

THE SONG "KEY OF TRUTH" AND THE PROBLEM OF
"NEW TONDRAKIANS"

«Բանալի ճշարտության» երկը և «Նոր թնդրակեցիները»

The representatives of Armenian Evangelical Church have currently adopted a new strategy aimed at proving that in the frames of Armenian reality Evangelical Church is not an alienate phenomenon imported by European missionaries but rather the inheritor of Paulician and especially Tondrakian sects arisen before on Armenian soil. Moreover, following countenanced viewpoints of late 19th century brought to light by some liberal Armenian clergymen, some evangelist authors consider the aforementioned sects as primogenitors of European reformation and Evangelical-Protestant churches.

In order to prove their standpoint, evangelist authors consider that neither Paulician nor Tondrakian sects are the successors of Manichean sect, while according to a previously known and accepted belief these sects originate from Manichaeism.

At the end of 19th century the apologist of this viewpoint was Galust Ter-Mkrchyan, who, due to his academics in European universities, bore the influence of European modern protestant ideology. In 1892 with 'Miaban' inscription Galust Ter-Mkrchyan printed in 'Ararat' gala the 'Writing of Confession' ¹ by Anania Narekaci later considered by the member of Mkhitarian congregation of Venice B. Sargsyan as the second confession paper written by Անանիա Նարեկացի ². The preface to the article raised a big smoke in conservative media and made Muratsan to respond in "Nor-Dar" magazine ³ and later motivated Barsegh Sargsisyan to react with series of articles ⁴. The reason of such sputter was the statement in preface saying that Tondrakian sect was in the base of "all protestant and evangelical movements". G. Ter-Mkrchyan considered this sect Armenian- origin, a manifestation of unique Armenian thought widéspread and known all over the world, reaching up to Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Balkan Peninsula (specifically Bulgaria), Middle Europe, Northern Italy and Southern France. Moreover, 'Miaban' regards all sectarians mentioned in the 'History' of Արիստակես Լաստիվերտի ⁵ and the papers of Grigor

¹ 'Miaban', Anania Narekaci, 'Ararat', 1892, N 1, [Միսբան, Անանիա Նարեկացի. «Արարատ» 1892, № 1]

² Sargsisyan B., "Study of Manichean-Paulician-Tondrakian sect and the paper of Gregory of Narek", Venice, 1893, p. 9, [Մարգարյան Բ., Պատմամանիքական և տոնդրակյան խմբակների մասին Գրիգորի Նարեկացու թուղթը, Վենետիկ, 1893, էջ 9]

³ Muratsan, "Tondrakian sect and the remarks of a friar from Echmiadzin about it", "Nor-Dar" (New age), February 1892, N 33 and N 35, [Մուրատյան, Թոնդրակյան խմբակը և Էջմիածնի մի փարսանի մտքի մասին նրա արձագանքները, «Նոր-Դար», փետրվար 1892, № 33 - № 35]

⁴ Sargsisyan B., ibid, p. 9.

⁵ Aristakes Lastivertsi, Hystory, translated by V. A. Grigoryan, Yerevan, 1971, pp. 91-98. [Արիստակես Լաստիվերտի, Պատմություն, Խրատվ. Վ. Ա. Գրիգորյանի, Եր., 1971, էջ 91-98]

Magistros as national heroes and calls them 'famous promoters of sect'⁸. Reasonably, such ideas couldn't be left unanswered.

In his article "Tondrakian sect and the remarks of a friar from Echmiadzin about it" Muratsan wonders why the 'Miaban' is written with certain pride for the sect. Even if Tondrakians originate purely from Armenian thought, he assumes that preaching modern sectarian views is not a reason to be proud about it. Furthermore, Muratsan represents 'Miaban' as supporter of Protestantism and Reformation that considers Armenia as the historical motherland of these movements and is ready to go as far as forging historical facts just to prove its point of view⁷.

Discussing the dialogue between Muratsan and 'Miaban' Barsegh Sargsyan presents his articles classified by Galust Ter-Mkrtychyan as religious extremism and complicated record of assumptions rather than prudent scientific report⁸. Though this statement is partially true, one should keep in mind that Galust Ter-Mkrtychyan himself and those highly influenced by his ideas like F. Conybeare, had fallen into extremity and faked history just to support their own opinions. Being professor of Oxford University and renowned as specialist of Armenian studies, in his paper Frederic Conybeare makes historical mistakes later repeated by many English speaking specialists of Paulician movement and by Armenian Evangelic authors⁹. Thus the work of Frederic Conybeare became a foundation for such modern Armenian Evangelic authors as the historian of Armenian Evangelic Church Leon Arpee, Arsen Keorkizian¹⁰, V. Tutikian, etc.

Both Galust Ter-Mkrtychyan and Frederic Conybeare had "Key of truth" and the study of so called "new Tondrakians" with traces of Paulician-Tondrakian sect in the base of their theories. Worthy to note that G. Ter-Mkrtychyan's ideas had influence on such reputable scientist as Karapet Ter-Mkrtychyan, who however used Ter-Mkrtychyan's works without mentioning their source¹¹.

The question is: what laid in the core of "The key of truth" and who were those 'new Tondrakians'?

In 1880 in the journal "Experience" was published Alexander Yeritsyan's article "The Tondrakians of our days". There the author represented the history of

⁸ "Miaban", Anania Narekatsi, "Ararat", 1892, N 1, [Միաբան, Անանիա Նարեկացի, «Արարատ», 1892, N 1]

⁷ Muratsan, "Tondrakian sect and the remarks of a friar from Echmiadzin about it", "Nor-Dar" (New age), February 1892, N 33 and N 35, [Մուրատյան, "Թոնդրակիականների աղանդը - Էջմիածնի մի վանքիցի այդ ուղանկի մասին արած ակնարկները", «Նոր-Դար», փետրվար 1892, N 33 - N 35]

⁸ Ter-Mkrtychyan G., Anania Mokatsi, "Ararat", 1897, N 2, page 93, [Եր-Մկրտչյան Գ., Անանիա Մոկատցի, «Արարատ», 1897, N 2, էջ 93]

⁹ Conybeare F. "Key of Truth. A manual of the Paulician Church of Armenia, Oxford, 1898. Clarendon Press"

¹⁰ Rev. Keorkizean, Paulician-Tondrakian movement in Armenian Apostolic church from VII to XII cc, Beirut, 1970, [Քեօրկիզեան, Պաւլիկեան-թոնդրակեան շարժումը Հայ Առաքելական եկեղեցւոյ մէջ Է. դ. դարէն մինչեւ ԺԺ դարը, Պիքիւր, 1970]

¹¹ See, Ter-Mkrtychyan G., Armenian studies, Yerevan, 1979, p. 220, [Եր-Մկրտչյան Գ., Հայագիտական ուսումնասիրություններ, Եր., 1979, էջ 220]

Paulician and Tondrakian sects as transformed types of Manichaeism¹². However the true importance of the article was that based on archival documents Alexander Yeritsyan first published in 1837 the history of the case against "Tondrakian" sectarians of Արիսկի (now Lernut) village of Shirak region, 4 confession papers of Արիսկի villagers, as well as some parts of "The key of truth" which has been confiscated from Արիսկի sectarians.

The history of these sectarians is following: Armenians that migrated from Ottoman Turkey during Turkish-Russian war in 1828-29 settled down in the borders of Russia from Արաւիշի to Yerevan. 25 generations of Արիսկի villagers migrated from the village Ջիլիսի from Khnus region known in 10-11cc as a haven for Tondrakian sect. In anti-Tondrakian case documents they are qualified as 'Tondrakians', "though illiterate, but skilled with enough knowledge to obstruct clear minded with their devious lies in order to praise their sect"¹³. According to the report of the Holy Synod of Echmiadzin to the manager of Caucasus, even before the migration from Turkey this sect was widespread in Ղազար. However, common among Gyumri inhabitants, the heresy was closer to Evangelical-Lutheran doctrine, the apologists of which founded a school and a print house in Shushi. When their activities were banished in Russian protected territories, they distributed their books to simple Armenian workers. Another support to Evangelical origin of the sect are Արիսկի villagers' confession papers where its clearly shown that doctrine of their belief was taught by a co-villager Tarzi Sargis Harutyunyan who in his turn learnt it in 1835 from an Արիսկիսի sacristan Gevorg and his property "The key of truth". Sacristan Gevorg had told to Tarzi Sargis that all Christians are false except "Germans who are orthodox Christians"¹⁴.

The "Key of truth" is comprised of an introduction and more than 20 chapters, the majority of which has been torn. The original has 149 pages and much obliteration probably caused from fear by sacristan Gevorg in 1837. He is suspected to erase and delete those parts that harshly speak against Armenian Apostolic church. Concerning the author and the date of the book, these problems have given an occasion to divergence of opinions. One of them belongs to English translator and publisher of the original "The key of truth" F. Conybeare, who received a xerocopy from Galust Ter-Mkrchyan. He wrongly presumes that the book was written by the great Paulician (not Tondrakian) leader Մկրտչ Զարեհապետի in 7-9 cc, more specifically in 850¹⁵. This erroneous viewpoint, as we believe, was later widely circulated by historians of Armenian Evangelic church.

¹² Yeritsyan A., Tondrakians of our days, "Pordz", 1880, N 10, pp. 9-132 [Տէր-Մկրտչեան Զ., Զարեհապետի ու զոր հետնորդաց անկեղծ, Եր., 1979, էջ 220]

¹³ Ibid, p. 100.

¹⁴ Ibid p. 105.

¹⁵ In fact Conybeare doesn't differ Paulician and Tondrakian movements as for him their doctrines are identical. He considers these two sects as one which misleads to the fusion and confusion of the two different doctrines. Moreover Conibear is sure that Մկրտչ Զարեհապետի simply edited existing Paulician texts into a manual called "Key of truth".

In fact, "The key of truth" and 'new Tondrakian' sect gave reason to protestant and evangelic authors to come to a wrong conclusion by ascribing pre-missionary origin to Protestant-Evangelic churches. In order to answer those questions whether "The key of truth" reveals Paulician or Tondrakian doctrinal views or is just a manual of evangelical doctrine, one needs to consider the following facts.

In 1841 the consistory of Yerevan transmits news to Synod about information by Shirak region assigned friar Grigor from Ghpchagha concerning the conversion of sectarians. According to this data based on the content of "The key of truth", the sectarians "have foolishly baptized each other and received the sacrament the way mislead Tondrakians did" two times – first in the stable of church clerk Tono Kirakosyan, second in the internal room of Souvar Hovhannisyan¹⁶. The document says "the way mislead Tondrakians did", while as per A. Yeritsyan "new-Tondrakians" sacrament of communion done by water and unleavened bread is similar to Evangelical ritual. Another significant fact: the review of illegal baptism done by religious leader of Alexandrapol bishop Nicholas in 1842 reveals that Arkhveli sectarians were baptized in the river which is especially attributive to Baptist church. The elements of baptism are included also in "The key of truth", where in the first chapter child baptism is denied by following citation "not nonbeliever children that are idle" and as it is known Baptist church refuses child baptism¹⁷. Another, A. Yeritsyan mentions in his article in "Experience" that baptism was done "in the name of Father and Son and the Holy Spirit" proving that the ceremony could not be conducted "in Tondrakian mistaken way" as Tondrakians rejected both Holy Trinity and the Grace of Holy Spirit. By definition of Armenian sources¹⁸ the Tondrakians did not accept also providence, sacraments, sin and punishment, whereas the first chapter of "The key of truth" speaks about accepting original and active sin and repentance¹⁹. Further theological study of the book illustrates Evangelical and more specifically Baptist doctrine. However, in this article we focus on partial theological study of several components in "The key of truth" which is already enough to conclude that with some exceptions the writing mainly presents protestant doctrinal viewpoints.

The question "who were "new Tondrakians"" is hard to provide us with a final and exhaustive response. Nevertheless, I'll dare to suggest a new hypothesis concerning given topic as I believe it will become more lucid following a series of facts and observation.

a) Though F. Conybeare and the authors following him had put the date of the "Key of Truth" in 850 A.D. considering that its author was the Tondrakian leader *Միսրոպ Զարթուր/սուրյի*, we are convinced that the book is a work of 18th century. The detailed investigation of MS 6710 showed that the original of the book was written in

¹⁶ Yeritsian A., *ibid*, p. 109.

¹⁷ Conybeare F. *ibid*, p. 3.

¹⁸ See, Gregory of Narek, "To the abbot of Kchav Monastery", Book of Papers, Tibilist, 1901. pp499-500, [Գրիգոր Նարեկացի, «Էն յանանայրի Անուայ», Գիրք բլրայ, 1901, էջ 499-500]

¹⁹ Conybeare F. *ibid*, p. 2.

1782 by priest Hovhannes, but we got only a copy of it written in 1811. Besides, the content of the book is of protestant character. We have discussed these issues in separate articles.

b) In his article Al. Yeritsyan mentions that there were many 'new Tondrakians' in Alexandropol, villages of Shirak, kaghzvan, Pambak, Nor Bayazet, provinces of Yerevan and Ejmiadzin. Even the 3/4th of 134 houses considering themselves Evangelical belonged to Tondrakian sect and "were sometimes acting as Pryguns"²⁰. As Al. Yeritsyan notes, that even in one of Russian villages the priest of Molokan-Pryguns was a Tondrakian Armenian. In general Yeritsyan often compares 'Tondrakian' sect to Molokans and especially Pryguns²¹.

c) As known from the history of Caucasus, Evangelism was wide spread in this region and Russia especially among merchants, 90% of which were Molokans and Sabbatharians easily joining Baptists²². Thus the expansion of Baptism in Caucasus was realized with help of rich Molokan merchants. An explicit example of it was first baptism of Molokan merchant Nikita Voronin administered by Baptists in Tiflis in 1867. At the beginning Evangelism was spread in Transcaucasia and Northern Caucasus. Since 1860s among Russian and Ukrainian villagers appeared so called Shtundism movement, which resembled a fusion of Molokan or spiritual Christian (Dukhobor) and Baptist sects²³.

d) Rev. A. Keorkizyan writes that in his work "The World Religious Systems, p 375" Conybeare mentions that "those called Armenian "heretics" tend to achieve moral high standards in their daily life. They are similar to our Quakers (from English verb to quake- shake, now- a state of trance)"²⁴.

e) R. Levonyan notes that according to some data, "new Tondrakians" eventually accepted Evangelism finding its relevance with their dogmatics²⁵.

f) In the introduction to "The key of truth" there's an expression "the holy milk of our Lord Jesus, Christ through which shall thou progress in faith" which in fact is a Molokan adopted doctrine about 'spiritual milk'²⁶.

The following points give base to conclude that up to nowadays there is a circle easily binding such various religious movements as Molokan-Pryguns, English Quakers and Baptists. Only the practice of religious trance by either Pryguns and Quakers or Baptist - Pentecostals can play the role of such a circle. On its turn, it helps to argument the hypothesis that "new Tondrakians" were probably Armenian

²⁰ Yeritsyan A., *ibid* p. 91.

²² The works of V archeological summit in Tiflis, Moscow, 1887, p. 170. [*Trudi V-ogo arkhheologicheskogo sjezda v Tiflise, M. 1887, str. 170*].

²² Isayenko A., *Extermist Baptists and their followers*, Ordjonikidze, Ir., 1988, p. 12-14, [*Isayenko A., Ekstremisti baptisti i ix posledovateli, Ordjonikidze, Ir., s. 12-14*].

²³ Yeryshev A., *Evangelical Christians-Baptists*, Kiev, 1960, p 18, [*Yeryshev A., Evangeliskie khristiane -baptisty, Kiev, 1960, s. 18*].

²⁴ Rev. Keorkizean, *ibid*, p. 66. See also, Conybeare F. C., *The Armenian church, Religious Systems of the world, a contribution to the study of Comparative Religion*, London, 1911, pp. 397-404.

²⁵ Levonyan R., Ghazaryan A., *ibid*, p. 35.

²⁶ Conybeare F. *ibid*, p. 1.

Baptists previously belonging to Pentecostal branch dissected form Evangelism as the state of trance and rejection of child baptism were their attributive features. This explains similarity and closeness between Molokan-Pryguns and 'New Tondrakians'

As for the hypotheses of Armenian Evangelical church being the successor of old Paulician and Tondrakian movements, M. Ormanyan rejects its soundness as "it's a known reality that Eastern Protestantism is introduced by American missionaries"²⁷. Moreover, Armenian Protestantism had better roots than Armenian Paulicians have ever had since Armenian Protestants were **politically** supported by western Protestant, an aid Paulicians were short of ²⁸.

19-րդ դ. վերջերին գիտական շրջանառության մեջ դրվեց մի վարկած, որի համաձայն պավլիկյան և թոնդրակյան աղանդները համարվում են եվրոպական ռեֆորմացիայի ճախածնող: Այս տեսակետի սկզբնավորողներն են Գալուստ Տեր-Սկրտչյանը և Ֆրեդերիկ Կոնիքիրը: Տեսության հիմքում ընկած է «Բանալի ճշմարտութեան» երկի ընկալումը որպես «նոր թոնդրակեցիների» ուսմունք, որով հետագայում որոշ պատմագիրներ փորձեցին ավետարանական եկեղեցին «հայացնել» վաղ անցյալից: Հոգվածում ապացուցվում է, որ պավլիկյան և թոնդրակյան աղանդները չեն կարող կապված լինել Հայաստանում բողոքական-ավետարանական շարժումների հետ և որոշ ուսմունքային նմանություններով հանդերձ՝ հիմնովին տարբեր են:

²⁷ Maghakia arch. Ormanian, Armenian Church, Constantinople, 1911, p. 237, [ՊՄ աղաթիս ապ. Օրմահեան, Հայոց եկեղեցիի, Կոստանդնուպոլիս, 1911, էջ 237]

²⁸ Eghiaian B., The Division of Armenian Denominations. Anthilias, 1971, p. 91-92, [Եղիանեան Բ., Հայ Զորանուստությունների բաժանումը, Անթիլիս, 1971, էջ 91-92].