործեաց զանլուր եւ զանկարելի չարիս, եւ զսարսափման լսողաց արժանաւոր»: “However, Arshak showed no repentance or contrition but shamelessly rifled the treasure and inheritance of the dead man and even married his wife P‘ařandzem. From her was born a son who was called Pap. This P‘ařandzem worked an unheard of and unimaginable crime worthy of inspiring

imprisonment the *Life of St Nersēs* is silent about P‘arānjem’s fate and Xorenac‘i calls her *dšxoy* (queen) for the first time.¹¹⁸ It should also be mentioned that Ammianus Marcellinus does not know the name of the Armenian wife of Aršak.¹¹⁹

This evidence should suffice to reject Garsoïan’s interpretation of King Aršak’s polygyny. Yet, as we shall see below, her suggestion that the answers to this complicated issue should be searched for in the Iranian marriage patterns is valid.

I believe there is considerable textual evidence to suggest that P‘arānjem’s conjugal relationships and King Aršak’s polygyny reflect the Iranian *čakarīh* marriage practice. As I have mentioned earlier,¹²⁰ it was the legal, religious (Zoroastrian) and customary obligation of the agnatic group to ensure the continuation of the line of its members by means of *stūr* marriages, that is either through *čakarīh* union or the marriage of *epikleros*. Thus, should a man die without leaving an heir,

horror in those who heard of it”; III.xxxiv: «Ապա այնուհետեւ յոյժ նեղեալ Արշակ, յոչ կամաց երբայ առ Շապուհ, եւ ի պահեստի լինի ի նմանէ. եւ բռնութեամբ հարկաւորեալ գրէ, զի Փառանձեմ կին նորա եկեացէ ի դուռն: Եւ Շապուհ հրամայէ ամենայն մեծամեծացն, զի ընդ Փառանձեմայ եկեացեն»»; “So then Arshak, exceedingly hard pressed, unwillingly went to Shapuh and was imprisoned by him. He was compelled to write that his wife P‘arandzem should come to the court. And Shapuh ordered all the magnates to come with P‘arandzem.”

¹¹⁷ *Life of St Nersēs*, pp. 50–51: «Իսկ Փառանձեմ ատեայլ զԱրշակի քաղաւորն ... եւ [Արշակ] կապեաց քաղ ընդ նմա [Ողոմպի], եւ առաւել սիրէր զնա քան զՓառանձեմ: Իսկ Փառանձեմ ոխացեալ ընդ Ողոմպի եւ հնարէր կորուսանել զնա»»; “But P‘arānjem hated King Aršak ... and he [Aršak] gave her [Ołompi] the crown, and loved her more than P‘arānjem. And P‘arānjem nourished resentment at Ołompi and thought of eliminating her” (my translation).

¹¹⁸ *MX*, III.xxxv: «Նա եւ ոչ դշխոյն Փառանձեմ զնաց ի կոչ տանն իւրոյ, այլ հանդերձ գանձիւք անկաւ յամուրն Արտագերից»»; “Likewise Queen P‘arandzem did not obey her husband’s summons, but with the treasures took refuge in the castle of Artagerk’.”

¹¹⁹ *AM*, XXVII.xii.5: “Quibus ita studio nefando perfectis, Cylaci spadoni et Artabanni, quos olim susceperat perfugas, commisit Armeniam (horum alter ante gentis praefectus, magister alter fuisse dicebatur armorum) eisdemque mandarat, ut Artogerassam intentiore cura exscinderent, oppidum muris et viribus validum, quod thesauros et uxorem cum filio tuebatur Arsacis”; “After thus effecting these abominable designs, he entrusted Armenia to Cylaces, a eunuch, and to Arrabannes, both of whom he had long before received as deserters – of these the former was said to have been previously a governor in that nation, the latter, a commander-in-chief-giving them orders to use all care to destroy Artogerassa, a powerful town with strong walls, which guarded the treasury of Arsaces, as well as his son and his wife.”

¹²⁰ See *Chapter I*, 2.2.2.

the members of the agnatic group would ensure that a boy be born by the deceased man's widow, daughter or a woman appointed by the agnates so that he will manage the deceased man's property and preserve the domestic cult of his ancestors.¹²¹ A close reading of the *Epic Histories* suggests that Aršak's marriage to P'ařanjem was the fulfilment of this obligation towards Gnel, who was Aršak's nephew and belonged to the Arsacid dynasty.

Although the compiler of the *Epic Histories* presents Aršak's union with P'ařanjem as motivated by a strong desire,¹²² I am inclined to believe that Aršak primarily complied with the obligations which he had as the *tanutēr* of the Arsacid family. Thus, by marrying P'ařanjem, he was to ensure the continuation of Gnel's lineage. There is further evidence in the same source supporting this hypothesis: after Gnel's death Tirit' asks for Aršak's (not Andovk's) permission to marry widowed P'ařanjem,¹²³ which clearly indicates that P'ařanjem, as a widow of Aršakuni prince, was under the guardianship of Aršak.

In this context the boy born from this union, namely the future King Pap, was legally the heir of Gnel and not of his biological father Aršak. The fifth-century sources do not comment on this issue and consider Pap as the legitimate heir to the Armenian throne. This is not surprising because Aršak did not have other children and the next Aršakuni in the line for succession was Pap.

Finally, a note should be made about P'ařanjem's ascension to the queenship. The *Epic Histories* presents her as "the queen of the realm of Armenia, the wife of

¹²¹ See above n. 56.

¹²² *EH*, IV.xv: «բազաւորն Արշակ ի լալիսն տեսանէր զկինն սպանելոյն, տոբէր եւ ակն դնէր՝ առնուլ զնա իւր կնուքեան»; "when King Aršak saw the wife of the murdered man among the wailers he was stricken with passion, and desired to take her as his wife."

¹²³ *Ibid.*: «Կամ լիցի, առէ [Տիրի], քեզ արքայի, զի հրաման տացես զՓառանձեմ կին Գնելոյ քող առից ինձ կնուքեան»; "May it be," he [Tirit'] said, "your royal will, may you give the order allowing me to take Gnel's wife P'ařanjem as my wife'."

Aršak king of Armenia”¹²⁴ for the first time in the episode when Aršak has been arrested in Persia and Pap is to accede to the throne. Since P‘arānjam’s representation unequivocally shows that during the reign of Aršak she does not hold the title of queen, it is reasonable to assume that she acquires this right as the mother of the future king and as the *tantikin* of the Aršakuni family.

5. Widowhood

In Zoroastrian communities widows, as well as orphaned minors, were under the protection of the agnatic family,¹²⁵ and, as discussed above, through them the lineage of their deceased husband could be continued if no male offspring was left after the man’s death. In the New Testament¹²⁶ and in early Christian texts, too, widows were perceived as a vulnerable group that required special attention.¹²⁷ In the works of the Church Fathers the institution of widowhood did not receive any negative evaluation, but they attempted to impose a specific set of rules that would regulate the behaviour of widows in society.¹²⁸ Thus, only widows who were “undisciplined” were to be admonished.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Ibid., IV.IV: «տիկին աշխարհին Հայոց կինն Արշակայ թագաւորին Հայոց Փառանձեմն». It is noteworthy that in the same episode the compiler stresses P‘arānjam’s title of the queen several times.

¹²⁵ Perikhanian 1983a, p. 634.

¹²⁶ 1 Tim. 5:3–16.

¹²⁷ For instance, in Polycarp’s *To the Philippians* (6.1) we find the following lines: “Also the presbyters must be compassionate, merciful to all, ... looking after the sick, not neglecting the widow or orphan or one that is poor ...” (Miller 2005, p. 50). See also *APGL*, p. 1524: «χήρα», 2.

¹²⁸ See, for instance, John Chrysostom’s commentary on 1 Cor. 7 in *De Virginitate*, where he discusses the issues concerning the marriage of widows, such as when a widow can marry for the second time, and when she is discouraged to do so (*PG* 48, pp. 561–563); or, *Didascalia Apostolarum* 3.1–11 and 4.5–8 (Miller 2005, pp. 51–61).

¹²⁹ Miller 2005, p. 59.

Armenian sources generally seem to share this approach. In the *Epic Histories*, for instance, we are informed that St Nersēs, the Armenian patriarch, “gave relief and maintenance to widows, orphans, and the indigent, and the poor daily rejoiced with him ...”¹³⁰ Furthermore, he had “asylums-for-widows and for-orphans” built in various parts of the country.¹³¹ In his turn, Łazar extols the widows of martyred nobles for their ability to suppress their bodily desires.¹³² About the same widows Ełišē remarks that by enduring all the deprivations and tribulations they became again “brides of virtue, removing from themselves the opprobrium [sic] of widowhood,”¹³³ but he does not clarify what the ‘opprobrium of widowhood’ implies. In the absence of any other evidence, I will suggest that Ełišē here hints at the precarious social position of a widow who had no son, therefore she was forced to enter into a *čakarih* union with an agnate from her husband’s family. As we saw in the case of P’aranjem such practices were not welcomed by the ecclesiastical authorities, and Ełišē’s position is in line with it.

6. Women in the Šahapivan Canons: Additional Remarks

The Šahapivan canons are a unique testimony to how the Church perceived the position of women in society. Thus, *Canon III* presents women as men’s partners¹³⁴ and stresses that “the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the

¹³⁰ *EH*, IV.iv: «Այրեաց եւ որբոց եւ չխառնաց հանգիստ եւ դարման տունէր, եւ աղքատք զօրհանապազ ընդ նմա ուրախ լինէին».

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, V.xxxi: «գալթեոցսն եւ գորբաւոցսն».

¹³² *ŁP*, p. 161 [109]: «Նոյնպէս եւ կանայք, որոց նահատակեալ մարտիրոսաց արքն, եւ այլոց կանանց, որոց էին ի կապանս արքն ի Հրեւ՝ բազում պարկեւտաւոր առաքինութեամբ մի գմիով ելեւելս առնէին, զօր ամենայն մեռանելով ամենայն տխրից»; “Likewise the women whose husbands had been martyred, and other women whose husbands were imprisoned in Hrev, surpassed each other in purity and virtue, dying every day to their bodily passions.”

¹³³ *Ełišē*, p. 247 [202]: «Այլիք որ ի նոսա էին՝ եղեն վերստին հարսունք առաքինութեան, եւ բարձին յանձանց գնախառնոյս այրութեանն».

¹³⁴ Cf. Gen. 2:18; “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner’.”

husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.”¹³⁵ Not only does this biblical topos provide a legitimisation to the canon, but it also stresses the general approach adopted by the Armenian ecclesiastical authorities towards the relationships between men and women. For instance, the same canon imposes equal punishments on women and men for committing adultery.¹³⁶ Moreover, according to *Canon II* the children of a priest, irrespective of their gender, receive the same punishment for illicit sexual activities.¹³⁷ Finally, *Canons VIII–X* forbid both men and women to practise witchcraft and sorcery, or appeal to soothsayers for help. In the case of violation of the canons, they will receive the same punishment.¹³⁸

7. Conclusion

This discussion of the marriage practices of the Armenian people as described in early Christian Armenian sources enables us to draw several conclusions. Firstly, two sets of marriage customs can be singled out in pre- and early Christian Armenia: the local traditions, primarily maintained by the *šinakans* and *azats*, and the Zoroastrian marriage practices predominantly followed by the elite of the society. The main marriage pattern approved by the representatives of all social groups was marriage by *varjank*, but bride theft and marriages of close relatives were also common. The Church attempted to establish control over this important social institution and imposed tight restrictions on the last two practices by issuing a set of canons, which

¹³⁵ 1 Cor. 7:4. Hakobyan 1964, pp. 432–433.

¹³⁶ Hakobyan 1964, p. 434: «Եթէ այլ և եթէ կին կանոն այդ կացցէ»; “whatever man or woman that canon shall stand” (my translation).

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 430–432.

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 440–442.

does not seem to have been very effective. However, as far as divorce was concerned, a significant aspect of the older (Zoroastrian) tradition, according to which the wife was to keep all her possessions after the divorce, was preserved.

Another important conclusion reached in this chapter concerns the marriages of Queen P'aranjem. It appears that her marriage to King Aršak was according to the Iranian *stūr* marriage, more specifically the *čakarih* type, which allowed a widow of a childless man to marry the nearest agnate to bear a male heir for her late husband. This practice was condemned by the clergy and was believed to be an immoral act.

The overall discourse of the ecclesiastical authorities on the institution of marriage reveals a common tendency towards equal treatment of women and men, which, if we put it into the wider context of fifth-century Armenian literature, concurs with the general benevolent image of women that the writers endeavour to create.

Chapter VI

Queenship in Arsacid Armenia¹

Եւ բաճային զգերեզմանս զառաջին թագաւորացն Հայոց զարանց
բաջաց զարշակունոյ, եւ խաղացուցանէին ի գերութիւն զոսկերս
թագաւորացն...

And they [the Persians] opened the tombs of the former
kings of Armenia, of the most valiant Aršakuni, and they
carried off into captivity the bones of the kings.

EH, IV.xxiv

1. Introduction

Despite the fact that virtually nothing has survived on queenship in Arsacid Armenia before the fourth century, there is compelling fifth-century evidence on this institution in late Arsacid Armenia, which enables us to examine the extent of power that queens could hold in the male-centred *naxarar* society. They also provide remarkable insights into the conditions under which the queen's authority was exercised and on how differently her reign was perceived in comparison with the rule of a male monarch.

In order to explore these issues one should in the first place turn to the *Epic Histories*, which contains details of the reigns of the Armenian queens P'aranjem and her daughter-in-law Zarmanduxt. This source describes the circumstances which were conducive to the rise of the queen to power and the degree of her authority in the absence of the king. Furthermore, we possess a small number of references to Queen

¹ This chapter is a slightly revised version of my earlier article "Women on the Throne and the Symbolic Attributes of Authority" (Zakarian 2013b).

Ašxēn in Agat'angelos's *History*, whose representation enhances, albeit to a lesser degree, our understanding of the involvement of the queen in the political life of the country.

The queen, as the consort of the king, derived her status and power from her spouse. Therefore, the extant material on queens should be contextualised and evaluated alongside our knowledge of the king's authority in *naxarar* Armenia. The juxtaposition of the two representations will make manifest the differences and similarities, if any, between these social institutions.

Despite the fact that these representations were produced by clerics long after Armenia's Christianisation, the examination of the formulaic language portraying the rule and extent of power of an Arsacid king reveals the pre-Christian roots of the symbolic attributes of the king's authority. There is a conspicuous absence of a Christian interpretation of royal power, which indicates the shallow hold of Christianity on the institution of kingship of which queenship was a derivative.

The sources that we have at our disposal indicate that in the mentality of the Armenians the rule of a legitimate and righteous king was accompanied by supernatural patronage of divinely bestowed glory (*p'ark'*), fortune (*baxt*), and valour (*k'ajut'iwn*). The analysis of these concepts will further elucidate the way the royal authority was perceived by contemporaries and will enable us to determine the position of the queen in the paradigm of power relationships. In particular, it will be demonstrated that the queen would normally assume authority in the absence of the king or an adult son but only temporarily until her son came of age. Perhaps, due to this temporariness, her rule, albeit legitimate, was perceived as lacking divine endorsement.

2. The Symbolic Attributes of Authority

2.1 The Three Main Components

For a twenty-first-century reader the epigram quoted from the *Epic Histories* may sound odd at first glance, for why would the Persians carry off the bones of the Armenian kings along with the vast treasures they found in the stronghold of Ani? Even Xorenac'i (or the editor of his *History*) does not understand the underlying reason for this action.² However, there is another passage in the same chapter that explains the symbolic meaning of this incident:

... and they [the Armenians] took away from them the bones of their own kings that the Persians were carrying away into captivity to the Persian realm. For they said, according to their heathen beliefs: "This is the reason why we are taking the bones of the Armenian kings to our realm: that the glory of the kings and the fortune and the valor of this realm might go from here with the bones of the kings and enter into our realm." Then Vasak freed all the captives of the realm of Armenia; and the bones of the Armenian kings freed by Vasak were taken and buried in the inaccessible village named Ałjk' in the district of Ayrarat...³

As it appears from the words attributed to the Persian soldiers, the kings' bones symbolise "the glory [*p'ark'*] of the kings," as well as "the fortune [*baxt*] and the valor [*k'ajut'awn*]" of the Armenian realm. The subsequent narrative demonstrates that the Armenians were well aware of the symbolic meaning and significance of the

² *MX*, III.xxvii: «Իսկ սպարապետն Պարսից եկեալ ի Հայս՝ ի ձեռնսու լինելոյ նախարարացն առնու զամուրն Անի, եւ գերէ զամենայն զանձաւ արքունի որ ի նմա, այլ եւ զոսկերս թագաւորացն. ոչ գիտեմ, թէ վասն նախատի՞նս առնելոյ Արշակայ, եթէ վասն հմայից ինչ հեթանոսականաց»; "When the Persian general arrived in Armenia, with the help of the princes he captured the fortress of Ani and seized all the royal treasures in it, even the bones of the kings. I do not know if this was to insult Arshak or for some pagan incantations."

³ *EH*, IV.xxiv: «Եւ [Հայք] թափէին ի նոցանէն զոսկերս թագաւորացն իւրեանց, զոր Պարսիկք խաղացուցեալ տանէին ի գերութիւն յաշտարին Պարսից: Զի տսէին ըստ իւրեանց հեթանոսութեանն ըսի օրինացն, թէ վասն այսորիկ բարձեալ տանիմք զոսկերս թագաւորացն Հայոց յաշտարին մեր, զի փառք թագաւորացն եւ բախտն եւ քաջութիւն աշխարհիս աստի գնացեալ ընդ ոսկերս թագաւորացն՝ յաշտարին մեր եկեացեն: Ապա թափէր Վասակ զգերութիւնն ամենայն զՀայաստան աշխարհին. եւ զոսկերս թագաւորացն Հայոց, զորս թափեաց Վասակ, հանեալ թաղեցին յամուր ի գեղն՝ որ Աղձֆն անուանին, յԱյրարատ գաւառին...».

kings' bones, for they chased after the tomb raiders and managed to retrieve this great treasure.

In Agat'angelos's *History* the importance of royal ancestral glory is also highlighted: "May there be health and prosperity by the help of the gods. ... May there be wisdom of the Greeks to the province of the Caesars, protection from our heroic Parthians, from the *glory of [our] kings and ancestors*."⁴ This invocation made by pagan Trdat corroborates the account of the *Epic Histories* that the royal glory of valiant ancestors was perceived as the protective power of the realm.

The words *p'ark'* and *baxt* are borrowings into Armenian from Parthian and correspond to *farr* (Av. *x'arənah*, Sogd. *farn*, Bctr. *far(r)o*, and Khot. *phārra* – "fame, brightness, glory, splendour")⁵ and *baxt* (Av. *baxta*, Krd. *baxt* – "fortune, fate, destiny")⁶ respectively. The etymology of the adjective/noun *k'aj* and the abstract noun *k'ajut'iwn* is less clear, but the latter, as a concept, was used to refer to the supernatural valour of a man and corresponded to the Greek ἀρετή or ἀνδρεία.⁷ In Classical Armenian *k'aj*, besides the meaning 'valiant,' was also used to denote 'the one who is endowed with supernatural bravery,' or as an adverb 'very', and sometimes in the meaning of 'spirit, demon.'⁸

Early Christian Armenian sources abound with references to these concepts, especially to *k'aj/k'ajut'iwn* and *p'ark'*, but a comprehensive study of these

⁴ Aa §127; «Ողջոյն հասեալ եւ շինութիւն զիցն օգնականութեամբ, ... իմաստութիւն Յունաց հասցէ դաստակերտիւ կայսերաց, եւ ի մեր զիւցախառն Պարթեւաց հասցէ ալցելութիւն, ի փառաց բազաւորաց եւ ի քաջ նախնեաց» (my italics).

⁵ Gnoli 1999, p. 312; Gignoux 1972, pp. 22, 51; MacKenzie 1971, p. 96; Ačařyan 1971–1979, 4:482–483; Bartholomae 1904, pp. 1870–1873.

⁶ Gignoux 1972, p. 20; MacKenzie 1971, p. 17; Ačařyan 1971–1979, 1:389–390; Bartholomae 1904, p. 923.

⁷ Garsořian 1982, p. 157.

⁸ Martirosyan 2010, pp. 290 and 294; Ačařyan 1971–1979, 4:555; Ėmin 1850, pp. 44–45, p. 44 n. 59; NBHL 2:981.

phenomena is yet to be undertaken. Garsoïan is one of few scholars who has addressed this topic in a number of her works. By emphasizing the Iranian provenance of these notions, Garsoïan mentions that the Arsacid dynasty of Armenia being “deeply Iranized in ethos and manners” had adopted “the transcendental Iranian virtues of *p’ark’*, *baxt*, and *k’ajut’iwn*, together with the formulaic epithet *‘k’aj’ aranc’*, most-valiant-of-men’.”⁹ These qualities, still understood in fifth-century Christian Armenia, were ascribed to the legitimate kings of the country, and it was widely believed that they were bestowed upon the monarchs by the divine will.¹⁰ Garsoïan additionally draws our attention to the fact that in Christian times *k’aj’* was also used in connection with God’s champions,¹¹ which can be attributed to the common practice of transferring certain concepts of the old religion to the new one. This explains the fact that the epithet *k’aj’* was also deployed by some authors to describe their patrons’ valour, like in the *Epic Histories*, for instance, where many members of the Mamikonean family are referred to as *k’aj’*.¹²

Thus, the ethereal concepts of *p’ark’*, *baxt*, and *k’ajut’iwn* were perceived as the symbols of legitimate authority. However, being a legitimate heir to the throne, did not guarantee their automatic bestowal. Only virtuous leaders who were champions of a righteous cause could be the recipients of divine endowment. As indicated by Garsoïan,¹³ this is strongly supported by the representation of King Pap of Armenia, who appears to lack divine patronage owing to his “evil” character repeatedly emphasised by the compiler of the histories. In a similar way, in Agat’angelos’s

⁹ *EH*, p. 354.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 515, 534–535, and 552.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 534; Garsoïan 1982, p. 157.

¹² *EH*, p. 355; V.ii, V.iv, and V.xxxvii.

¹³ Garsoïan 1981, p. 44.

History King Trdat is deprived of the epithet *k'aj* while he persecutes the Christians, but as soon as he is converted, he is again characterised as *k'aj*.¹⁴

2.2 *K'ajut'iwn* (Valour)

Which deities of the pre-Christian Armenian pantheon bestowed these qualities on the elect? The answer for the notion of *k'ajut'iwn* is provided by Agat'angelos in the words he attributes to King Trdat: “May there be ... valor from valiant Vahagn.”¹⁵ Vahagn was the Armenian name of the Zoroastrian deity of victory *Vərəθraγna*,¹⁶ but his cult had also preserved features from the Indo-European and Hurro-Urartian religious heritage of the Armenians.¹⁷ Vahagn was identified with Heracles by some Armenian authors,¹⁸ and it is noteworthy that on the reverse side of one of the coins of Artaxiad Armenian King Tigranes II the image of Heracles or Vahagn “holding a club in his right hand and lion’s skin in his left” is carved.¹⁹ With the king’s bust pictured on the obverse side, it most likely served ideological and propagandistic functions, for Vahagn was one of the most popular deities in Armenia²⁰ and traces of his cult are attested in many sources.

¹⁴ See, e.g., *Aa* §17: «*Բաջ արանց Տրդատ արքայ Հայոց մեծաց*»; “most valiant of men, Trdat, king of Greater Armenia”; and in §892: «*Բաջդ արանց Տրդատ*»; “most valiant of men, Trdat”; while in §47, for instance, he is merely referred to as «*Տրդատ արքայ Հայոց մեծաց*»; “Trdat, the king of Greater Armenia”.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, §127; «*Բաջուրիսն հասցէ ձեզ ի Բաջէն Վահագնէ*».

¹⁶ See, e.g., *HZI*, pp. 54 and 62–65.

¹⁷ Russell 1987, pp. 209–215; Petrosyan 2004, pp. 212–214. For more details on the cult of Vahagn in Armenia, see Russell 1987, pp. 189–228.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Thomson 2010, p. 208.

¹⁹ Bedoukian 1968, pp. 41–69; see also Nercessian 2009, pp. 27–29.

²⁰ In a similar manner, the Greek Hercules would be understandable to the population of the conquered territories, such as Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Atropatene, and so on, where the Hellenistic culture was wide-spread at the time.

2.3 *P'ark'* (Glory)

The importance of *p'ark'* (Av. *x^varənah*, Phl. *farr*) in the Iranian tradition has been underscored by several recent studies,²¹ and some of their findings can help us elucidate various aspects of the Armenian equivalent. *Yasht* 19 in the *Younger Avesta* reveals many aspects of Zoroastrian *x^varənah*, which developed over the centuries and took various shapes amongst peoples who either adopted it as a new concept and added their discernible cultural elements to it, or absorbed it into a similar existing concept under the pressure of the dominant culture. Originally, there were two kinds of *x^varənah* – the Glory of the Kavyan royal dynasty and the Unappropriated Glory,²² both of which were created by Ahura Mazdā – the supreme divinity of the Zoroastrian religion.²³ Avoiding theological and dogmatic controversies surrounding the interpretation of the two types of glory, I shall briefly focus on the main characteristics of these concepts which will enhance our understanding of the Armenian *p'ark'*.

The Kavyan Glory, which in the Hellenistic period became representative of the glory of a righteous and legitimate ruler,²⁴ was in possession of the seven “Bounteous Immortals” – *Aməša Spentas*.²⁵ Initially, it seems that these seven spirits of goodness had the control of the royal *x^varənah* and could bestow it on the elect who deserved it by their deeds, such as the Kavyan ruler Haošyangha Paradāta, “who slew two thirds of the Māzainya daēvas and the deceitful inhabitants of Varena.”²⁶ At a later period, the prerogative to protect and bestow *x^varənah* was transferred onto the water deity

²¹ See, e.g., Canepa 2009 and Soudavar 2003.

²² Humbach and Inchaporia 1998, p. 15.

²³ Ibid., see, e.g., pp. 30 (§9), 42 (§45).

²⁴ See Gnoli 1999, p. 315, referring to Cumont.

²⁵ Humbach and Inchaporia 1998, p. 32 (§15). For *Aməša Spentas*, see HZ I, pp. 202–205.

²⁶ Humbach and Inchaporia 1998, p. 35 (§26).

Apam-Napāt (subsequently this function passed onto Anāhitā, who was one of the main deities worshipped in pre-Christian Armenia) and the sun-god Mithra.²⁷ As for the Unappropriated Glory, Ahura Mazdā spoke thus to Zaraθustra and said,

Everyone of you mortals, ... should therefore strive for the Unappropriated Glory. ... he should endeavor to win the luminous appreciation of his gifts to the priest. ... Reward will accompany such a person, granting much comfort, endowed with abundance, being rich in cattle and pasture. Steadfastness will accompany him, persisting all days, (as well as) the (power of) striking down (the enemies) at the attack, persisting over years...²⁸

In other words: on the one hand, *xʻarənah* became a quality which was believed to accompany rulers as a sign of divine guardianship, and on the other hand, it was a quality which could be acquired through one's deeds. In the Armenian context both interpretations of glory are found, but of greater interest to the present study is the *p'ark'* of righteous legitimate kings, which resided in their bones and protected the land even after their death.

Garsoïan has also pointed out²⁹ that in the episode V.v of the *Epic Histories* King Aršak's *p'ark'* is presented in accordance with the Iranian tradition as “a separate entity” which accompanied the Armenian army in the battle against Šapuh II, even though Aršak himself was in prison in Persia.³⁰ The Armenian contingent “attacked fiercely, valiantly [*k'ajut'yamb*] hurling their foes to the ground from their steeds,” and “shouting out these words: ‘To Aršak the *Brave!* [*k'aj*].’”³¹ This episode

²⁷ Soudavar 2003, pp. 52–59.

²⁸ Humbach and Inchaporia 1998, p. 44 (§§53–54).

²⁹ Garsoïan 1981, pp. 44–45.

³⁰ Garsoïan refers to *Kārnāmag-i Ardašīr*, in which *xʻarənah*, in the form of ram, follows and eventually joins Ardašīr indicating that he is the legitimate ruler of Iran.

³¹ *EH*, V.v: «գունդն ցիգակաւորացն յարձակեալք մուկեցեալք, *հաջութեամբ* գախոյեանս ի վերուստ յերկվարացն յերկիր կործանէին յանդիման թագաւորին Պարսից Շապուհ. եւ ընդ ընկեցողն իրախոյս բառնային՝ աղաղակելով ամենայն զօրքն պատերազմիկ Հայոց, համակ զայս բոնս ասելով՝ եթէ առ Արշակ *հաջ*: Զի զամենայն ախոյեանսն, զոր ի հակառուսն յայն սպանանէին, նմա նուիրէին իւրեանց *հաջի թագաւորին Արշակայ*. զի զամենայն զոր սպանանէին, ասէին. Արշակայ թագաւորին մերոյ գոհ լիջիր» (*my italics*).

is indicative of the Iranised mentality of the author and his audience, though in the second half of the fifth century, when the histories were written down, the concepts *k'aj* and *p'ark* must have already been perceived as traditionally Armenian.

2.4 *Baxt* (Luck, Fortune)

The origin of *baxt* is largely obscure. It strongly resembles *aši* of pre-Zoroastrian Iran that is believed “to represent the good fortune which any man might experience through luck (and due sacrifices),” as compared to *x'arənah*, which “seems rather to be a divine grace which descended on those favoured by the gods, endowing them with exceptional power and prosperity.”³² Some scholars believe that *baxt* was closely related to the Armenian god Tir, who was in charge of destiny among other functions he performed; this opinion is based on the similarities between Tir and the Babylonian god Nabū, who possessed, *inter alia*, an analogous ability to influence human fortune.³³ Indeed, the likeness is strong, for Agat'angelos describes Tir as “the interpreter of dreams, the scribe of pagan learning, who was called the secretary of Ormizd,”³⁴ and Nabu was considered to be “the god of writing,” “the patron of scribes,” “Marduk's scribe,” and “the writer of the tablets of destiny.”³⁵ However, there is no reference to Tir performing the function of a deity that affected one's destiny in one way or another, which is why other hypotheses of *baxt*'s origin should also be examined.

There is no single *yazata* (a divinity that is worthy of worship) in Zoroastrianism that is responsible for the allotment of *baxt*. It might be so because in

³² HZI, p. 66.

³³ See, e.g., Russell 1987, pp. 289–311, in particular, p. 306; Petrosyan 2004, p. 216.

³⁴ Aa §778; «Գիպեալ ի հանապարհի երագացոյց երագահան պաշտաման Տրի դից, դպրի գիտութեան քմաց, ահուանեալ Դիւան գրչի Որմզդի».

³⁵ Frymer-Kensky 2005, p. 6390.

Zoroaster's teaching it is axiomatic that "each man is directly responsible for the fate of his own soul,"³⁶ but numerous references to fortune or fate during the Parthian and Sasanian periods point to its popularity. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods the cult of the goddess Tyche (Gk. Τύχη) is abundantly attested in various forms, such as in sculptures, literature, and on coins.³⁷ For example, on the reverse side of tetradrachms of Parthian kings a female figure is usually found: she is in the position of "handing a diadem to the seated king" and is identified by David Sellwood with the goddess Tyche.³⁸ In general, Tyche, representing 'good luck,' is a common motif on Armenian Artaxiad coins too, with an additional Antiochian detail, namely the river-god Orontes swimming under the feet of Tyche³⁹. It can be argued that the etymology of the word *baxt* that encompasses the meanings 'to allot,' 'to divide'⁴⁰, suggests that it is better related to the goddess Moira (Μοῖρα)⁴¹ than Tyche. Yet, the common use of Tyche as one of the symbols of royal power renders it reasonable to assume that the kings would embrace the concept of 'good luck' to be representative of their authority rather than the unpredictable Moira.⁴²

It is plausible that *baxt*, like Tyche⁴³, was an ancient concept that slowly grew in popularity and became perceived as a spirit or divinity⁴⁴ possessing supernatural powers, capable of influencing the course of events in human life.

³⁶ HZI, p. 321.

³⁷ See Matheson 1994a.

³⁸ Sellwood 1980, p. 11.

³⁹ Bedoukian 1968, p. 131; Nercessian 2009, p. 25.

⁴⁰ Eilers and Shaked 1989, p. 536.

⁴¹ See Bartholomae 1904, p. 923.

⁴² It is noteworthy that the *NBHL* (1:424) also translates *baxt* into Greek as *tyche*, and in the Armenian Scriptures we find *baxt* standing for *tyche* (see, e.g. Isa. 65.11).

⁴³ Cf. Matheson 1994b, p. 19: "Only gradually did chance, a random force over which one had no power, become a goddess who was something closer to Luck, which could be either bad or good, but whose good side could be invoked by making the proper gestures, whether by offering something to the goddess or by wearing her image or one's lucky hat."

Another theory explains that the reverence for *baxt* in the Armenian Highland was a result of the development of the cult of Huttuini, the Urartian god of fortune, to whom king Menua erected a stele in Tušpa (Van) and whom he asked for “life, happiness and greatness.”⁴⁵ It has been suggested that the god’s name was translated into Armenian by means of the word *Groł* (literally ‘writer’),⁴⁶ although Russell and others relate this “supernatural being” to the Zoroastrian god Tir.⁴⁷ In the Middle Ages *Groł* was substituted by the Angel Gabriel, which shows that *Groł* was associated with the transferral of the souls of the deceased to heaven.⁴⁸ In modern Armenian, however, it has assumed a negative meaning of ‘an imaginative evil spirit that brings death to people, an angel that takes one’s soul’,⁴⁹ whereas *baxt* is mainly understood as “good luck, chance”.⁵⁰

On the basis of the extant evidence, it is problematic to draw any satisfactory conclusion about the origins and development of *baxt* in the Armenian context. Whatever its origins, it was undoubtedly an important concept, amongst others, invoked in various forms to provide legitimacy and protection to a monarch’s rule.

To summarise, by the time the *Epic Histories* was compiled, Armenia had already been Christian for over a century, but the pagan concepts of *k’ajut’iwn*, *p’ark’*, and *baxt* still formed an important part of the ideological framework and discourse through which power relations, legitimacy, and divine intervention in human lives

⁴⁴ It is worth mentioning that, according to the *NBHL* (1:424), one of the meanings of *baxt*, still preserved in modern Armenian, is ‘a daemonic spirit’ («նգի իմն դիւական»), which, as mentioned earlier, appears to be one of the interpretations of *k’aj*.

⁴⁵ Hmayakyan 1990, p. 47; for the original inscription, see Harutiunyan 2001, p. 124, and Melikishvili 1960, p. 195.

⁴⁶ Hmayakyan 1990, p. 48.

⁴⁷ See Russell 1987, p. 301.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 302-303.

⁴⁹ Aġayan 1976, 1:264; «Երեւակայական չար ոգի, որ մարդկանց մահ է բերում, հոգեւտ հրեւտակ».

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:162; «Խաջողութիւն, բարեպատէհ բերում».

were communicated. When applied to kings, these concepts were aimed at highlighting their virtuous character and the divine support for their rule, but when women rulers were described, as I shall demonstrate below on the examples of P‘arānjem and Zarmanduxt, none of these attributes of legitimate power were mentioned.

3. Queen Ašxēn

The first queen mentioned by name in the fifth-century sources is Ašxēn, the wife of King Trdat. She appears in Agat‘angelos’s narrative by the side of her husband, and her representation by the Armenian narrator, albeit brief, enables us to catch a glimpse of the queen’s agency in Armenian society.

There is a reference to Ašxēn’s direct involvement in the political affairs of the country when Trdat chooses to summon his army in the presence of his queen and his sister⁵¹ and includes her name in his putative letter to Leontius, Archbishop of Caesarea;⁵² in an equally putative response of Leontius mention is made of the king Trdat, *tikin* Ašxēn, and *oriord mec* Xosroviduxt⁵³ as well as of “all the general

⁵¹ *Aa* §791: «Իսկ թագաւորն Տրդատիոս հանդերձ միաբանութեամբ կնու իւրով Աշխէն տիկնաւ, եւ քերք իւրով Խոսրովիդուխտ, երաման ետ ի ժողով կոչել միաբանութեամբ ամենայն զօրաց իւրաց»; “Then king Tiridates, with his wife, queen Ašxēn, and his sister Xosroviduxt, ordered a gathering to be summoned of all his army.”

⁵² *Ibid.*, §800: «Վասն այսորիկ եւ մեր ազատտան եղեալ յօգնականութիւն ընդունելութեան ազօրից ձերոց եւ սրբութեանդ, Ղեւոնդիոս արքեպիսկոպոս Կեսարու եւ ամենայն ուխտ քահանայութեանդ սրբոյ եկեղեցւոյ, որ այդր էք, մեք յաղորմութենէ Տեառն ազօրիւք ձերովք առցուք ողջոյն, Տրդատիոս թագաւոր ամենայն զօրօք երկրիս Հայոց մեծաց, եւ Աշխէն տիկին, եւ օրիորդ մեծ Խոսրովիդուխտ»; “Therefore, trusting in the support of your acceptable and holy prayers, O Leontius Archbishop of Caesarea and all the priestly clergy of your holy church there, by God’s mercy and through your prayers we send you greetings – I king Tiridates with all the army of Greater Armenia, and queen Ašxēn and princess Xosroviduxt.”

⁵³ Literally, *tikin* – a married “great lady” or “queen” (for details, see *Chapter I*, 4.2) and *oriord mec* – an unmarried “great young lady.”

populace of Greater Armenia.”⁵⁴ By the same title Agat‘angelos presents the queen in §832, and once again we witness her participation in a very important socio-political event when a large number of people including the royal family and many *naxarars* are baptised, thus stimulating the process of Christianisation.

There is a noticeable tendency in the manner of presenting Ašxēn and the king’s sister Xosroviduxt: the author follows a strict order of mentioning the names of these characters – when mentioned together, Xosroviduxt’s name always (with only one exception)⁵⁵ appears after Ašxēn’s name, as if showing the queen’s superior position to the king’s sister. A similar hierarchical order of reference can be observed in those cases when Ašxēn and Xosroviduxt are mentioned alongside Trdat, when the latter, with no exceptions, is mentioned first. Only St Gregory is given higher priority in relation to the king⁵⁶ for his role as the one who converted the king and thereby saved Armenia.⁵⁷ Agat‘angelos thus follows the conventional understanding of hierarchical relationships of his time, for it is supported by ample evidence that strict hierarchy

⁵⁴ *Aa* §820: «Գանեալի՛ եւ խրատեալի, հարուածեալի՛ եւ ողորեալի, տանջեալի՛ եւ նուանեալի, կորուսեալի՛ եւ գտեալի, մոլորեալի՛ եւ դարձուցեալի, յալին առեալի՛ եւ սիրեցեալի Տեառն, Տրդատէս թագաւոր Հայոց մեծաց եւ Աշխեն տիկին եւ օրիորդ մեծ Խոսրովիդուխտ, եւ ամենայն հրապարակք բազմամբոխ ժողովրդոց որ իցեն Հայոց Մեծաց»; “To you who have been beaten and admonished, tormented and calmed, tortured and subdued, lost and found, gone astray and converted, noticed and beloved by the Lord, to Tiridates king of Greater Armenia and queen Ašxēn and princess Xosroviduxt and all the general populace of greater Armenia.”

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, §766: «Ինքնին թագաւորն Տրդատ քերքն Խոսրովիդուխտի հանդերձ եւ Աշխեն տիկնաւ»; “King Trdat himself and his sister Xosroviduxt and queen Ašxēn.” It is noteworthy that earlier in the same paragraph the three of them are mentioned in the ‘right’ order: the king, the queen and the king’s sister. So it might be assumed that for stylistic reasons Agat‘angelos chose to change the order and avoid repeating the same structure.

⁵⁶ We find St Gregory advising or giving orders to Trdat and other nobles on several occasions: see, for instance, §§767, 773, 777, and 828–829.

⁵⁷ The emphasis on St Gregory’s primacy is also easily understandable in the light of the historical situation contemporary to the text’s writing when Armenia did not have a monarch and the church was attempting to become a supreme unifying institution amongst the Armenians.

was a characteristic feature of early medieval Armenian society and it was effectively reflected in the works of early Armenian historians.⁵⁸

Ašxēn's representation suggests the queen's participation in social events, although it is not clear whether Agat'angelos's account reflects the actual situation in the ruling elite, or whether it is his intention to present an idealised female role model for his audience. Ašxēn appears to be the compliant spouse who supports her husband's initiatives, but the fact that Agat'angelos stresses her and Xosroviduxt's presence in the public space where politically significant processes are taking place indicates that the queenship was not a mere symbolic institution, but an important element in the paradigm of power relations. The examination of P'aranjem and Zarmanduxt's rules additionally support this assumption.

4. Queen P'aranjem

P'aranjem's ascension to the Armenian throne⁵⁹ happens under most adverse conditions: the country is being ravished by the Persian forces; King Aršak is chained in the fortress of Andməš; the *sparapet* of the Armenian army Vasak Mamikonean is arrested and cruelly killed by order of Šapuh II;⁶⁰ finally, the Aršakuni heir to the Armenian throne, Pap, has been sent to the land of Greeks as a hostage.⁶¹ Under these circumstances the Queen assumes the role of head of state and of commander-in-chief and organises stiff resistance against the Persian army. As tradition has preserved it,

when the queen of the realm of Armenia P'aranjem, the wife of Aršak king of Armenia, saw that the army of the Persian king was coming and filling the realm of Armenia, she

⁵⁸ Adontz 1970, p. 214.

⁵⁹ On P'aranjem, see also *Chapter V*, 3.2.3, 4.2, and Zakarian 2013a, pp. 9–19.

⁶⁰ *EH*, IV.liv.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, IV.xv and IV.lv.

took with her some eleven thousand select armored, warlike *azats*, together with them she avoided the Persian forces, sought [refuge] and entered the fortress of Artagers in the land of Aršakunik'.⁶²

This account explicitly shows that P'aranjem possessed actual authority over the army of nobles who obeyed her until every single man perished. As the compiler informs us, for over thirteen months the atmosphere in Artagers was congenial, and the fortress fell only when "[d]eath came down upon those who were in the fortress as a punishment from the Lord."⁶³ Taking into account the male-centred nature of Armenian society in which noble women possessed power primarily within the confines of their households,⁶⁴ it seems reasonable to assume that P'aranjem's authority was not a mere product of her strong personality but rather that it was the legitimate right of the queen to exert authority over the realm and the army in the absence of the king and the commander-in-chief.

P'aranjem's legitimacy is further supported in the episode when the *hayr-mardpet* enters Artagers during the siege, insults P'aranjem and berates "the clan of the Aršakuni for being men of ill-counsel and ill-repute, as well as destroyers of the realm. 'Justly,' he said 'has all of this come upon you, and [also] that which shall come'."⁶⁵ These words suggest that P'aranjem is perceived as one of the Aršakuni, who were considered to be the only legitimate rulers of Armenia.⁶⁶

⁶² *Ibid.*, IV.IV: «Ապա իբրեւ ետես տիկին աշխարհին Հայոց կինն Արշակայ քաղաւորին Հայոց Փառանձեմ գօրս քաղաւորին Պարսից, եթէ եկին լցին զաշխարհս Հայոց, առեալ ընդ իւր մարդիկ իբրեւ մետասան հազար ազատս ընտիրս սպառազէնս պատերազմողս, եւ հանդերձ նոյն զինեաց եմուտ ի բերդն Արտագերից՝ որ ի յերկրին Արշարունեաց՝ յերեսաց գօրացն Պարսից».

⁶³ *EH*, «մահ անկաւ ի վերայ նոցա՝ որք ի բերդին էին, զի ի տեսնել հասին պատուհաւ».

⁶⁴ See *Chapter I*, 2.2.2.

⁶⁵ *EH*, IV.IV: «Ապա եկն եմուտ գաղտ ի ներս ի բերդն Հայր մարդպետ ներքինին, եւ քեմամնեաց զտիկինն մեծապէս իբրեւ գրոգ մի: Սկսաւ զնել քեմամնս ազգին Արշակունեաց, զի վատախորհուրդք են վատաւեանք, կորուսին զաշխարհս եւս. իբաւի անց ընդ ձեզ այդ, եւ այլ զի անցցէ».

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 517; see under *bnak tēr*.

The compiler of the *Epic Histories* provides no evaluation of P'aranjem's queenship, and no reference is made to *p'arḱ*, *baxt*, and *k'aḟut'iwn*, even though she was a member of Aršakuni family by her first marriage and was perceived as a legitimate ruler; neither is her valiant defence of Artagers characterised as brave (*k'aḟ*). There can be two possible explanations to this fact: either, as in the case of King Pap, the compiler deemed P'aranjem unworthy of the throne, thus she was deprived of the supernatural paraphernalia of a legitimate and righteous ruler, or these attributes were considered to be masculine traits and could not be applied to female monarchs.

5. Queen Zarmanduxt

To understand which of these two suggestions is more valid I shall turn to another queen of Armenia, about whom the *Epic Histories* has preserved some information. I am referring to Queen Zarmanduxt, the widow of King Pap and the mother of the future king Aršak III. She comes to power with the help of the Mamikonean *sparapet* Manuēl at the time when her husband has been killed and her eldest son is still too young to accede to the throne of Armenia. This is how the compiler presents the political situation in the country after Pap's assassination:

He [*sparapet* Manuēl] wielded authority and gave orders to the realm in the place of the king, and he kept the realm prosperous. He kept the wife of King Pap, Queen Zarmanduxt, with her two Aršakuni sons in place of the king and took them around with honor. ... he honored ... Zarmanduxt with the great pomp of a queen.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Ibid., V.xxxvii: «Էւ [սպարապետն Մանուէլ] վարէր զիւր իշխանութիւնն, և տայր հրաման աշխարհի փոխանակ թագաւորի. և ունէր զաշխարհի ի շինութեան: Եւ զկիսն Պապայ արքայի զԶարմանդուխտ տիկին, հանդերձ որդւով աւակունով, առեալ զնոսա՝ ի տեղի թագաւորի կալեալ ի պատիւ շրջեցուցանէր ... և ... զԶարմանդուխտ ի մեծի շքի տիկնութեան պատուէր».

When the queen and the *sparapet* send a letter of submission to the Persian king, the latter also recognises Zarmanduxt's authority and the legitimacy of her rule: he grants her "a crown, a robe-of-honor, and the royal standard," and her children, Aršak and Vałaršak, receive a crown.⁶⁸ The following passages are further revealing:

And thereafter, the Armenian commander-in-chief Manuēl together with his entire contingent placed at their head Queen Zarmanduxt the wife of King Pap, and they displayed her all around in place of the king.⁶⁹ ...

the *sparapet* and the commander-in-chief Manuēl went with the Aršakuni queen and her two children, Aršak and Vałaršak, to the district of Karin, together with the entire Armenian army, the highest nobility and the *naxarars*, and all the *tanutērs* went with them. The *sparapet* Manuēl gave his daughter Vardanduxt in marriage to the young Aršak Aršakuni and thus made him his son-in-law. ...

After this, all the men of the Armenian realm assembled once more together and [Manuēl] made the young Aršak king of the Armenian land, and his brother Vałaršak second to him.⁷⁰

This information about Zarmanduxt's queenship clearly shows that a widowed queen with underage children would temporarily become the head of the state and would be recognised by everyone as such. She would then act as a regent for the future king, who would accede to the throne as soon as he came of age.

Deliberately or not, however, the compiler projects an image of a powerless Zarmanduxt who lacks agency, in contrast to the *sparapet* who exercises ultimate power. When important decisions regarding state affairs are to be made, the *sparapet*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, V.xxxviii: «Եւ ընդ նմա առաքէր յերկիրն Հայոց զՍուրէն պարսիկ մի հոյս եւ նախարարացն իւրոց. եւ ընդ նմա յղեաց տասն հազար հեծեալս վառեալս սպառազէնս, զի երբիցէ Սուրէն յաշխարհն Հայոց ի քիկունս օգնականութեան զօրավարին Մանուէլի, եւ պահել ի բռնամեաց զտիկինն զԶարմանդուխտ: Եւ ետ թագաւորն Պարսից տանել ի ձեռն Սուրենայ թագ եւ պատմունան, եւ զվառ թագաւորացն տիկնոջն Զարմանդիտոյ, եւ թագս մանկանցն որպէսցն երկոցունց Արեւակայ եւ Վաղարշակայն».

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, V.xxxviii: «Եւ յայնմ հետէ զօրավարն Հայոց Մանուէլ հանդերձ ամենայն զնդաւն զտիկին Զարմանդուխտ զկինն թագաւորին Պապայ ի գլուխ առեալ, ի տեղի թագաւորացն շրջեցուցանէին».

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, V.xliv: «Ապա յետ այսր ամենայնի զօր արարեալ զօրավարն սպարապետն Մանուէլ, հանդերձ արեւիտնի տիկնուն, եւ մանկամբն երկոսումբ՝ Արեւակուն եւ Վաղարշակուն, հանդերձ ամենայն բառակուն Հայոց մեծամեծ աւագայնովն նախարարօքն եկեալ հասանէր ի գաւառն Կարնոյ. եւ ամենայն տառուտեալք ընդ նմա: Եւ տայր սպարապետն Մանուէլ զպուստր իւր Վարդանդուխտ կինն Արեւակայ մանկանն արեւիտնոյ, եւ փեսայ իւր առնէր զնա: ... Ապա յետ այսորիկ դարձեալ ի մի վայր ժողովեալ [Մանուէլ] զաշխարհ ամենայն զմարդիկ երկրին Հայոց, եւ թագաւորեցոյց զմանուկն զԱրեւակ երկրին Հայոց, եւ զՎաղարշակ երկրորդ նմին».

nevertheless seems to be obliged to consult the queen and to receive her consent before acting. Thus, in V.xxxvii the compiler informs us that “when Manuēl saw that whatever he did ran counter to the orders of the king of the Greeks, he judged it fitting to find one person at least to give him support. He then *took counsel with the queen and they decided* to seek the support of the Persian king.”⁷¹ Similarly, in V.xxxviii “Queen Zarmanduxt and the *sparapet* Manuēl sent Garjoyl *malxaz* with many Armenian *naxarars* as well as letters-patent, gifts, and presents to the king of Persia...”⁷² This shows that the Queen of Armenia did not merely occupy an honourable position in the society, but that she, in fact, possessed sufficient power to influence the social processes in the country, for no serious decision is taken without the queen.

As is the case with P‘aranjem, Queen Zarmanduxt’s representation does not include any reference to *p‘ark‘*, *baxt*, and *k‘ajut‘iwn*. This can only be attributed to the incompatibility of these concepts with the institute of queenship and has nothing to do with the personality of the queen, for, in contrast to P‘aranjem, Zarmanduxt’s overall description reveals no traces of transgression and no negative evaluation or comment is made about her by the compiler. In particular for this reason I am inclined to assume that the supernatural paraphernalia of royal power were believed to be masculine traits and could not be applied to an Arsacid queen of Armenia.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, V.xxxvii: «յորժամ տեսանէր Մանուէլն՝ զոր ինչ գործեացն ընդդէմ էր հրամանաց թագաւորին Յունաց, ածեալ զմտաւ իւրով՝ թէ արժան է նմա գէթ զմի ոք թիկունս առնել նմա, ապա *խորհեցան խորհուրդ ընդ տիկնոջն*, եւ կամեցաւ թիկունս առնել զարքայն Պարսից» (*my italics*).

⁷² *EH*, V.xxxviii: «Ապա յետ այսորիկ առաքեցին Զարմանդուխտ տիկինն Հայոց եւ սպարապետն Մանուէլ զԳարջոյլ Մաղխազ, եւ ընդ նմա զբազումս ի նախարարացն Հայոց, հրովարտակօ՛ք ընծայիւք եւ պատարագօք առ թագաւորն Պարսից...»

6. An Unnamed Queen of Greater Armenia

At the beginning of the *Epic Histories*⁷³ there is a brief mention of an unnamed Armenian queen, who was the wife of the King Xosrov Kotak. Her representation is another evidence of an active queen who interferes in the political life of the country. Allegedly, the queen provides support to the rebellion of pagan Armenians who attack the church where the Armenian high-priest Vrt'anēs was performing “the sacrifice of praise.”⁷⁴ The compiler explains that the queen attempts to kill the high-priest because Vrt'anēs has rebuked her “for her secret adultery and dissolute ways.”⁷⁵ When the rebellion fails and the rioters are captured, they confirm that they have been “emboldened by the order and instigation of the queen of Greater Armenia.”⁷⁶

No other information is provided about the fate of the queen, but it seems apparent that she possessed certain administrative levers at her disposal, which allowed her to stage a rebellion against the ecclesiastical authorities.

7. Conclusion

The discussion of supernatural concepts of *p'ark'*, *baxt*, and *k'ajut'awn* within the context of Armenian culture has revealed interesting aspects of these symbolic notions. On the basis of currently available sources we may conclude that *p'ark'*, *baxt*, and *k'ajut'awn* represented masculine virtues and would only accompany a legitimate and, most importantly, a righteous king. As far as the institution of queenship is

⁷³ *Ibid.*, III.iii.

⁷⁴ According to Garsoïan, “the sacrifice of praise” («գալատարագն օրհնութեան») refers to “the *θυσία αινέσεως* of the Basilian Liturgy” (*EH*, n. 9, p. 246).

⁷⁵ *EH*, III.iii: «Բայց ունէին եւ սակաւ մի խորհուրդ համարձակութեան ի կնոջէ թագաւորէն՝ գայն գործել. վասն զի յանդիմանէր զնա սուրբն վասն գաղտնի շնութեան զիջութեան բարոյից պոռնկութեան».

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, «Իսկ նոցա զարդարն սկսեալ խօսել, խոստովան լինէին՝ եթէ եկա՞մ զի աւերեցո՞ւմ գտեղիս, եւ զիեզ սպանցո՞ւմ, հրամանաւ համարձակեալ տկնաբկելով մեծին Հայոց տիկնոջն».

concerned, the representation of Ašxēn, P‘ařanjem, and Zarmanduxt explicitly shows that the queenship in Arsacid Armenia was an integral part of the state mechanism. When the king was alive and was leading the country, the queen would not exercise any substantial authority, though her presence was conspicuous by the side of her spouse. Whenever the king’s throne was empty, the queen would assume authority as head of state, but only temporarily until the legitimate heir would accede to the throne. The queen’s rule, though legitimate, was perceived as lacking supernatural patronage, for in the mentality of the Armenian people the common symbolic attributes of authority were not applicable to female monarchs.

Chapter VII

Women in the Theatre of War

1. Introduction

Violence, especially violence perpetrated against women, has been endemic to the human race throughout world history. Early Christian sources contain a large number of references to women who experienced different degrees of maltreatment and abuse in both the domestic and public spheres. Hagiographic texts, in particular, abound with lurid descriptions of blood and gore with women recurrently featuring as the main object of violence. Furthermore, during conflicts captive women are often portrayed as a tool in the hands of the captors, who would exploit them to dictate their terms to the hostile party, or sometimes, aiming to humiliate and demoralise the adversary, these women would be sexually abused and brutally killed.

Armenian literary sources of the fifth century are not different in this respect, for besides hagiographic accounts there are also several compelling historical narratives that feature high-ranking women who become victims of war or suffer its negative consequences. These women are the focus of the present chapter. The analysis of their representation will offer illuminating insights into the mentality of the Armenian people and will reveal the stance of society on violence inflicted upon women. In particular, I shall demonstrate that a man's honour and dignity were closely associated with his wife's reputation, and an abuse of someone's wife meant an insult to her husband and his clan. Therefore, a woman's body was often

manipulated to exert pressure on her husband and to force him to act in compliance with the captor's will. However, there were certain unwritten rules, in the likeness of the medieval chivalric code, which the conflicting sides observed. In any case, all manipulations of woman's chastity were fraught with danger and could lead to blood feuds; for that reason, during the negotiation process the captors would often ensure these women's safety and special treatment appropriate to their rank to avoid serious repercussions.

This sort of mentality developed around the concepts of honour and shame, which were fundamental notions that ensured the social viability of an individual and his family. In other words, honour was the key social and cultural constituent which determined one's respectability and consequently the status and position in society, while loss of honour would seriously jeopardise it. The extant evidence suggests that man's honour was perceived to be dependent not only on his personal traits and deeds, but also on the moral integrity and chastity of his wife, whom he was obliged to defend from all dangers that could compromise her reputation. This social reality, as we shall see, is clearly discernible in the accounts of the fifth-century Armenian authors.

2. The *Epic Histories*

There are several passages in the *Epic Histories* that deal with the violent treatment of women of high social status.¹ Amongst the victims we find the Queen of Armenia P'aranjem, noble Hamazaspuhi Mamikonean and many unnamed Armenian noblewomen. Interestingly, atrocities against them are described in more detail than

¹ This section draws on my earlier analysis of the representation of female figures in the *Epic Histories* (see Zakarian 2013a).

any other act of violence in the histories. The most plausible explanation for such an approach lies in the compiler's intention to demonise the Persians and the Armenian apostates in the eyes of his audience, for their aim is to undermine the Arsacid statehood and its Christian faith.

2.1. P'aranjem

The death of Queen P'aranjem is recounted in the episode IV.lv. Having been abandoned by everyone, P'aranjem is compelled to surrender the besieged fortress of Artagers after fourteen months of its heroic defence against the Persian army. She is taken to Persia with other Armenian captives, where Šapuh, king of Persia,

ordered all of his troops, magnates, base-born, and all of the men of the realm under his dominion assembled together, and he brought P'aranjem the queen of Armenia into this mob. And he ordered a device of debauchery erected in the public-square and had the woman thrown into it. And he delivered Queen P'aranjem to foul and beastly copulation. And in this fashion they killed P'aranjem the queen.²

The author explains that by abusing the Queen, “Šapuh wished to insult the race of the realm and kingdom of Armenia.”³ It is entirely plausible that this was indeed the underlying motive of Šapuh's action, but it is more important to note that the compiler himself interprets P'aranjem's gruesome death as an ‘insult’ to the Armenian people. He does not, however, make the same evaluation of the death of King Aršak, who commits a suicide after being kept in appalling conditions in the

² *EH*, IV.lv: «Եւ հրաման ժողովել զամենայն զգօրս իւր եւ զմեծամեծս իւր եւ զփոքունս եւ զամենայն մարդիկ աշխարհին իւրոյ՝ որ ինքն իշխէր, եւ ի մէջ ամբոյսին ածել զտիկինն Հայոց զՓառանձեմն: Եւ հրամայեաց ի հրապարակին իմն առնել հրապոյրս մեհենայից, որով հրամայեաց զկինն արկանել, եւ արծակել տիկնոջն Փառանձեմայ ի խառնակութիւն պռոկութեանն անասնական պղծութեանն: Այսպէս սատակեցին զտիկինն զՓառանձեմ»

³ *Ibid.*, IV.lv: «Կամեցաւ քազաւորն Պարսից Շապուհ քեւամանս առնել ազգին աշխարհին Հայոց եւ քազաւորութեանն».

Persian prison;⁴ nor does he do it in the case of *sparapet* Vasak Mamikonean, who is, by Šapuh's order, "flayed alive, his skin stripped off, filled with straw, and taken to the same fortress of Andməš, [which is also] called Anuš, where they were holding King Aršak"⁵. Thus, the queen appears to represent the symbolic honour of the country, and her dishonouring is perceived as the ultimate humiliation and total disrespect for the country and its people.

I would argue that this is one of the main reasons why P'aranjem's role in Armenian history is downplayed and obscured by other historians, and the details of her death are altered. For instance, in *The Life of St Nersēs* nothing is said about P'aranjem's death. On the other hand, Xorenac'i and Step'anos Taronec'i (also known as Asolik, 10th–11th cc.) are silent about P'aranjem's rape and only mention that the Persians killed her by impaling her body on a cart pole.⁶ However, an incisive comment is made by Mxit'ar of Ani (13th c.), who characterises P'aranjem's assassination as an "ignominious death worth of oblivion" (*naxatamah ew anyišeli*)⁷.

It is noteworthy that in an earlier episode the compiler evaluates the capture of the wives of Šapuh by the Greek emperor in similar terms⁸. After unsuccessful

⁴ Ibid., V.vii.

⁵ Ibid., IV.liv: «Էտ հրաման թագաւորն Պարսից մորթել զգօրավարն Հայոց Վասակ, եւ գմորթն հանել եւ լնուլ խոտով, եւ տանել ընդ նայն բերդ յԱնդմաշն՝ որ Անյուշն կոչեն, ուր արգելին իսկ զթագաւորն Արշակ».

⁶ *MX*, III.35: «Զորս գերեալ հանդերձ զանձիւքն եւ տիկնուն Փառանձեմաւ խաղացուցին ի յԱսորեստան. եւ անդ ընդ սայլի ցից հանեալ՝ սատակեցին»; "Taking them captive with the treasures and Queen P'arandzem they brought them to Assyria. And there they massacred them by impaling them on wagon poles." *Asolik*, II.1: «Եւ պաշարեալ Մերուժանայ զամուրն Արտագերից՝ առնաւ զնա եւ հանէ զՓառանձեմ, ըստ պարսկական որինաց՝ ընդ ցից սայլի»; "And having besieged it, Meružan seized the fortress of Artager and according to the Persian custom impaled P'aranjem on a cart pole" (my translation).

⁷ Mxit'ar of Ani 1879, xxiii, p. 31: «Նա [Մեհրուժան Արծրունին] եւ գմայր Պապայ, զՓառանձեմ, նախատամահ եւ անյիշելի մահուամբ սատակէ»; "He [Meružan Arcruni] also puts P'aranjem, Pap's mother, to ignominious death worth of oblivion." It is worthy of note that the compound adjective *naxatamah* (*naxat* = ignominious, *mah* = death) is a *hapax legomenon* with a repetition of the root *mah*.

⁸ This account contains many inconsistencies in chronology and prosopography, and it is not clear how accurately the historical events are reflected in it. Garsoïan discusses the problems

military operations Šapuh allegedly hastens to negotiate the terms of the truce “so that he should at least free his wives from captivity and [so] release him from this infamous and opprobrious shame”⁹. This representation of the Persian king’s fears to the fifth-century Armenian audience comes to confirm that in the mentality of these people inability of a man to protect his wife and her honour was perceived as a sign of weakness and could seriously damage his reputation.

2.2. The Armenian Noblewomen

After P‘afanjem’s brutal murder Šapuh continues to pursue his policy of intimidation and demoralisation by abusing women. According to the compiler a large number of the captive women were “impaled on carriage-poles” alongside their children.¹⁰ These must have been the wives of the *šinakans* rather than of the nobles, for a couple of lines later the author stresses that

As for the wives of the *azats* and *naxarars* who had fled, he [Šapuh] ordered them brought to the racecourse of the city of Zarehawan. And he ordered all these noblewomen stripped naked and seated here and there on the racecourse. And King Šapuh himself rode out on horseback, galloped among the women, and took for himself one by one whichever of them caught his eye for foul copulation.¹¹

related to this episode in the notes to III.xxi (*EH*, pp. 264-267; see especially notes 1, 4, 16, 21, and 23).

⁹ *Ibid.*, III.xxi: «Եւ ինքն [Շապուհ] ի գղջումն եկեալ վասն իրացն եղելոց, ապա արձակէր զիշխանսն պատուականս ի հնազանդութիւն խաղաղութեան վասն գերեզարձ առնել ի կայսերէն միւսանգամ, եւ այնուհետեւ աղօթակերս արձակել ի հաշտութիւն խաղաղութեան խօսել ընդ կայսերն, զի գոնեայ զկանայս իւր արձակեսցէ ի գերութենէն, եւ բարձցէ ի նմանէ զծանախութեանցն զգարովութեանցն նախատինս».

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, IV.lviii: «Ապա հրաման տայր քազաւորն Պարսից Շապուհ ... զամենայն զկին եւ զմանուկ հանել ընդ ցից սայլից».

¹¹ *Ibid.*, IV.lviii: «Եւ զկանայս ազատացն եւ նախարարացն զվախուցելոցն հրաման տայր ածել յասպարէզն՝ որ էր ի Զարեհիւան քաղաքի: Եւ հրաման տայր հռլանել զամենայն ազատ կանանին, եւ նստուցանել աստի անտի ասպարիսին. եւ ինքն Շապուհ արքայ հեծեալ ի ձի, շուռակի անցանէր առ կանանովն. եւ որ յակն գային, մի մի ի նոցանէ պղծեալ ի խառնակութիւն տանէր առ ինքն».

None of the women is named, and no specific information about their numbers is provided. This gives the impression of being an exaggerated portrayal of an episode from the devastating campaign of the Persian army to Armenia in *ca* 367, and it is noteworthy that all the later Armenian authors, as in the case of P'āranjem, prefer to remain silent and omit the account of the sexual abuse of the noblewomen from their narratives.

The physical abuse of some of the noblewomen appears to be only part of the king's strategy to coerce Armenian noblemen into submission to his authority, for

Šapuh king of Persia likewise ordered fortresses built in the most impregnable localities of Armenia and he also ordered keepers installed there. And he apportioned the noblewomen among these fortresses and there, so that if their husbands did not come to serve him, the keeper-of-the-fortresses should kill the wives left with them.¹²

Šapuh sends a clear message to the Armenian nobles whose spouses are held captives: should they carry on their struggle against him, he will show no mercy to their wives who may share the fate of the dishonoured women. It becomes evident that the female body was thus exploited to derive political benefits for the side which established control over the adversary's women.

Episode V.ii further extends our knowledge of this topic. During a successful military campaign the Armenian *sparapet* Mušel Mamikonean manages to capture the harem of Šapuh along with the queen-of-queens and many Persian nobles. It is remarkable that Mušel treats the captive men with total disrespect and has them killed in the same way as they murdered his father Vasak¹³, but he allows “no one to insult

¹² *Ibid.*, IV.Iviii: «Եւ տայր հրաման Շապուհ արքայն Պարսից զամուր ամուր տեղիսն Հայոց բերդս շինել, հրամայեաց եւ բերդակալս կացուցանել: Եւ զազատ կանանին անդէն 'ի բերդեանն բաշխէր եւ թողոյր. զի երբ ոչ արք նոցա եկեացեն նմա 'ի ծառայութիւն, սպանցեն զկանայս նոցա բերդակալքն՝ առ որս երող գնուա».

¹³ *Ibid.*, V.ii: «Եւ զամենայն մաշկաւարզան ի բուն արկանէր Մուշեղ սպարապետն, եւ զամենայն աւագանիս՝ արս իբրեւ վեց հարիւր՝ հրամայէր մորթել զօրավարն Հայոց Մուշեղ, եւ լնուլ խոտով. եւ տայր բերել առ Պապ

the wives of Šapuh king of Persia in any way” and sends “them all back to their husband King Šapuh”¹⁴. The Persian king appreciates the *sparapet*’s gesture, for Mušel has “inflicted no offence on him on account of his wives”¹⁵, and even orders that the portrait of Mušel with his white steed be painted on one of his cups¹⁶. Yet, Šapuh is reported to make no comment on the death of his nobles.

This is obviously the compiler’s own interpretation and eloquent representation of the events. It is, nevertheless, essential to note that this Christian cleric perceives Mušel’s killing of the Persian nobles as a justifiable act of revenge not denounced by Šapuh, whereas if the *sparapet* mistreated the king’s women, that would be considered an insult and would enrage the king of kings.

In most cases the compiler is keen on explaining the motives of his protagonists, but in this episode we learn nothing about Mušel’s incentive to spare Šapuh’s wives. Garsoïan believes that it “was a heroic gesture going back to the chivalry of Alexander the Great vis-à-vis the wives of Darius III after the battle of Issos (Plutarch, ‘Alexander,’ xxi) and may well have become an epic cliché.”¹⁷ I would elaborate further on this interpretation and suggest that Mušel acted according to the unwritten code of honour, which is attested in a number of Persian sources¹⁸.

արքայն Հայոց: Առնէր գայս ի վրէժս հօրն իւրոյ Վասակայ»; “The Armenian commander-in-chief Mušel ordered their skins flayed off, stuffed with straw, and taken to Pap king of Armenia. And he did this to avenge his father Vasak.”

¹⁴ Ibid., V.ii: «Բայց զկանայսն Շապիոյ թագաւորին Պարսից ոչ ունեմ ինչ թոյլ տայր Մուշեղ զօրավարն Հայոց անարգել ինչ զնոստ ունեմ. այլ ժանաւարս տայր նոցան կազմել ամենեցուն, եւ հանեալ արծակէր զամենեւեան զհետ անն նոցա Շապիոյ արքայի».

¹⁵ Ibid., V.ii: «Իսկ թագաւորն Պարսից զարմացեալ ընդ բարերարութիւնն Մուշեղի եւ ընդ քաջութիւնն եւ ընդ ազատութիւնն, զի ոչ արար ինչ նմա յազազս կանանցն թեմաման».

¹⁶ Ibid., V.ii: «Եւ նկարել զառաւ ի պատկեր զՄուշեղ ներմակաւն»; “he ordered a cup decorated with the portrait of Mušel with his white steed.”

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 308, V.ii n. 8.

¹⁸ For the primary sources, see Shahbazi 1987, p. 498. Zakeri (1995, pp. 60, 67–68) also discusses the existence of such a code in the Sasanian army, in particular among the elect soldiers known as *asbārān*. There can be little doubt that the Armenian general and all the military were fully acquainted with this code of conduct and the hierarchical relationships

In his attack on the Persian camp and killing of the nobles the *sparapet* was primarily driven by a desire for revenge for the death of his father, which seems to have been perceived as legitimate by the compiler and, perhaps, by Šapuh himself. The code of honour, however, only permitted killing of an adversary who was of the same or of lower rank, which is why Mušel could not maltreat the wives of Šapuh, especially the queen-of-queens, because of their high position within the hierarchy of power.¹⁹ In fact, when accused of plotting against King Pap, Mušel unequivocally refers to this concept in the code by saying: “I have killed all of my equals, but those who wear the crown are not my equals but yours. Go and kill yours, as I have killed mine. But I have never raised my hand against a man [who is] king, against one who wears a crown.”²⁰ The *sparapet*’s words contain a mild reproach of Pap’s failure to revenge the murder of his parents, which could be yet another reason²¹ why Pap acquired an unsavoury reputation among his contemporaries.

2.3. Hamazaspuhi Mamikonean’s Martyrdom

The *Epic Histories* features one more description of violence towards women, the focus of which, however, is different from other accounts. This episode belongs to the

within the Iranian milieu, for not only were there several-centuries-long cultural and political ties between the Armenians and Persians, but also by the fact that at the time the Armenian cavalry still formed a highly esteemed part of the elite of the Sasanian army (Christensen 1944, p. 210).

¹⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus confirms that amongst the Persians prisoners were treated differently depending on their social status: thus, he reports that when the Armenian King Aršak was imprisoned by Šapuh, “after his eyes had been gouged out, he was bound in silver chains, which among that people [i.e. the Persians] is regarded as a consolation, though an empty one, for the punishment of men of rank ...”; “Dein per exquisitas periuriisque mixtas illecebras, captum regem ipsum Arsacen, adhibitumque in convivium, iussit ad latentem trahi posticam, eumque effossis oculis vinctum catenis argenteis, quod apud eos honoratis vanum suppliciorum aestimatur esse solacium ...” (*AM*, XXVII.xii.3).

²⁰ *EH*, V.iv: «Զին զընգերսն զամենեւեան եւ կոտորեցի. իսկ որ թագս ունէին, նոքա իս ընգերք չէին, այլ քո. եկեացես՝ որպէս եւ զինսն սպանի, դու գոյսն. այլ իմ յայր թագաւոր ոչ ձգեալ ձեռն երբէք որ թագ ունի».

²¹ For the summary of other reasons, see Garsoïan’s comments in *EH*, pp. 397–398.

genre of hagiography, and its protagonist, Hamazaspuhi Mamikonean, who is most likely a historical figure, is killed as a Christian martyr for her refusal to convert to Zoroastrianism. In contrast to the previously discussed passages the anonymous narrator not only portrays the perpetrators as wicked and iniquitous traitors, but he also wishes to glorify Hamazaspuhi and her dedication to Christian ideals.

Hamazaspuhi was from the Mamikonean house and was married to Garegin, the lord of Țstunik'. Garegin fled the Persian forces during Šapuh's military operations in Armenia, and Hamazaspuhi was left in the fortress of Van, which came under the control of the Persian army. At the time the apostates Vahan Mamikonean and Meružan Arcruni "gave out an order to the fortresses to compel the women to turn to the religion of the Mazdeans, and if they did not accept, to put all of them cruelly to death."²² Hamazaspuhi disobeys the order and is put to death.

The author borrows images from hagiographic narratives and in beautiful, poetic language creates the radiant image of a Christian martyr:

Since Hamazaspuhi would not agree to keep the Mazdean laws, they carried her to a lofty tower that stood on a rocky height and looked in the direction of the lake on the side of the river, stripped her naked as she had come from her mother's [womb], tied her feet with a rope, and hanged her head down from that high place. And thus she died on the gallows. But her body was white and luminous to see, so that it remained hanging like a marvellous apparition. Her body shone from on high with a whiteness like snow, and day after day many people gathered to see it as a miraculous manifestation in the realm.²³

²² *Ibid.*, IV.lxx: «գամենայն կանայս փախուցելոցն զնախարարացն՝ որ քողինն եւ զնացինն, տային հրաման ի բերդեանն զի նեղեցեն զնոսա՝ դարձուցանել յօրէնս Մագդեգանց. երբ ոչ առնուցուն յանձն, սատակեցեն զամենեւեան չարաչար».

²³ *Ibid.*, IV.lxx: «Իբրեւ ոչ առնոյր յանձն Համագասպուհի պսիւղ զօրէնս Մագդեգանցն, հանէին ի բարձր աւտարակն՝ որ կայր ի վերայ բարձր գահուն քարին, որ հային ի կողմն ծովակին ի գետոյ կուսէ. եւ մերկացուցին զնա իբրեւ ի մօրէ. եւ արկեալ կապ գոտիցն, զլիւկայր կախեցին զնա զբարձուէն կուսէ. եւ այնպէս մեռաւ ի կախադանին: Եւ էր նա սպիտակ մարմնով, եւ պայծառ տեսանելով. կայր կախեալ յերեսոյր տեսիլ նշանակի, եւ փառաբանէր մարմինն ի բարձուէն զոր օրինակ ձիւն սպիտակութեամբն. եւ բազում մարդիկ ժողովէին տեսանել օր ըստ օրէ, զի իբրեւ սքանչելի ինչ երեւէր յաշխարհին».

Although Hamazaspuhi is stripped naked and her body is displayed in public, shame and dishonour are absent from this description. On the contrary, the gleaming whiteness of the martyr's body symbolising her purity becomes the sign of divine visitation. As in Agat'angelos's representation of the martyrdom of the Hrip'simian virgins, violence against Hamazaspuhi is interpreted as a means to bring God's grace to the Armenian land.

3. The Kamsarakan Women in Łazar P'arpec'i's *History*

A different war experience of noblewomen is related by Łazar P'arpec'i in the account of the second Armenian revolt in 482–484 against the oppressive religious policy of the Sasanian court. The episode of the captivity of women from the noble Kamsarakan family provides further evidence on how the integrity of women's body and self was exploited to achieve one's objectives. In addition, it testifies that the military code of conduct was still followed at the end of the fifth century, and a woman's high status in the Armenian-Iranian milieu could ensure her safety while in captivity.

In one of the episodes of military operations the Persian commander Zarmihr Hazarawuxt, sent by King Peroz to suppress the rebellion, fortuitously captures the two wives of the Kamsarakan brothers Nerseh, lord of Širak, and Hrahat.²⁴ In contrast

²⁴ *ŁP*, p. 204 [145]: «... տեղեակ առաջնորդօք հասանէր [Հազարաւուխտ] ընդ առաւօտուն ծագել: Եւ գտեալ անդ բազմութիւն այլ մարդկան, ընդ որս դիպեցան եւ կանայք երկուց Կամսարականացն, տեառնն Շիրակայ Ներսէի եւ Հրահատայ, յորոց վերայ անկեալ յանգգաստ գօրացն Պարսից՝ զբազումս ի ռամիկ մարդկանէն Հայոց սպանանէին. եւ զկանայս երկուց Կամսարականացն եղբարց, զՆերսէի եւ զՀրահատայ, ըմբռնեալ տանէին ի բանակն Պարսից»;
 “Led by guides he [Hazarawuxt] arrived at daybreak. He found there a great number of other people, among whom happened to be also the wives of the two Kamsarakan, Nerseh lord of Širak and Hrahat. The Persian troops fell on the unwary Armenians and killed many of the commoners. Seizing the wives of the two Kamsarakan brothers, Nerseh and Hrahat, they took them to the Persian camp.”

to the men, the Kamsarakan women are not named, even though Łazar must have known them personally, in view of the fact that in his youth he spent some time under their roof.²⁵ Hazarawuxt aspires to force the brothers to abandon the ranks of the rebels, which will considerably weaken the Armenian resistance led by Vahan Mamikonean.²⁶

Łazar ascribes the following thoughts to Hazarawuxt after the latter has discovered who the captured women are:

Through them I shall surely be able to hunt down and capture Vahan. For they [the princes Kamsarakan] have his heart and their solidarity is sure and devoted. Once they are separated from him, and he is left alone without those men, either he will submit to us, as we desire, or he will flee to a foreign land and perish all alone.²⁷

This retrospective view based on the interpretation of subsequent events implies that the Kamsarakan women become an instrument of blackmail and manipulation. Nevertheless, the Persians do not succeed in their plans, for King Peroz soon perishes during his campaign against the Hephthalites²⁸, and the Armenian rebellion comes to an end after the compromise reached by Vahan Mamikonean and the Persian official Všnaspdat Nixor at Nuarsak (484)²⁹.

Łazar is silent about the destiny of the two women, but we may assume that they returned safe and sound to their families, for the last reference to them indicates that the Persian commander of the Bolberd fortress, where they were kept, receives

²⁵ Ibid., p. 250 [187-188]: «Եւ եկեալ անտի [ի Հռոմս] կեցի առ Կամսարականոյ յամենայն ամբոխսն ... Արդ՝ գառաջին կելոյն իմոյ զվարս տէր Ներսէս եւ Հրահատ Կամսարական գիտենն»; "Returning thence [from Roman territory] I lived with the Kamsarakans, all together ... So lords Hrahat and Nerseh Kamsarakan are acquainted with the circumstances of my early life ..."

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 204-205 [145-146].

²⁷ Ibid., p. 204 [145-146]: «արդ նոֆո հաստատ կարեն որսալ եւ ըմբռնեն զՎահան. քանզի նոքա են նորա սիրտ եւ հաւատաւէս միանձնապէս միութիւն. եւ թէ քակտեալ նոքա ի նմանէ լինին զամ մի, եւ նա միայն մնայ առանց այն արանց՝ կամ նուաճեալ հնազանդի մեզ, որպէս եւ կամիմք, եւ կամ վախճեալ յօտար երկիր՝ կորնչի միայն առանձինն».

²⁸ Ibid., p. 214 [155].

²⁹ Ibid., p. 220 [160].

“strict orders that they [the Kamsarakan ladies] were to be kept with all care, and especially unmolested in accordance with Christian practice”³⁰. Unlike King Šapuh’s brutal treatment of Armenian noblewomen the Persian general Hazarawuxt and later *marzpan* Šapuh Mihranean, treat the two women with the respect that their rank requires³¹, or at least this is what the author wants us to believe.

The high status of the Kamsarakan family, their unswerving support for Armenia’s religious freedom, the close collaboration and ties of kinship with the Mamikoneans, and his personal attachment to the Kamsarakans explain Łazar’s zeal to glorify the men of that clan for their bravery³² and to praise their women for their high moral standards. Indeed, Łazar is genuinely concerned with providing a convincing explanation for his claim that, while in captivity, the wives of the Kamsarakan princes were not subjected to physical violence and mistreatment, and remained pure in accordance with the Christian faith. It appears to be of utmost importance for him to protect the reputation of these women in the eyes of his audience, for it may otherwise have a detrimental effect upon the honour of the entire clan. For this purpose he repeatedly emphasises that the Kamsarakan women were “guarded honourably and with all respect according to the Christian religion”³³, so that they would preserve their physical and moral integrity.³⁴ It should also be noted

³⁰ Ibid., p. 216 [157]: «Բայց զկանայս Կամսարականացն թողեալ Շապուհ անդէն ի Բողբերդի՝ յանձն առնէր բերդակալին, ստէպ պատուիրելով՝ բազում զգուշութեամբ պահել եւ առաւելապէս սրբութեամբ, ըստ օրինի քրիստոնէից կարգի». Łazar mentions these same instructions given to Yēzavtšnasp, the commander of the fortress Bołberd, earlier in the narrative (see *ibid.*, p. 205 [146]).

³¹ Ibid., p. 204 [146]: «Բայց զկանայս նոցա, երկուց Կամսարականացն, հրամայէր [Հազարաւուխտ] ըստ օրինացն քրիստոնէիցն, որպէս լուեալ էր հաստատապէս, պահել սրբութեամբ եւ ամենայն զգուշութեամբ»; “He [Hazarawuxt] ordered the wives of the two Kamsarakan to be guarded honourably and with all respect according to the Christian religion, as he had accurately heard.”

³² See, for instance, *ibid.*, pp. 107 [65], 185 [129], 193 [135], and 211 [151].

³³ Ibid., pp. 204 [146]: «ըստ օրինացն քրիստոնէիցն ... պահել սրբութեամբ եւ ամենայն զգուշութեամբ». For other instances, see n. 27.

³⁴ See nn. 30 and 39.

that for Łazar purity is exclusively a Christian virtue, though it was also preached and revered as a significant moral value by the Zoroastrians.³⁵

The Persian attempt to blackmail Nerseh and Hrahat Kamsarakan fails. Łazar uses this episode to extol the unquestioning faith which the two brothers manifest by refusing to betray their religion and in that way save their spouses. They are said to have fully relied on God's grace and remained "inflexible in the faith."³⁶ Yet, if we disregard Łazar's propagandistic intent according to which religious loyalty seems to override honour, then how should we interpret this decision which in reality would endanger both the women and their husbands' reputation?

I believe that a number of objective factors determined the Kamsarakan brothers' refusal to cooperate with the Persians. First of all, the members of the Kamsarakan dynasty, which was believed to have descended from one of the seven great houses of Iran, namely the Kāren Pahlav,³⁷ were held in great respect in the Persian court, which is why the Persian generals would hardly venture to harm the Kamsarakan wives without direct royal command.³⁸ Furthermore, any violence towards the members of a clan could have resulted in a blood feud. Łazar implicitly hints at it by putting the following words into the mouth of the captive Kamsarakan women: "But if they [our husbands] hear anything else about us, of outrage or shame – let alone of sin or immorality in the eyes of our religion – they will rather risk death and perish."³⁹ Finally, considering the historical context in which the events unfold

³⁵ See *Chapter I*, 4.2.

³⁶ *ŁP*, p. 206 [147]: «անւարժ հաստատեալք ի հաւատս».

³⁷ Toumanoff 2011, p. 453, and 1963, pp. 206–207.

³⁸ This is the case, as discussed above, in the *Epic Histories*: King Šapuh himself orders the abuse of Armenian noblewomen. Apparently, the Persian generals held a lower rank than the Kamsarakans and they could not violate this order without consent from above.

³⁹ *ŁP*, p. 205 [146]: «ապա թէ այլ ինչ լսեն [արսն մեր] վասն մեր՝ ի նախատուաց իսկ եւ յամօրոց, թող ի մեղաց եւ ի գործութենէ՝ ըստ մերոց օրինացն, առաւել դնեն զանձինս ի մահ, կորնչին».

we should not exclude the literal rendering of Łazar's words that Nerseh and Hrahat Kamsarakan indeed put their faith in God.⁴⁰

To sum up, Łazar's discourse on the captured noblewomen evinces the significance attached to the bodily and moral integrity of women in contemporary Armenian society, which was apparently related to the notion of family honour and was carefully guarded by all its members. Though implicitly, Łazar also alludes to the existence of a moral code which was followed by both the Persians and the Armenians, and which proscribed maltreatment of someone of a social higher rank.

4. Conclusion

The passages examined in the present chapter allow us to draw certain conclusions regarding some of the elements of mentality of the people in fifth-century Armenia. Honour and shame appear to have been essential moral concepts which defined the social conduct of both men and women. As far as women were concerned, morality was closely related to chastity, and it implied that the husband had absolute control of his wife's body and any mistreatment of that body was perceived as a grave offence against the man's honour. In the case of the queen, the abuse of bodily integrity was considered to be an insult not only to the king, but also to the nation. This explains

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 206–207 [147]: «Այլ վասն կանանցոյ մերոց տամք ձեզ նշան ինչ, եւ ձեր փորձեալ քաջ քննեցեք. զի եթէ արդարեւ մեք յողագս հաւատոյն, զոր սիրեմք եւ ունիմք հաստատապէս, եւ վասն այնր տենչալի յուսոյն եւ փառացն կրեմք զայս վիճսո, եւ հաճոյ է գործս մեր համարիտ Աստուծոյ եւ ընդունելի՝ զմեզ փրկէ ի նեղութենէս, եւ զկանայս մեր պահէ ամենայն սրբութեամբ եւ տայ ցմեզ. ապա թէ ոչ այդպէս լինի՝ մերում թերահաւատութեան մեղադրեսցուք, եւ մի ինչ ձերում բռնութեանց եւ սաստից»;
 “But as for our wives, we give you a sign, and do you test and examine it well. For if we really endure this tribulation for the faith, which we love and hold firmly, and for that desirable hope and glory, and [if] our efforts are pleasing and acceptable to the true God, he will rescue us from our tribulation, keep our wives completely inviolate, and restore them to us. But if such does not occur, we shall blame our own lack of faith and not your violence or threats.”

considerable tensions which were created after noblewomen were captured by an adversary.

Significantly, the fate of captive women did not entirely depend on the whim of the captors, for there are unmistakable signs of an unwritten code of conduct by which all the parties involved in the conflict had to abide. The social status was the key element in these relationships: one had no right to endanger the life of a person who occupied a higher social position than him, but he was permitted to ill-treat anyone who held the same or lower rank in society. While it is difficult to establish how closely this code was observed, the extant evidence suggests that retaliation and revenge for any kind of violation of one's honour was a common practice at the time.

What is more, the discourse of Christian authors evinces efforts expended to redefine the concept of honour and relate it to the Christian system of values. The historical context of constant conflicts between the Zoroastrian Persians and Christian Armenians was conducive to undertaking this task. Thus, the exploitation of female bodies which was aimed at deriving political benefits was primarily interpreted as encroachment on the Christian beliefs of the Armenian people: the female body was perceived as a symbolic battlefield where the true religion was fighting against unrighteous pagan beliefs.

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to address a hitherto insufficiently researched area of inquiry in the field of Armenian Studies and to make the first comprehensive analysis of the representation of women in fifth-century literary works composed in Armenian. It allowed us to gain an accurate understanding of the way in which early Christian Armenian authors perceived and presented women's agency, experience, identity, and discourse in their ideologically charged narratives. The evidence that emerged from the analysis was corroborated by additional sources, which enabled us to obtain remarkable insights into the ways in which fifth-century Armenian authors perceived the role and position of women in early Christian Armenian society. This study also extended our knowledge of the social structure of Armenia by deconstructing the ideologically charged narratives and by exploring the significance and extent of women's participation in the societal changes such as the transition from Zoroastrianism to Christianity.

Besides its significance for the social, political, and cultural history of Armenia, the present work also complements the extant scholarship on the representation of women in early Christian Greek, Latin, and Syriac literature.

The examination of the sources has demonstrated several common themes on which the fifth-century Armenian authors elaborate. The outcomes of the study have therefore been presented according to a specific subject, in which the representations of women in various narratives are collected and compared. It must be stressed, however, that in the vast majority of cases women only of the upper class feature in these narratives and not all aspects of their agency and experience could be reconstructed. Thus, our perspective is limited to how much the medieval clerics

could access and observe themselves, as well as to what they chose to depict in their works.

Due to the education they received the Armenian clerics' discourse was considerably influenced by the religious teachings of the Greek and Syriac Church Fathers. However, as far as the representation of women is concerned, the Greek Fathers' largely misogynistic discourse did not have a discernible effect on the Armenian authors. On the contrary, the approach developed in early Christian Armenian literature was congruous with the more liberal way of thinking of the Syriac Fathers. Even more so, the Armenian authors showed a clear tendency towards empowering women ideologically and providing them with prominent roles in a male-centred society. This approach to the function of women in society seems to have been rooted in the pre-Christian beliefs and the customary law of the Armenians, and was adopted by the representatives of the Church to facilitate the dissemination of Christianity.

The empowerment of women is conspicuous already in the narratives of Christianisation. Despite the fact that men's significance in the process of conversion is foregrounded, the male narrators explicitly show that women's agency is essential for the entire process of the country's evangelisation. No gender-based discrimination features in both narratives and women are depicted as possessing multifaceted agency, which is strongly encouraged.

With the strengthening of the position of the Church in society in the second half of the fourth century the ecclesiastical authorities offered women the option of an ascetic lifestyle. They authorised the building of special enclosed dwelling-places where women of different ages could join together and devote themselves to Christian practices. In the first half of the fifth century some ascetic women were also reported

to be living in spiritual marriage with priests or other ascetics. However, female asceticism in either form seems to have been incompatible with the local culture and did not flourish in Armenia, apparently disappearing in the aftermath of the Battle of Avarayr in 451.

Besides moralising women's agency and experience within a religious context, the medieval clerics also provided their perspective on specific aspects of women's social life. The image of the society projected by them suggests a rigid hierarchy not only in the public but also in the domestic sphere where there was a distinct division of responsibilities and roles. Depending on their status within the family women were permitted to occupy certain spaces but on some special occasions they could cross the boundary of the allocated space and have access to new experience. Within this social structure the Armenian authors highlighted the importance of the role of women as educators. They expressed no reservations about women preaching in public and highly commended mothers who inculcated in their children Christian values.

The analysis of the institution of marriage has demonstrated that the Iranian matrimonial practice including polygyny and consanguineous marriages was common among the Armenian elite, whereas the members of the lower class predominantly practised marriage by bride purchase or abduction. In spite of the fact that the Church attempted to regulate this sphere of social life by promulgating canons condemning and banning the practices that were at variance with the Christian beliefs, some of them, nevertheless, such as bride theft and bride purchase, continued to be practised.

Some glimpses of the life in a noble household where women occupy a pre-eminent position have also become available to us. Based on personal observations the authors provide interesting details about a clearly hierarchical division among women, which appears to have had the same structure as the *naxarar* society. The

mistress of the house (*tantikin*) was at the head of the hierarchy and occupied a throne of honour, while the other women's position in the hierarchy depended on their marital status and age. The extant sources, however, do not allow us to acquire thorough understanding of these relationships, and in particular it is not clear how this structure within the family functioned vis-à-vis the hierarchical divisions among men. For instance, what was the division of authority between the *tantikin* and the younger brothers of the *paterfamilias*? Or, to what extent did women participate in decision-making within the extended family?

The fifth-century sources nonetheless provide some insights into the power relationships between women and men within the public sphere. In particular, information on the institution of queenship in Arsacid Armenia has been preserved, and it allows us to draw certain conclusions about the extent of power that the Queen of Armenia could exercise in the male-dominated public space. The surviving representation suggests that whenever the king's throne was empty, the queen would assume authority as the head of state and army, but only temporarily until the legitimate heir would officially accede to the throne. It was due to the fact that the queen's authority was believed to lack divine patronage, and she could not possess the symbolic attributes of supreme (masculine) authority, namely heavenly glory (*p'ark'*), fortune (*baxt*), and valour (*k'ajut'awn*).

According to the fifth-century authors the Queen of Armenia nevertheless represented the symbolic honour of the country, in the same way as a man's wife was perceived to represent the honour of her husband. This was a cultural characteristic shared between the Armenians and the Persians, and was often exploited for deriving political and strategic benefits. In particular, women's bodily integrity was targeted by

conflicting parties, especially during war, in order to disgrace or blackmail the adversary.

The present study of the representation of women reveals specific constants and variables in the organisation of early Christian society in Armenia. On the one hand, the image that was promoted by the Christian authors shows a male-centred society with clear divisions into spheres of influence: men effectively controlled the public space, while women were in charge of the domestic sphere. Since the main focus of all the texts is the public sphere, men's agency, experience, identity, and discourse were given priority and featured prominently in them. On the other hand, the representation of the roles and responsibilities of women in the family and society suggest that they could wield a profound influence on both social processes and family life. With the exception of isolated utterances no mention of female inferiority is made. On the contrary, women are portrayed as men's partners in the struggle against unrighteousness of pagan religions, though, ironically, this concept was adapted from the pre-Christian religion of the Armenians. It is further corroborated by the canons promulgated at the Council of Šahapivan that treated Armenian women as equal to men in the legal sphere.

To conclude, the discourse of the fifth-century Armenian authors suggests that the gender interactions within the early Christian Armenian society were built on a hierarchy that implied a cooperation of its different layers rather than on domination and submission. This understanding of roles and responsibilities was explicitly reinforced, and yet, due to the inevitable limitations imposed by the literary nature and ideological function of the discussed texts, it is hard to establish to what extent this representation reflected the reality in which women lived.

As an avenue for future research it would be interesting to investigate whether this approach to the role of women in society changed in subsequent centuries. In particular, the focus should be on how and to what extent Justinian's reforms in the sixth century and the Arab conquest of Armenia in the seventh century influenced the exiting paradigm of relations. In addition, a study of fifth-century Armenian translations of Greek and Syriac exegetical and apocryphal texts, with the focus on the creative and adaptive elements introduced by Armenian translators, could provide further insights into the issues related to women in early Christian Armenian society and serve as a starting point for a comparative study of the representation of women in the Eastern Christian tradition.

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Appendix: Map

