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## THE PRECONDITIONS AND REASONS FOR CHRISTIANITY TO BECOME A STATE RELIGION IN GREATER ARMENIA (GREAT HAYQ) IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 3<sup>RD</sup> CENTURY

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The article highlights the domestic and global preconditions for Christianity to become a state religion in Hayq. The underlying reason and the social-political consequences have been specified, as well. As it follows, the religious situation in Greater Armenia did not allow the country to adopt a neutral position in the military and political race between the two super powers of the time, first because of its syncretic nature and later owing to Zoroastrian reforms. Hence, Greater Armenia faced a most decisive choice in favor of a new type of independence that was possible only through a religious neutrality – a step that Tiridates III realized thereby earning the title of the Great.

**Keywords:** *Greater Armenia, Rome, Sassanid Persia, persecutions of Christians, Tiridates II, the Hripsimians, Tiridates the Great, state religion.*

### Introduction: persecutions of Christianity and Armenia

Christianity was on the rise throughout the Roman Empire in the 40s of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Christian Philip, who became a Roman emperor in 244 AD, was the first Christian Emperor to gain the Roman throne. This, however, does not mean that Christianity was a state religion. He would like it to be so, but there were many obstacles for this. The nationalization of a religion bears no relation to the personal faith of the king or the emperor whatsoever. Rather, it is a pure political act, and it requires a set of favorable conditions. However, being a Christian emperor, Philip started to appoint Christians to various positions, support them in the state affairs and provide greater opportunities for them to succeed, starting from the army, since, he, too, was a general. Christians were the most conscientious and unconditional servicemen in the army holding to the belief that death was not the end of life. Emperor Philip held a great celebration on the 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the

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foundation of Rome in 248 AD. Nevertheless, this did not stop others to feel envious of his support for the Christians and neglect of the pagans. One of the embittered people was Decius who murdered the emperor in 249 AD and ascended to the throne.

It should be highlighted that in the history of the church it was Emperor Decius who launched the first nationwide religious persecutions. The ones prior to him were of local character and were rather episodic. They took place in this or that city or province on certain occasions. In fact, Decius did so to counteract his predecessor's pro-Christian policy and as a revenge on the part of the pagans. Previously, if there was some persecution in a certain state, city or elsewhere, Christians had the chance to run away from that place and find shelter in other cities. While, in case of the total and nationwide persecution, they still faced maltreatment since this was the state policy. Therefore, the only way to save oneself was to leave the borders of the country. And, surely, many Christians abandoned the Empire to save their lives. Many Christians, being wealthy and holding high positions in the society, being active members of the church and famous donors thought there was no need to die for a faith and lose all they had. They preferred to pretend to reject Christianity and wait for the wave of the persecution to subside, and then return to church afterwards. And they did so. All this confusion resulted in the emergence of two opposing movements in 250 AD – Novationism<sup>2</sup> and Anti-novationism. One of the leaders of the second group was Dionysius who was the Bishop of Alexandria.

### **Persecutions of Christianity and Hayq**

One of the greatest historians of Church – Eusebius of Caesarea (the 4<sup>th</sup> century) writes that in reply to the letter to Dionysius of Alexandria, Bishop Meruzhan of Armenians received an answer that they should display forgiveness towards the apostates and receive them back if they repented. This piece of writing came to be known as “On Repentance” (Ananean, 1978, pp. 54-59)<sup>3</sup> due to the requirement for repentance. Hence, it follows that these persecutions had their reflection in Armenia, and the Armenian king, as a Roman ally, persecuted Christians, as well. This letter also comes to show that the Christian church was already a well-organized institution since it already had a bishop. The letter sent by Meruzhan and the reply should date back to 251 AD as it would take a year for the debates to start and the two sides come to a conflict for the letter to reach Egypt and back to Armenia.

Eusebius of Caesarea also mentions that Bishop Pirmilianos of Caesarea wrote a story about the persecutions in which he stated that the latter were practiced in Armenia, as well. Finally, Movses Khoreantsi, referring to Pirmilianos, writes that

being a bishop in Caesarea he mentioned about Armenian persecutions, too. However, since Pirmilianos failed to mention names, locations and causes, Khorenatsi ignored his writings and did not quote them. Being a meticulous author, Khorenatsi was to be sure of the validity of the information to use it in his work. And since Pirmilianos was not reliable in this sense, the Armenian historian did not use his information, though, he found it important to note that Pirmilianos had mentioned about religious persecutions in Armenia.

Thus, we have three important pieces of evidence.

- First, in the first half of the third century Armenia already had a well-organized church with its bishop.
- Second, there were religious persecutions in Armenia from 250-251 AD. Otherwise, it would make no sense for Meruzhan to write a letter and ask about being more forgiving towards the apostates in Armenia.
- Third, Pirmilianos did write about religious persecutions in Armenia.

Since, according to Agatanghelos (*The History of Agathangelos*, 1909), St. Hripsime and her companions were subjected to religious persecutions by Tiridates the Great, it is necessary to understand when else, apart from this documented case, religious persecution was practiced in Armenia.

In the course of this total and nationwide persecution, Armenia was ruled by Tiridates II – the grandfather of Tiridates the Great. He reigned from 216 to 252 AD. Tiridates II had become an ally of the Roman Empire, since the Arshakunis were overthrown in Persia as a result of the Sassanid revolution. Artashir Sassanid came to the throne in 227 AD and started fighting against the Arshakunis. All the sister-countries that were ruled by the Arshakunis were attacked by the Sassanids. The only person who was able to resist long and fought back was the Armenian king Tiridates. However, the Sassanids were on their rise and grew stronger and stronger spreading their power over the whole territory of Iran. The stronger they became, the weaker the Armenian king grew despite being a Roman ally.

### **Zoroastrianism in Hayq**

In 252 AD Sassanid Persia conquered Syria and attacked Armenia. In 253 AD King Tiridates fled from Armenia to Armenia Minor, the Roman part of Armenia, and probably died there at an old age. Persians took hold of the whole territory of the Armenian kingdom and crowned Khosrov – the son of Tiridates (Martirosyan, 1977, p. 204). Khosrov II, the father of Tiridates the Great, sided with Emperor Valerian in 257-258 AD when the latter attempted to attack Persia with great momentum. But, since the emperor was defeated and was captured by Persia in 259, Khosrov was killed through conspiracy by his brothers, of course, at the provocation of Persians. According to the data provided, one of these brothers was

called Anak<sup>4</sup>. After the plot, Persians became the full rulers of Armenia, appointing their heirs, namely – Vormizd-Artashir, the son of Shapuh (261-272/3); Shapuh (272/3-274); and Nerseh (275-286/7) to the Armenian throne. The family of the murdered Khosrov and the little heir Tiridates (born in about 250) were taken to Rome by their guardian Prince Artavazd Mandakuni whose name was recorded in a false 5<sup>th</sup>-century Roman reference book (Manaseryan, 1997, pp. 128-129), according to which, he was an Armenian king and advised the King of the kings Shapuh to set free Emperor Valerian. The style and the content of the letter come to prove that the letter was fake. However, it does not follow that the fact of having a king in Hayq was fake, too (Hakobyan, 2013, pp. 528-529)<sup>5</sup>. Hence, if religious persecutions were practiced in Armenia proper, it must have taken place before 252 AD because Armenia was ruled by Persians in 253 AD. They brought their own rules. What is more, they started spreading Zoroastrianism under the name of religious reforms.

We can say that the second person – the heir of Iran, sat in Armenia for 40 years as an independent king. Thus, ruling in Armenia, Vorzmid and Nerseh became rulers of the whole Iran in 276 AD and 293 AD respectively. The latter, Nerseh, ruled Armenia from 276-293. The years of his reign were peaceful until 287 when Tiridates the Great, supported by Emperor Diocletian, was pronounced the king of Hayq, and Nerseh launched a fight against him. However, since Nerseh was regarded a contender of the Iranian throne, his rival, the king of the kings Vahram, supported Tiridates. Khorenatsi (1981) and other historians write that under the Persian rule Armenia prospered and developed, instead of being destroyed. The Armenian king Nerseh realized that in order to collect taxes and to present the conversion of religion to Zoroastrianism as something useful and beneficial, he needed to develop the country. They knew that the Persian religion would face resistance in case they decided to destroy the country. They knew quite well that they had to pursue a cautious policy, particularly in their fight against the Armenian pagan religion.

In the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Zoroastrianism was introduced as a religious reform. Prior to that, Armenians had some ideas regarding the religion of Zoroastrianism. This time, however, the whole religious system was introduced under the supervision of Priest Kartir. The latter was also the king's right-hand man and a supporter of his ideology. The famous Paikuli Inscription belongs to the priest. Such a privileged man was he, that the king allowed him to leave an inscription on a huge cliff. Before him, Shapuh I had left an inscription in 262 AD and was followed by that of Kartir a couple of years later. This aimed to emphasize the strengthening and spread of Zoroastrianism and to establish several important fire temples in Armenia and one in Bagavan, which previously served as a pagan shrine. The inscription shows that Persians did not stand the Armenian pagan

syncretism which contained a combination of Zoroastrian, local and Hellenistic elements. They destroyed pagan shrines and temples and built fire temples instead. It is already well acknowledged that the Armenian pagan temples and shrines, despite being called Mazdayasna and Behdin, differed from the Iranian shrines in their architecture.

Most probably, a similar fire temple was built in Vagharshapat, which still lies in the basis of the Holy See. The fire temple might date back to the rule of Nerseh and reforms of Kartir or before Nerseh – the period of the rule of Artashir, i.e. the fire temple belongs to the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

Representatives of the Armenian community often debate the question concerning the anti-cultural role of Christians during the nationalization of the religion. The supporters of this approach claim that Christians destroyed pagan writing and culture, ruined the temples, etc. This is the result of misconception, if not complete lack of knowledge, for the Armenian pagan culture and temples were destroyed by Persians, as a result of their religious reforms. That is to say, it happened not in the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, but in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, as a consequence of the intolerance of Zoroastrianism, since Persians had a full control over the most part of Armenia. Rome was getting weaker, especially in 259 when Emperor Valerian was defeated in the battle and was captured by Persians. The fact that in 261 the Persians executed Valerian instead of freeing him in return for something, was a sign of obvious hostility against not only Rome, but also Armenia, especially when the part belonging to Rome was also conquered (Hakobyan, 2013).

It became evident that after the plotted murder of King Khosrov his family and relatives were to flee to Caesarea – the part that belonged to the Roman Empire. Tiridates, born early in the 250s, was about 7 or 8 when they took him to Caesarea and then to Rome in 260-261, where a certain Lycianus adopted and raised him. In fact, Tiridates was a political figure since childhood since he was the heir to the Armenian throne. And Rome, in the interests of its own country, was to bring him up and return to the throne one day as its own representative and ally. Being a great fighter and endowed with physical strength, Tiridates took part in the battles led by Rome and stood out with his courage and bravery. And Emperor Aurelius, crowned him, most probably in 273. He gave him the crown without a kingdom. Though some historians hold to the belief that he returned the power in the former Roman part – Chermes. This, however, is very hypothetical. Otherwise stated, he was given the crown without the kingdom, because it was still in the hands of the enemy. When Tiridates did some heroic acts during the battles, he was honored as the Armenian king, since he had been crowned. It was during his stay in Rome that he earned the nickname Helios (sun), since any king was to enjoy the support of the god of the sun and be his representative on earth. Thus, for instance,

Aurelius was called Helios and built a temple dedicated to the sun in Rome, accepting the Sun as the supporter of the emperor (Yeremyan, 1984, pp. 60-61). A most impressive raid of Emperor Carus towards Ctesiphon in 282 in which Tiridates also participated, can serve as an indirect confirmation of the idea stated. When the horse of Tiridates was killed while he was crossing the Euphrates River, he swam to the other shore on the saddle leaving the observers surprised to understand the role of the saddle.

After the death of Aurelius in 276 AD, Persians strengthened their position in Armenia again. King Artashir who ruled in Armenia became the king of Persia. Nerseh, his other brother, who was appointed the king of Armenia, was not lucky. His rival won and made their candidate the king of Persia.

When Nerseh came to Armenia to rule in 276, he continued the political line of the religious reforms and tried to attract the Armenian princes to his side. Those who had anything to do with the Arshakunis were viewed as rivals and were subjected to persecution. Those who had no relation with the Arshakunis were seen as supporters. He promised to forgive all those who would join him, gathered all the Armenian princes around him and ruled as an independent king. The useful work done by Artashir and later on by Nerseh was praised by Movses Khorenatsi (Khorenatsi, 1981, pp. 216)<sup>6</sup>. However, being fervent supporters of Zoroastrianism, they were both enemies of pagan religion and were quite indifferent towards Christianity.

### **Christianity – an indicator of neutrality of Hayq**

During the reforms of Zoroastrianism, Christians did not face any persecution as they did not have the temples and churches that were to come later on. Besides, Christians had their own meeting places where they used to gather secretly and moved from place to place upon necessity. When they sensed some trouble, they hid from the public eye and when the situation grew more peaceful, they pursued their religion openly.

Persecutions against Christians in Armenia might have also been carried out by Persians, however, they were not cases worthy of recording. If we accept the theory that St. Hripsime and her companions were killed by Persians, it would have probably been recorded somewhere, but nothing of the kind exists. According to testimony, it was Tiridates who persecuted St. Hripsime and her companions. The original document does not contain any evidence of any Persian in this regard.

Hence, Persia ruled over the whole territory of Armenia from the 260s to 287, when Tiridates, with the support of Emperor Diocletian, conquered Greater Armenia and ascended to the throne probably in Chermes or Ani (Yeremyan, 1984, pp. 62-63). One could believe that it was at this time that Parthian Priest Gregory

who was already known as Agathangelos [Gr. *bringer of good news*] returned to Greater Armenia with the Arshakunis and other noble families and worked in the court of his cousin Tiridates III as his secretary. While serving in the court of Tiridates III, the episode of St. Gregory's refusal to make a sacrifice to the statue of Anahit in Yeriza revealed his Christian faith.

In fact, apart from the crown which he already had, Tiridates also received a kingdom still in a small part of the joint Armenia Minor and Greater Armenia. Emperor Diocletian managed to appoint Tiridates the king of that small part as a serious representative of Rome and from that time on Tiridates started his fight against Nerseh, the King of Armenia. To make Tiridates stronger, the king of kings Vahram gave him the city of Tigranakert, as stated in the famous record where Tiridates named him "God king". In 293 the king of Armenia Nerseh signed an agreement with Tiridates and Armenian noblemen promising the former the whole Armenia if the latter supported him in the fight for the Persian throne (History of the Armenian People, 1984, pp. 64-65).

It was the first time that Nerseh had handed Armenia to Tiridates in exchange for the realization of his goal, i.e. the Persian throne. It was a most remarkable and huge deal both strategically and economically at the end of the third century. Thus, ascending to the throne in a small part of Armenia in 287 AD, Tiridates received the rest of Armenia several years later in 293 AD in return for the coronation of Nerseh. From a religious perspective he inherited ruins, destroyed temples, cities filled with Zoroastrian fire temples, a society with a half dissatisfied, half overwhelmed and half neutral population. Christians made up the neutral part of the society, because, as it followed, they were the ones who had not sustained serious losses. True, there were some individual cases of persecution and there were certain people who had had losses, but this was viewed as something usual in those days. Once Tiridates' reign spread over the country, the old practice resumed. Zoroastrians faced rejection again and fire temples were shut down. In places where people voluntarily wished to keep the fire temples, they were left unaffected. However, it soon turned out that Zoroastrianism was strange to many people and that's why the closing of the fire temples did not prove a problem, like for example in Bagavan. It was not realistic to restore the previous temples in their places immediately or build new ones, so, they simply placed stone sacrificial tables. Evidently, the restoration of the former huge Armenian centers of worship in Greater Armenia (Ani, Til, Tordan, Yeriza, Bagaritch), in Taron (the temples of Vahagn and Astghik in Ashtishat), in Bagrevand (the temple of Bagavan), in Ararat valley (the temple of Anahit in Artashat and the Temple of Tir in Yerazamoyrn) and elsewhere should have been among the primary and long-term plans of Tiridates III. However, at that time, buried in diplomatic, economic and other issues Tiridates III was only able to initiate the construction of the Temple in Garni

dedicated to Mihr, his benevolent God and supporter of the Armenian-Roman political and military alliance. At the same time, he perceived it as a place of worship for Helios King and his benevolent predecessors.

The construction of the temple<sup>7</sup>, which required huge financial and human resources including local and foreign masters, lasted 6 years (293-298) – about as much time as was required to build the temple of Aghtamar (951-921). In these areas Tiridates, naturally, was to hold events that would reject the work of the previous king – Nerseh.

All of this further escalated the tension between Armenia and Persia again. After settling his issues in Persia, Nerseh attacked Armenia in 296-297AD, however the Armenian army with the alliance of Rome and headed by Emperor Galerius defeated the Persians in the Battle of Uskha in the field of Basen. The 40-year-long Peace Treaty of Mtsbin was signed. The whole Armenia was legally handed to Tiridates and a few obligations were outlined.

It is important to go back to the 290s of the rule of Tiridates, especially to 293-296 AD when he ruled over Greater Armenia. Tiridates realized that the pagan religion had sustained huge and irreversible losses. He knew that it would take enormous efforts to restore the temples. What is more, the number of Christians had grown, and they were quite indifferent towards paganism. They did not care about all that. Moreover, he saw that Christians made up the only healthy class of the society he had to count on. And then there was the Peace Treaty of Mtsbin. Before that, both under Aurelius, when Tiridates was crowned, and under Diocletian, when he received the kingdom, though in a small part of Armenia (287) and later in 293, when he received the whole Armenia which he ruled until 298, all of that was handed to Tiridates with the help of Rome or by the temporary “ally” Nerseh, only as a result of political calculations. And then a peace treaty was signed in 298 AD determining the borders of Armenia which coincided with the ones in 66 BC, when Tigran the Great was deprived of all the foreign conquests and was left with Armenia proper. Now, the whole Armenia had come back to Tiridates, and he was to understand who or what he owed to. Though the Persians were the defeated party in the Battle of Galerius, they still could put forward certain conditions. Otherwise stated, the agreement could not be drawn up considering the wish of Rome only. Armenia became an independent state due to the Peace Treaty of Mtsbin, but it was not to be subject to any other country. It was to be independent. But how could Tiridates be fully independent if he was the representative of Rome? He had been crowned still when he was a youth and had received the kingdom back in 287 AD, hence, he was obliged to keep neutrality, at least. Being neutral meant not to make any marked step against Persians or in favor of Rome.



In contrast to this, Georgia, according to the Peace Treaty of Mtsbin accepted the superiority of Rome, because the emperor crowned the Georgian king. Nothing of the kind was mentioned about Armenia in the agreement. If it was mentioned for a smaller unit like Georgia in the text of the agreement, and if nothing was mentioned with regard to Armenia, it means Armenia was to exist independently, as a separate kingdom which was to keep neutrality in return.

How was this to be done? What did Tiridates the Great do that helped keep that neutrality for 40 years. In case of a war between Rome and Persia, Greater Armenia could help neither of them with an army. Nor could it applaud either of them. However, it was not enough for neutrality. Neutrality meant that the whole society was to be neutral with its mentality, with its way of life, with everything. This found its vivid expression in the religion. If Hayq had a religion like syncretic paganism, it could not be neutral, because in the eyes of Persians it was a pro-Roman religion, while in the eyes of Romans it was a pro-Persian religion especially owing to certain elements of Zoroastrianism that had been introduced recently. Therefore, the only neutral religion which could contribute to the political course of the time, was Christianity, since it belonged to neither of the sides and was rejected by both (Garitte, 1946, pp. 23-116). That's why King Tiridates III adopted Christianity as a state religion. Right after the Peace Treaty of Mtsbin in 298 AD, Christianity was to become a state religion. Even the year of 299 could be possible, especially with regard to Zoroastrian reforms that had been made in Greater Armenia which was in direct conflict with neutrality (Shomon, 2013, pp. 19-22)<sup>8</sup>.

It goes without saying that they could not choose a religion which did not enjoy the support of the people. The new religion was to be both neutral and receive the support of the general population. Christianity and the church had this support. As we already know, Armenia/Hayq already had its Bishop in the face of Meruzhan in the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. However, most probably, he was not the first one. Apparently, he was preceded by a couple of others.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century the Armenian society was already redistributed among Zoroastrian, Christian, pagan and other religions. And since Christianity had grown stronger and more powerful, and paganism had lost its previous popularity during the past decades due to Persian persecutions, Tiridates III turned to that neutral force. It is not important whether Tiridates was Christian himself or not, whether he was baptized or not. He could have remained pagan until the end of his days but proclaimed Christianity a state religion all the same. And vice versa, he could have been Christian himself and not have proclaimed Christianity as a state religion.

There is the second issue here. Christianity gave Tiridates the opportunity to be neutral and independent regarding the issue of the divine origin of the crown and power. Prior to that, people used to believe that power came either from God,

from the Roman Empire and the Persian King. In Rome people used to believe that their emperor and his power was of divine origin, since there was no other power that could rule him, either crown him or deprive him of crown. For full independence, the Armenian population with its elite and king, was to think similarly. And now, when they started to believe in a new God, Christ became the one who crowned the king and was the source of his power. He was the one who gave the king the power and the latter was to be grateful to Him. In other words, with the adoption of Christianity, the question of the source of the independent power was also solved. Now it was clear where the power came from and who had made the reign possible. Even if Romans said that Tiridates had been crowned by their hand, they saw that Armenians were Christian and, hence, the divine nature of their hand was gone forever. One owes to the hand that puts a crown on one's head and dictates over one's consciousness. Now, the hand was left hanging in the air, since the head to be crowned was Christian. He received his power from Christ. This was a very interesting shift in thinking, a change in psychology which made independence and neutrality<sup>9</sup> possible.

When could Tiridates persecute St. Hripsime and her companions, if we believe the testimonial theories? The answer turns out to be "Never". Persecutions in Rome started in 249-250 AD and ended in 260 AD.

Starting from 253 AD the bigger part of Hayq was ruled by Persians, by Khosrov II, the son of Tiridates. If there were any persecutions in Armenia after 253 AD, the persecutors should have been Persians who acted by the order of Khosrov. If they were organized by Tiridates, they must have taken place in the smaller part of Armenia from 287 to 293. But there was no persecution in the country then. Persecutions were restarted by Emperor Diocletian in 303, when Armenia had already adopted Christianity as a state religion. The only suitable time for persecutions which corresponds to the overall persecutions pursued by the Empire, was the year of 250, under Tiridates II, when a Roman Christian was forced to cross the border of the state and flee to another country to stay alive. According to the history of Agathangelos, Armenia proved to be that very country for St. Hripsime and her companions. And since the name of the persecutor-king was also Tiridates, mistakenly, the murder of the virgins was attributed to the son of Khosrov – Tiridates the Great.

Indeed, the evidence provided by Pirmilianus and Eusebius concerning Meruzhan and the persecutions coincides. Hence, St. Hripsime and her companions might have immigrated to Armenia during the persecutions of Decius and were captured by Tiridates II. According to the testimonies provided by St. Hripsime and her companions, the capital city at that time was Vagharshapat. But this contradicts the History of Agathangelos (1909), since Artashat became the capital city under Tiridates the Great. This fact can also be found in *St. Gregory's Conduct*, where it

is mentioned that the capital city at that time was indeed Artashat with its Khor Virap and Taperakan Bridge (Garitte, 1946, pp. 23-116).

It can be assumed that the contradiction occurs due to the editors' work who, headed by their teacher of the 5<sup>th</sup> century Mashtots, were not archeologists who could dig into history to reveal the contradictions and correct them. Besides, when compiling the book in the second quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, under Vramshapuh, the capital city was Vagharshapat. If we presume that St. Hripsime and her companions were not killed between 250-251 AD, then we have to believe that it didn't happen at all, since there was no other suitable time, place or environment in history for that. However, the graves of the martyrs and their remains are there, and the fact has been preserved in the Armenian traditional memory. It is well known that the heroes bore the names of Roman citizens – Gayane and Hripsime, and lived by the laws of the Christian community, selling their products as bead makers and glass makers. They could not speak Armenian but Greek and had to choose a country with a Greek-speaking environment. Hence, they were to choose a city where Greek would be understandable at least to some of the inhabitants. The city was called Kainopolis (a new city). That was how Vagharshapat was called. It was built and restored under Vagharsh and became the capital city of the country, and was called in a Hellenistic style. St. Hripsime and her companions came and settled in the garden huts in the suburbs until people started noticing the beauty of Hripsime. They could live in the huts which were empty and deserted in spring, whereas in the time of harvest, the owners of the gardens would not allow foreigners to settle and live there. Hence, it follows that they must have arrived towards the end of spring in 250, lived there for several months before the work started in the gardens, and then they were killed.

If we think that St. Hripsime and her companions were killed in 251, then we should have to believe that St Gregory could not have been born by then, while the *History of Agathangelos* (1909) connects them with St Gregory. It says that when the girls were killed, St. Gregory was freed from prison and built chapels on their graves. However, in reality, the chapels appeared 50 years after their death, when Christianity was already a state religion. Who would allow anyone to turn the graves of certain people into a sanctuary in a pagan country where they had been killed for being Christian? Obviously, none. Neither would Zoroastrians allow it. So, it follows that it must have been kept in memory to become a sanctuary 50 years later, after Christianity had established itself as a state religion. The people and the future Christian community kept the memory of the people who had perished then.

This is how the place of the sanctuary was preserved and turned into a chapel. And St. Gregory became their contemporary due to a literary montage once again. The dream of Khosrovidukht served as a link, according to which if Gregory was

released, he would cure the king. What is more, Gregory seems to have moved in time. The virgins came to Armenia 13-14 years after his imprisonment and the prison guards were surprised to see that he had survived so long.

In reality King Tiridates II fled the country under the pressure of the Persians in 252 AD after the murder of St. Hripsime and her companions. The Persians took total control of Armenia through his son Khosrov. Later, when Persians killed the Armenian King Khosrov through a conspiracy in 260, his family was divided into parts and his son, the heir to the throne, who bore the name of his grandfather, aged 7 or 8, was taken to Rome.

As far as the other members of the royal family are concerned, the families of Khosrov's brothers and uncles, all or some of them, including the paternal family of Gregory the Parthian, who lived in the estates of Til or Tordan, settled in the neighboring Armenia Minor that belonged to Rome or the cities of Cappadocia. This incident was later portrayed in St Gregory's Conduct as an escape of the nurse with a child to Caesarea after the conspiracy against his father Anak<sup>10</sup>.

### Conclusion

St. Hripsime and her companion virgins fled to Armenia from Rome during the religious persecutions under Emperor Decius and perished under Tiridates II (251AD) when Tiridates III and Gregory the Illuminator were not born yet. During the decades that followed, Hayq was fully under the dominance of Persia and faced religious reforms which resulted in the destruction of the monuments of the Armenian pagan culture. Towards the end of the century Rome and Persia signed the Peace Treaty of Mtsbin which proclaimed Hayq a neutral state headed by Tiridates the Great who adopted Christianity as a state religion in 299 AD.

### Notes

1. The author expresses his gratitude to Nelly Petrosyan, a PhD applicant, who recorded the course on The History of Armenian Church at YSU Faculty of Theology in 2015 and wrote an article using the information.
2. The supporters of Roman Novatian Bishop were called Novatians.
3. According to P. Ananean, this paper was preserved in Armenian in the Collection of Papers (Tpghis, 1901).
4. According to *The History of Agathangelos* (1909), Anak was St. Gregory's father and King Khosrov's cousin.
5. According to Al. Hakobyan, under Artavazd we should understand Vormizd-Artashir (Hakobyan, 2013).
6. Khorenatsi's praise was addressed to only Artashir (Khorenatsi, 1981).

7. There is no need to discuss the debate over the time period of the construction of the Temple of Garni. We shall come to it in our future investigations later.
8. Other approaches concerning the date of Christianity to become a state religion are introduced by M. L. Shomon in his Gregory the Illuminator's Ordination in Caesarea and Baptism in Bagavan. (*Handes Amsorya*, 2013, pp. 19-22).
9. R. Manaseryan, a skilled expert on the history of Old Armenia, comes up with a most interesting analysis of the mentality of the ancient people concerning the source of power. See Manaseryan 1997).
10. Making use of this conspiracy Catholicos Sahak wanted to assure the Persian court that Anak the Parthian was his great grandfather, who had done a great service to the Persian king by killing his enemy Khosrov. That is to say, the kinship relations between Anak and Gregory the Illuminator (being father and a son) was born in a political context and bears no historical ground.

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**ՔՐԻՍՏՈՆԵՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՊԵՏԱԿԱՆԱՅՄԱՆ ՆԱԽԱԴՐՅԱԼՆԵՐԸ ԵՎ  
ՊԱՏՃԱՌՆԵՐԸ ՄԵԾ ՀԱՅՔՈՒՄ 3<sup>Կ</sup> ԴԱՐԻ ԵՐԿՐՈՐԴ ԿԵՄԻՆ**

**Արծրունի Սահակյան**

Հոդվածում վեր են հանվում Հայքում քրիստոնեության պետականացման նախադրյալները ոչ միայն երկրի ներսում, այլև համաշխարհային համատեքստում: Ճշգրտվում են նաև պետականացման սոցիալ-քաղաքական հանգամանքներն ու պատճառները: Պարզվում է, որ Մեծ Հայքի կրոնական իրավիճակը, նախ՝ իր սինկրետիզմով, ապա՝ գրադաշտական բարեփոխումներով, թույլ չէր տալիս, որ պետությունը լիներ չեզոք երկու գերտերությունների ռազմաքաղաքական մրցապայքարում: Ուստի Մեծ Հայքին մնում էր կատարել շրջադարձային ընտրությունն՝ հոգուտ նոր տիպի անկախության, որը հնարավոր էր միայն կրոնական չեզոքության միջոցով, ինչն էլ ճշգրիտ կռահեց և իրագործեց Տրդատ III-ը՝ արժանանալով «Մեծ» տիտղոսին:

**Բանալի բառեր՝** *Մեծ Հայք, Հռոմ, Մասանյան Պարսկաստան, քրիստոնեության երի հալածանք, Տրդատ II, Հռիփսիմյաններ, Տրդատ Մեծ, պետական կրոն:*