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# ARMENOLOGICAL HERITAGE

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**Karen V. Melik-Pashayan, The Cult of the Goddess Anahit, Yerevan, 1963, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, Academy of Sciences of Armenian SSR.**

In this remarkable monograph the renowned ethnographer presents a study of Anahit, one of the chief deities of the Pre-Christian Armenia. Below the Editorial board suggests two chapters of the monograph – “Armenian pagan pantheon and the place of Anahit in the pantheon” (Chapter 2, pp.23-45) and “Places of cult of Anahit” (Chapter 5, pp.103-125).

### **ARMENIAN PAGAN PANTHEON AND THE PLACE OF ANAHIT IN THE PANTHEON**

Ancient Armenia which comprises the northern part of the Near East, due to its geographic situation is a transitional country where the peoples of ancient Mesopotamia, Asia Minor and Caucasus contact each other. Through the Armenia proceed trading caravans of these countries followed by military campaigns of ancient eastern monarchs. Due to trading relations elements of foreign ideology and thought enters into the population of Armenia. On the other side, the conquerors introduce the cult of their religion and main deities by force, especially among the elite. Thus, in Armenia were adopted Assyrian-Babylonian deities from the south, Anatolian, Hittite ones from the west, and that of Persian from the south-east. In the process of the amalgamation of these foreign and local cults had come into being the Armenian pantheon.

One of the central figures of our pantheon is regarded Aramazd. He was the father of the gods, the pagan forefathers took him as the creator of the sky and earth, and call him “Great and noble Aramazd, creator of the sky and earth”,<sup>1</sup> by his support exists the Armenian country, he gives abundance and richness. Here are the words of Trdat about Aramazd: “May there be greeting and prosperity by the help of the gods, abundant fertility from noble Aramazd ...”.<sup>2</sup>

Linguists etymologize the word Aramazd as follows. Ahura means “lord” and Mazda – “ultimate wisdom”.<sup>3</sup> To the pagan deities were dedicated festivals, those dedicated to Aramazd took place during the month Navasard.

The chief temple of Aramazd was located in the settlement Ani of the Daranali district (*gavar* in Armenian – transl.), Upper Armenia. In this regard we read the following wrote by Agathangelos: “... then he went to the fortified site of renowned Ani, the site of the royal burial ground of the Armenian kings. There they destroyed the altar

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<sup>1</sup> Agathangelos, History of Armenia (G.Ter-Mkrtchyan and St.Kanayants), Tiflis, 1909: 38 (translation of R.Thomson [Agathangelos, History of the Armenians, Albany, 1976, p.65]).

<sup>2</sup> Idem, p.73 (Thomson 1976, p.139).

<sup>3</sup> H. Acaryan, Dictionary of Armenian personal names, vol.1, Yerevan, 1942, p.268.

of the god Zeus-Aramazd, called father of all the gods”.<sup>4</sup> Afterwards Trdat donated Ani along with its surroundings to the church.

Another temple of Aramazd was located on the mountain Palato where he was worshipped along with Astlik.<sup>5</sup>

Khorenatsi remembers that there was a temple of Aramazd in Mtskheta, on the bank of the Kura river: “And he immediately destroyed the stormy image of Aramazd, which stood out of the town, passing through a mighty river, people worship him everyone standing on the roof of his house since it was visible, and if anyone wishes to make sacrifice he passes the river and sacrifice before the temple”.<sup>6</sup> From this reference it becomes clear that the statue stood on an elevated place and everybody worshipped him from the roof of his house, and anyone who want to perform sacrifice, crosses the river and did it in front of the temple.

Another temple of Aramazd was in the settlement Bagavan of the district Bagrevand, Ayrarat province. Although temples dedicated to Aramazd were numerous, thorough study of historical sources show that Aramazd was not so popular among the pagan Armenians as Anahit. We think that the cult of Aramazd emerged due to the Persian influence, so it was alien to the Armenian pantheon.

Armenian pagan pantheon was composed on the principle of kinship which is essentially different from that of the Persian Zoroastrian religion. Aramazd was the father of the family, he has three daughters – Anahit, Astlik, Nane, and one son – Mihr; in some sources Vahagn also is regarded as the son of Aramazd.

In Armenian pagan pantheon Vahagn occupied an exceptional place; he was one of the most beloved and popular deities of pagan Armenians and was the war god. It is seen from the words of Trdat: “... valor from valiant Vahagn to you ...”.<sup>7</sup>

Vahagn was worshipped also as the sun-god, and from this point of view is important an ancient reference which Alishan had included in his “Old beliefs...”: “Some people worshipped the Sun and called it Vahagn”.<sup>8</sup>

In the only song which had reached us and is dedicated to Vahagn, also is evident his association with the sun and fire:

Heaven was in travail, earth was in travail, the purple sea  
Was also in travail, in the sea travail also gripped the red  
Reed. From the tube of the reed came forth smoke, from  
the tube of the reed came forth flame. From the flame a  
read-headed young boy run out. He had fire for hair, and  
had flame for beard, and his eyes were sun.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Agathangelos, p.73 (Thomson 1976, p.325)).

<sup>5</sup> Matenagrutyunk of our Holy father Movses Khorenatsi, Venice, 1865, p.301.

<sup>6</sup> Idem, p.170.

<sup>7</sup> Agathangelos, p.73 (Thomson 1976, p.139).

<sup>8</sup> Alishan, Old beliefs, Venice, 1865, p.294.

In the Armenian ethnography is preserved very interesting data which also prove that in the remote past Vahagn personified the cult of sun as well. In Van was preserved for long a remarkable custom connected with the cult of sun. On the next day after the wedding, in the morning the participants along with the bride and son-in-law, frequently lead by a priest, climb on the roof of the house or some other elevated place from where could be seen the sunrise, and the group of unmarried young men sang the next song addressed to the sun:

Hello morning sun, morning hello,  
 Let us say hello to morning sun  
 Let give the king much sun,  
 Vahe, Vahe.  
 Hello morning sun, morning hello,  
 Let us say hello to morning sun,  
 Let give the queen much sun,  
 Vahe, Vahe.<sup>10</sup>

Without doubt this song is a hymn preserved from the pagan period which is dedicated to Vahe, the sun-god. The etymology of the word Vahagn also speaks in favor of the fire-sun. It is built from the root Vah which means “bring, he who brings” and noun *agn* (*agni*) resulting in “he who brings fire”.

Thus, Vahagn simultaneously acts as the sun-god and it explains the popularity of his cult. Windischmann, Lagarde, Gelzer had identified Vahagn with Verethrana mentioned in Avesta and on this basis classified him among the gods of Persian origins. We think that it is not right suggestion. We could not agree with that treatment. First of all, for Persians Verethrana was a secondary deity, and the next, the roots of the cult of Vahagn are deep, and the Persian influence is traced from later period. We think that by its attributes and religious significance Vahagn stands closer to the Indian Indra, since P.Kretschmer has shown that Indra is of Anatolian or, precisely Hittite origins and identified with the Hittite deity of Inar or Inara which is attested in the Hittite texts many times.

According to historiographers, the chief temple of Vahagn was in Ashtishat and was very rich in gold and silver. Grigor Lusavorich had destroyed it with great difficulty, since the pagans heroically defend the temple of their beloved god.

Another temple, as reports Tovma Artsruni, was in Ahevakan village on the eastern side of the mountain Varaga (Vaspurakan). According to the same Tovma, a temple dedicated to Vahagn was located in the Lesser Albak which was erected by Artashes II.

One more temple was in the place called Salahuneac of the district Derjan, Upper Armenia, built by Trdat.

<sup>9</sup> Movses Khorenatsi, *Matenagrytyunk*, p.59 (translation of R.Thomson [Movses Khorenatsi, *History of the Armenians*, Ann Arbor, 2006, p.119).

<sup>10</sup> *Azagrakan handes*, vol.20, Tiflis, 1910, p.158.

According to Movses Khorenatsi, Vahagn was a god also in Georgia where it was erected a statue of him and he was worshipped through numerous sacrifices. Khorenatsi remembers that a priestly family was dedicated to Vahagn – Vahunik, who were obliged to serve Vahagn. The festival of Vahagn took place in the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the month Sahmi (October 15) and was celebrated with great luxury.

Among pagan Armenians the days of the months bear different names and were dedicated to one or another god, thus, the 27<sup>th</sup> day was dedicated to Vahagn and bear his name.

It is known that Vahagn was called dragonslayer; until recently this word was thought to consist of *vishap* and *qaghel* which mean *vishap qaghel*, exterminate a dragon. B.Arakelyan explains the word *vishapaqagh* as *vishap* and *qagh*, where *qagh* means male goat, *nokhazn*. So, here we got dragon-goat.<sup>11</sup> This new explanation helps to trace the evolution of the cult of Vahagn from totemistic character to the deity. Let us remember that the gods had originated from totems who primarily were depicted zoomorphous, and later, as a result of the development of productive forces religious sphere was transformed. The deities had lost their zoomorphism and become anthropomorphic. But, as a hangover they still preserve their previous images; Ishtar was depicted with the head of a cow, Marduk as lizard, Indra – bull etc. So it is not impossible that Vahagn used to have an appearance of half-dragon half-goat.

Despite the fact that Nar and Mittanian Ishtar were not form part of the Armenian pantheon, but, since those tribal groups whose deities were Nar and Ishtar had an important role in the process of the formation of Armenian ethnos, and from the other side, the evolution of the cult of Anahit should not be understood without aforementioned goddesses, let us briefly discuss their cults.

Nar, the goddess of water and fertility, had an important role in the religions of Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. Gr.Kapancyan has established the existence of her cult among Armenians.<sup>12</sup> Nar was expressed as a relic in the worship of Nurin, about her exist numerous songs, one of which we refer below:

She wears a red belt,  
She wears a *shila* shirt,  
*Ajba* gorgeous lady has come,  
Nuri, Nuri has come,  
Let us bring an egg and put into her hands,  
Let us bring oil and put on her navel,  
Let us bring water and pour on her head,  
Let us open the door of the heaven.

This song is simply an address to the goddess Nar expecting from her a rain, for which she was pleased, given some gifts. It is well known that in the antiquity the statues of goddesses (Nar, Anahit) were brought out of the temples and water was

<sup>11</sup> B.Arakelyan, Notes on Vahagn Vishapaqagh, Bulletin of Humanitarian Sciences , 1951/2, p.75.

<sup>12</sup> Gr.Kapancyan, Hittite gods among Armenians, Yerevan, 1940.

poured on them from every side and were performed sacrifices. The same was done in regard to Nuri (Nar) also in the XIX-XX centuries.

As it was mentioned by Gr.Kapancyan, the existence of Nar among Armenians is proved both linguistically and by ethnographic materials. Tsovinar simply represents the word Nar and its association with the sea (water), *voskinar*, as well as its variants *naroy*, *naroy*, *naroy*, leave no doubt that these are the relics of the cult of Nar.

In his study "Some traces of the agricultural cult among Armenians" V.Bdoyan has shown that the goddess Nar is the further development of the totemistic frog which corresponds to the matriarchal social structure in Armenia.<sup>13</sup>

The Egyptian and Hittite inscriptions show that before the Urartians a part of the Armenian Highland was settled by the Mittanians who in the XVI-XV centuries BC had created a mighty kingdom whose borders were extending from Cappadocia to Nineveh. The Mittanian state had political and economic contacts with neighboring countries and especially with Egypt. Were preserved the letters of the Mittanian king Tushratta addressed to Egyptian pharaohs. In the Mittanian religion an important role played the cult of the Mother-goddess expressed through Ishtar. From the letters of Tushratta addressed to the pharaoh Amenophis III becomes clear that Ishtar was the chief god of Mittanians. Amenophis III who was married to Giluhepa daughter of Tushratta, after her death desired to marry his daughter Taduhepa. After a durative correspondence Tushratta agreed and sent Taduhepa to Egypt. But soon after Amenophis became ill and asks Tushratta to send the goddess Ishtar in order to cure him. Tushratta immediately sent Ishtar to Egypt and wrote: "Let Ishtar, the lord of the heaven, help my brother and me one hundred thousand years and grant us both great joy. Let us live in good accordance, Ishtar is my goddess, but for my brother she is not his goddess".<sup>14</sup>

From the last words it becomes clear that Ishtar was the goddess of Mittanians and Tushratta warns the pharaoh to send Ishtar back. Tushratta's letter which we did not refer completely, shows that Ishtar traveled to Egypt not the first time.

In the Mittanian treaties, oaths, curses Ishtar has an important role and is mentioned commonly, and this shows exceptional popularity of her cult. Unfortunately, the scarcity of written and epigraphic information does not give us possibility to represent in full the cult of Ishtar. But one thing is clear, the Subarian-Mittanian component of the Armenian ethnos was not neglected in the Armenian ideological grounds.

In the Armenian pagan pantheon had an important role Astlik, the goddess of love. In the Babylonian pantheon Ishtar has dual character; she is simultaneously the goddess of love and fertility. Probably, initially in our pantheon the situation was similar and Anahit combined the functions of love and fertility, but later her cult was splitted and the function of love had passed to Astlik.

<sup>13</sup> Studies of the State Historical Museum of Armenia, vol.3, Yerevan, 1950, p.68.

<sup>14</sup> A.Khachatryan, Critical history of Armenia of cuneiform period, Yerevan, 1933, p.338.

H.Acaryan regards the name Astlik as translation of Syriac “Kaukabta” which means Astlik, i.e. Arusyak.<sup>15</sup>

According to the information given by Agatangelos, the chief temple of Astlik was in Ashtishat: “The third was the temple named for the goddess Astlik, called the spouse of Vahagn, who is in Greek Aphrodite”.<sup>16</sup> Khorenatsi also has a similar mention; the statue of Aphrodite, beloved of Heracles was ordered to erect near the statue of Heracles, in the district of Hashteanak.

The cult of Astlik was widespread in Taron and for this reason, as wrote G.Srvandztyants, there was not a single mound or high mountain in Taron which was not dedicated to Astlik; thus, a part of the mountain Varaga, as well as a segment of the Taurus massive near S.Hovhan bears the name of Astlik.

In the same Taron an interesting legend was preserved which tells that “The Euphrates river makes a roaring noise (*grgral* in Armenian – transl.) when it enters the Mush plain, passing through the narrow gorge and hitting the stones; and that place is called Gur gurai where Astlik’s bath was located. And since Astlik usually took bath by nights, passionate young men make a big fire on the Daghonats mountain and under its light observe the marvellous beauty of Astlik, so she makes to cover the whole place with fog, that is the whole Mush plain in Summer and Winter, until the foothills of the mountains, in order to prevent watching from the mountains; and maybe it is possible that exactly after this heavy fog (*mshush* in Armenian – transl.) that land was named as Mush. The people sang the next song: “Mountains of Mush are *mush*, its soil and water are sweet (*anush* in Armenian – transl.)”.<sup>17</sup>

Tovma Artsruni tells that Artashes had built a temple of Astlik in Artashat: “And in the small hollow-like valley divided into three parts which begins from three mounds, by means of a trench he built a high tower and erected an image of Astlik, and a treasury in its neighborhood in order to protect it”.<sup>18</sup>

In the “History of Taron” by Hovhan Mamikonyan it is mentioned that in Taron there is a place called Astghnaber,<sup>19</sup> near the district of Hashteanak – Astghaber. G.Srvandztyants in his “Toros Aghbar” remembers that one of the mountains in the region of Sebastea bears the name Astlik<sup>20</sup>, in the same region was a river which also was called Astlik, there was Astghablur in Artsakh.<sup>21</sup>

The other temple of Astlik, as we have mentioned above, was located on the mountain Palato of Andzevaci district of Vaspurakan, next to the temple of Aramazd.

Indeed, the great number of the temples of Astlik speaks in favor of the popularity of her cult. The temple of Nane, another daughter of Aramazd was in the settlement Til

<sup>15</sup> H.Acaryan, Dictionary of Armenian personal names, vol.1, Yerevan, 1942, p.232.

<sup>16</sup> Agathangelos, p.603 (R.Thomson, Agathangelos, p.349).

<sup>17</sup> G.Srvandztyants, Groc-broc, Constantinople, 1874, p.97-98.

<sup>18</sup> History of the House of Artsruni of Tovma Artsruni, Tiflis, 1917, p.98.

<sup>19</sup> Hovhan Mamikonyan, History of Taron, Yerevan, 1941, p.180.

<sup>20</sup> G.Srvandztyants, Toros Aghbar, part 1, Constantinople, 1879, p.167.

<sup>21</sup> S.Eprikyan, Natural dictionary, Venice, 1903, p.249.

of Daranali district of Upper Armenia. Nane was the goddess of wisdom and knowledge. Due to the scarcity of information, her cult is not defined yet. Two opinions circulate among the scholars concerning Nane; P. de Lagarde derives the name of Nane from Sanscrit Nana, and according to Emin, Nane is one of the names of Ishtar and she was worshipped in Assyria under the name of Nana.

We think that Nane was a local goddess and had played an important role among the Armenian tribes.

In order to prove our suggestion it is enough to recall the circumstance that Nane had an essential impact on the epos "Daredevils of Sassoon". In the epos, as it was mentioned by H.A.Orbeli, Nane appears as an old woman.<sup>22</sup> In the person of Nane of Sassoon, as it was correctly noticed by V.Bdoyan, was personified the tutelary god of harvesting. "In the functions of the old woman we see a remote echo also on the account of war. Actually, the idea of the defence of the motherland Davit takes from the old woman. Femininity, without doubt, does not matter, since in the matriarchal society women were also warriors".<sup>23</sup>

Among the Persians Nane figures as a goddess of victory. The cult of Nane held an important place among Georgians, about which is written a voluminous study by V.Bardavelidze (forthcoming).

Mihr, the son of Aramazd was the god of the sun and fire.

Mihr has left numerous traces in our personal names and toponyms. Thus, Mihrshapuh, Mihrdat, Mihran, Mehruzhan, Mehendak; toponyms – the monastery of Ners Mihr, the town of Mihravan in Albania, in Syunik St.Orbelyan mentions the village of Mehogats (means the throne of Mihr) etc.

The temple dedicated to Mihr was located in the place named Bagaric, Derjan district of Upper Armenia. According to Strabo,<sup>24</sup> Armenians pay 20.000 horses to Persia annually on the occasion of Mithraic festivals. In the Armenian pantheon Mihr took the place of Vahagn, leaving the latter the function of the war-god; this could explain the popularity of the cult of Mihr.

A question arises, who was the spouse of Aramazd. According to some references, Anahit was regarded as the spouse of Aramazd.<sup>25</sup> Many scholars find it impossible saying that Anahit was only the daughter of Aramazd. To my mind, it should not be excluded that Anahit was both the daughter and spouse of Aramazd. Similar phenomena we observe among other peoples; thus, Hera was the sister and wife of Zeus, Osiris – the son and wife of Isis at the same time,<sup>26</sup> Ramesses I had been

<sup>22</sup> H.A.Orbeli, The Epos of Davit of Sassoon, Soviet Armenian literature, 1939/8-9, p.18-19.

<sup>23</sup> V.Bdoyan, Some traces of agricultural cults among Armenians, Studies of the Armenian State Historical Museum, vol.3, Yerevan, 1950, p.33.

<sup>24</sup> Strabo, About Armenians and Armenia (selected and translated by Hr.Acaryan), Yerevan, 1940, p.61.

<sup>25</sup> Haysmavurq, Constantinople, 1706, p. 38, "Small chronicles, XIII-XVIII centuries", vol.2, (compiled by V.A.Hakobyan), Yerevan, 1956, p.317, 359 etc.

<sup>26</sup> Mackenzie D.A., Egyptian Myth and Legend, p.367.



married to her four daughters, one of which held the position of the first wife,<sup>27</sup> Vormizd (Iranian Ormazd – transl.) was engaged in marital affairs with his mother and sister,<sup>28</sup> Erato was the sister and wife of Tigranes II; such examples are numerous.

In his book “Armenian pagan religion” K.Kostanyan had tried to solve this problem and expressed an idea that the goddess Spandaramet was the wife of Aramazd, but the data brought by him is not convincing. The study of a scarce information about Spandaramet show that she acted as a goddess of netherworld. In the prophecy of Ezechiel is written: «Let sandaramet torture your body».<sup>29</sup>

That she was the goddess of the netherworld is proved by the information of Agathangelos: “And he descended and came down near to the ground of the earth in the middle of the city. And he struck the wide expanse of the solid ground, and great and immeasurable rumblings sounded in the depths of hell”.<sup>30</sup>

One of the popular curses used in Van is said the next: «Let sandaramet eat away at your body»;<sup>31</sup> this is a remote memory about Spandaramet who was the goddess of the netherworld. Let us mention that Spandaramet exactly means “hell”.

Almost all organized pagan pantheons had a deity of scholarship and writing which different peoples name by different names; Tot by Egyptians, Nebos by Assyrians, Apollo and Hermes by Greeks, Mercurius by Latins etc. Armenian pagan pantheon has Tir. He was regarded as the scribe of Aramazd, the mentor of writing, rhetorics. Pagan Armenians ascribe him ability of interpreter of dreams. The temple of Tir was near Artashat. As Agathangelos mentions, Trdat first destroyed the temple of Anahit in Artashat: “On the road he first came across the shrine of the god Tir, the interpreter of dreams, the scribe of pagan learning, who was called the secretary of Ormizd, a temple of learned instruction. (Here) first they set to work, and destroyed, burnt, ruined and razed it”.<sup>32</sup>

From the name Tir were built personal names Tribaz, Trdat, Tiran, Tiroc, Tiratur, Tirit, and place names Tirinkatar, Tirarej, to Tir was dedicated the month of Tre and the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the month.

Let us discuss Ara the Handsome. Many scholars had studied his person. Among recent studies are worth to mention the “Worldview of ancient Armenians” by N.Adontz,<sup>33</sup> “Ara the Handsome” by Matikyan,<sup>34</sup> and the third, more important one -

<sup>27</sup> M.E.Matie, Traces of Matriarchate in ancient Egypt, in «Problems of ancient history» (collection of papers dedicated to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the book of Fr.Engels “The emergence of family, personal property and state”), Moscow - Leningrad, 1936, p.373.

<sup>28</sup> Ethnographic journal, vol.26, Tiflis, 1917, p.144.

<sup>29</sup> Prophecy of Ezechiel, 31, p.16.

<sup>30</sup> Agathangelos, p.384 (R.Thomson, History of the Armenians, p.277).

<sup>31</sup> Ethnographic collection of papers dedicated to Emin, vol.6, Moscow – Vagharshapat, 1906, p.310.

<sup>32</sup> Agathangelos, p.404 (R.Thomson, History of the Armenians, p.317).

<sup>33</sup> Hayrenik, Boston, 1926, October-November, 1927, January.

<sup>34</sup> Vienna, 1930.

“The cult of Ara the Handsome” by Gr.Kapancyan,<sup>35</sup> where the highly skillful scholar solves in detail and comprehensively the problems connected with Ara the Handsome, whereby the cult is studied under the light of historical development given its evolution.

Gr.Kapancyan established that it is a reflection of the ancient Near Eastern dying and resurrecting deity which has cultic similarities with Mesopotamia.

During the period of developed agriculture the idea of the dying - resurrecting deity had an important place which in the Armenian reality also was reflected in the face of Ara.

Gr.Kapancyan wrote: “Ara is not the deity which personifies the awakening of spring, plants and forces, but also of productivity, fertility or harvest”.<sup>36</sup>

What place in the pantheon was secured for Barshamin remains unknown yet. From the scarce information kept in the sources it becomes clear that his cult had entered Armenia from Mesopotamia. In this regard Khorenatsi writes: “He himself went down to Mesopotamia, and finding there the statue of Barshamin, he embellished it with ivory, crystal, and silver. He ordered that it should be brought and set up in the town of Tordan”.<sup>37</sup>

The next historian who had kept an information about Barshamin is Anania Shirakatsi, who in the chapter “Milky way” of his study “Cosmology and calendar” also mentions the Assyrian origins of Barshamin: “Again some people among Armenian forefathers says that in severe winter Vahagn, the forefather of Armenians, had stolen the straw of Barshamin, the forefather of Assyrians, so we learned to call it by tradition as milky way”.<sup>38</sup> The next information comes from Agathangelos telling how Grigor Lusavorich had destroyed the statue of snow-white Barshamin at the village of Tordan of Daranali district. But what was the essence of Barshamin's cult, what ideas does it contain, today remains unknown.

Strabo gives a remarkable information according to which Anahit was worshipped together with two gods – Oman and Anadat.<sup>39</sup> In the Armenian mythology exist two more deities of secondary importance – Amanor and Vanatur, about whom different scholars had expressed contradictory views. Thus, M.Emin regarded Amanor and Vanatur as a single deity, but Gh.Alishan found out that they were separate gods. H.Gelzer regarded as a god only Vanatur, and S.Paronyan takes both as a subordinates<sup>40</sup> of Aramazd.

To our sense, Vanatur and Amanor correspond to Oman and Anadat of Strabo, and are satellites of Anahit. To Oman corresponds Amanor and to Anadat – Vanatur (in Persian *dat* means “to give; gift”), where initial *v* could have been dropped and *dat* was

<sup>35</sup> G.Kapancyan, The cult of Ara the Handsome, Yerevan, 1945.

<sup>36</sup> Idem, p.156.

<sup>37</sup> Khorenatsi, Matenagrutyunq, p.89.

<sup>38</sup> Anania Shirakatsi, Cosmology and calendar, Yerevan, 1940, p.37.

<sup>39</sup> Strabo, p.39.

<sup>40</sup> The author uses the unusual word *storadryal* “subordinate” for both deities without defining its sense. Probably, he means satellite, a word used in the next sentence (transl.).

translated as *tur* (Armenian translation of *dat* – transl.). It should be remembered that the festival dedicated to Vanatur and Amanor was held in Navasard, almost together with that of Anahit, and this also proves that they were satellites of Anahit.

Anahit had an exceptional role in the Armenian pagan pantheon; it is seen from the words of Trdat addressed to Grigor: "... unless you agree to offer worship to the gods, and especially to this great lady Anahit. She is the glory of our race and our savior; her all kings honor, especially the king of the Greeks. She is mother of all virtues, benefactor of all human nature, and the offspring of the great and noble Aramazd".<sup>41</sup> These words are very important for the definition of Anahit. Thus, the wording "especially to this great lady Anahit" shows that Anahit had a special role in the Armenian pagan pantheon, her cult was spread everywhere, she "She is the glory of our race and our savior", etc.

No less important are the next words of Trdat's edict which define the functions of our chief deities: "May there be greeting and prosperity by the help of the gods, abundant fertility from noble Aramazd, protection from Lady Anahit, valor from valiant Vahagn to you and all our land of Armenia ...".<sup>42</sup>

The above mentioned passage shows that the kings seek protection of Anahit.

According to the Armenian pagan thought, Anahit was the force "who gives life and fertility to our land of Armenia", to her are ascribed creative and productive attributes, hence she appears as the symbol of productivity, motherhood, and fertility. It is clear that a deity having such attributes could not have been emerged in the patriarchal period, so the roots of her cult should be looked in the remote past, in the social-economic background of matriarchate.

The cult of Anahit was widely spread over the whole East. The information proving this is attested in the New Testament and in Soperk. These references belong to the period when Christianity had begun its propaganda in the East. Christian preachers were trying to discredit pagan deities, and, first of all Anahit whose authority was very popular, and from their turn, supporters of paganism fiercely fought against the Christians, trying to excite people: "... the temple of the great goddess Artemea is regarded as an empty place, and her greatness should be destroyed whom worship the whole Asia and the world".<sup>43</sup>

Almost identical important information is preserved also in Soperk. During the reign of Sanatruk the apostle Thaddeus came to Armenia from Mesopotamia in order to disseminate Christianity. Thaddeus and his supporters were arrested. The devil came to the enjailed in the image of a human and spoke to them: "what did you lack that you have left the great goddess Anahit and Pisidov, the mother of the gods and deluded with that Jewish man who taught you new learning and deceived your mind, return into the fold, kiss the country of Anahit and I shall plead to all gods for your absolution".<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Agathangelos, p.31 (R.Thomson, History of the Armenians, p.65).

<sup>42</sup> Agathangelos, p.73 (R.Thomson, History of the Armenians, p.139).

<sup>43</sup> New Testament, Constantinople, 1892, p. 163 (in Arm.).

<sup>44</sup> Sopherk Haykakanq, Venetik, 1853, vol.8, p.23.

The cited words show that the supporters of paganism were trying to use the authority of Anahit as a barrier against the victorious march of Christianity, since Anahit has a central position in the pantheon and she overshadows other deities.

### PLACES OF CULT OF ANAHIT

Above we have mentioned that the cult of Anahit was very popular in Armenia. Naturally, temples dedicated to her also should have been numerous, but due to scarcity of written, archaeological and ethnographic sources it is impossible to identify most of their locations.

The main temple of Anahit was located in the settlement of Eriza, district Ekeleac, Bardzr Hayk province, on the bank of the river Gayl. The cult of Anahit was so popular in this district that, according to Strabo, Pliny and Dio Cassius the entire district bears the name Anahtakan (i.e. belonging to Anahit – transl.).

Among the nakharar families who are named after their domains are mentioned those from Ekeleac. Thus, listing Armenian noblemen who visited the emperor Constantine in the city of Karin (Erzerum – transl.) Sebeos writes: "Spereans (of Sper – transl.), princes of Bagratuni, Manakeans and Daranakeans who were from the district of Ekelec".<sup>45</sup>

In the list of false Gahnamak which is included in the Life of St. Nerses, we also meet the term Ekeleank-Ekelakank.<sup>46</sup> These testimonials allow us to suggest that among ancient Armenians there used to exist a princely family descending from priests which bear the name Ekeleank and, probably, the district Anahtakan belonged to them.

After the elimination of pagan religion the district of Ekeleac was granted to the family of Lusavorich, and after the death of the male representatives, in 439 it had passed to Mamikonyans.

According to Gr.Kapancyan, Ekelik originated from the Sumerian word "eklum",<sup>47</sup> which means "field", and the geographical data prove this explanation. In reality, the district of Ekeleac comprises a field, and in this regard it is worth to refer to the next information given by Hakob Karnetsi: "He went and reached the land of Ekeleac, which is a field-shaped and wide; and it has numerous villages and settlements".<sup>48</sup>

The temple of Anahit at Eriza in the district of Ekeleac is the oldest one about which we have references by Pausanias and Procopius who tell that Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon, has brought from Eriza the statue of Anahit accompanied by Orestes and Pylades.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Sebeos, Constantinople, 1851, p.217.

<sup>46</sup> "Sopherk", vol.VI, Venice, 1853, p.33.

<sup>47</sup> Kapancyan Gr., Hayasa – the cradle of Armenians, Yerevan, 1947, p.86.

<sup>48</sup> Hakob Karnetsi, Bulletin of Upper Armenia, Vagharshapat, 1903, p.11.

<sup>49</sup> Procopius of Caesarea, The History of wars of Romans with Persians, Vandals and Gots, St-Petersburg, 1862, p.85.

The second big temple of Anahit was in the settlement of Ashtishat, district of Taron of the province of Turuberan, located at the plateau of the mountain Qarqe on the right bank of the Eastern Euphrates or Aratsani. During the reign of the kings Artashes and Vagharshak that settlement belonged to the family of Vahuni, Tigran II had confiscated it which became part of the royal domain, and later Trdat III donated it along with surrounding farmlands to Grigor Lusavorich (Illuminator – transl.). Since Sahak does not have male descendant, and his daughter had married to Hamazasp Mamikonyan, the domain had passed to Mamikonyans as a hereditary property. In Eriza, as well as Ashtishat were golden statues of Anahit.

Another temple of Anahit was in Armavir which was a distinguished pagan center, where were statues of sun and moon, a sacred forest where the priests perform different prophecies on the rustling of tree-leaves, here were located also the temples of Anahit and Apollo. Some scholars had doubted this information of Khorenatsi, but from the Greek inscriptions of Armavir it becomes clear that in Armavir actually existed a temple dedicated to Anahit. H. Manandyan regarded this temple as belonging to Artemis but we think that it was the temple of Anahit, and where was erected a statue of Artemis, under the Hellenistic influence and Artemis was identified with Anahit. Being the synthesis of Eastern and Western cultures the Hellenistic culture could not escape but influenced the Armenian pantheon, and actually with that influence should be explained the convergence of Greek and Armenian pagan religions and, as reports Movses Khorenatsi, in the temples alongside Armenian deities were identical Greek deities; thus, Zeus near Aramazd, Artemis near Anahit, etc. The same process we see in Armavir where next to the statue of Anahit stood the statue of Artemis. Thus, in Armavir a separate temple of Artemis was not erected.

The other big temple of Anahit was in Artashat and this fact finds proof due to the information given by Khorenatsi, Agathangelos and other authors. That temple was distinguished for its treasures: “First of all Trdat began to destroy the temple which was built in the city of Artast. And he took over gold, silver, precious stones and ritual vessels for the worship so much that is impossible to write down<sup>50</sup>”.

The next temple of Anahit was called the “Throne of Anahit” about which Pawstos writes the next: “There were two anchorite religious living-in-the-mountains. The name of one, who was a Syrian by race and who lived on the mountain Arewc, was Šalita. The name of the other was Epip'an. He was a Greek by race, and he lived on the great mountain called the Throne of Anahit ...”<sup>51</sup>.

Among our researchers circulate contradictory opinions regarding the location of the “Throne of Anahit”; thus, some scholars (M.Emin, K.Kostanyan) think that the Throne of Anahit was located in Ashtishat of Taron, province of Turuberan. From that same reference it is clear that the Throne of Anahit and the mountain Arewc were near

<sup>50</sup> N.Marr, *The baptise of Armenians, Georgians, Abkhazians and Alans by the St. Grigor, Vagharshapat*, 1913, p.51.

<sup>51</sup> *Armenian History of Pawstos Buzand*, Venice, 1889, p.224 (translation after *The Epic Histories Attributed to Pawstos Buzand* [transl. and commentary by Nina G.Garsoïan], Cambridge/Mass., 1989, p.205).

each other, but our historians did not mention a mountain Arewc in Taron. Taron is far away and, as it is seen from the reference, Šalita and Epip'an had reached very quickly, so the Throne of Anahit could not have been far from the Ekeleac district. So, most probably, the Throne of Anahit was located in Bardzr Hayk, in the district Arewc where also was a mountain Arewc. N.Adontz places the district of Arewc to the north of Akn<sup>52</sup>, on the left bank of the Euphrates, in the westernmost part of the Mndzur mountains.

A big temple of Anahit was also in the city of Komana of the province Gamirk, Cappadocia, which was part of Armenia. The staff of this temple reached 6000 people. The temple possessed also with extensive lands.

Movses Khorenatsi is the only author who mentions the temple of Anahit in the place called Darbnac qar of the district Andzevaci, Vaspurakan province; he writes the next: "... and the local population call it Darbnac qar. Reaching that place the Saint apostle chased the smiths, henchmen of evil and destroyed idols of Anahit".<sup>53</sup>

The priests of the place Darbnac qar or Agravaqar were called *darbin* since they cause great noise while striking the anvils with their hammers and kept the cult of the mountain live among the people. After a violent and persistent struggle the followers of Christianity had succeeded to destroy that temple and erect there the monastery of Hogeac which was dedicated to Mariam the Godmother (Maria Magdalena – transl.). In Taron is mentioned the fortress of Tirinkatar or Tsirinkatar, in the Taurus mountains, in the place called Aregaknatsag, where also stood a temple of Anahit. According to N.Sargsyan, in the monastery of Arakeloc was kept a manuscript in Greek written by Grigor Lusavorich in which the latter tells about his deeds and travels. Later the manuscript was translated by Chartuanel Mamikonyan into Armenian. N.Sargsyan in his "Topography of Lesser and Greater Armenias" introduces its copy where the passage concerning Anahit tells: "This is true border of the monastery which before the great castle was called Tirinkatar, since it was a place of Anahit which we destroyed by the might of Christ ..."<sup>54</sup> After it the temple was conquered with great difficulty and Lusavorich donated the fortress Tirinkatar along with its town and neighborhood to the monastery of Arakeloc.

A temple dedicated to Anahit exists also in Bagaran, about which we have a reference by Movses Khorenatsi. After the construction of Artashat Artashes I "... erected in it a temple and transferred to it from Bagaran the statue of Artemis ...".<sup>55</sup>

Another temple of Anahit should be looked in the place called Anatadzor of the district Baghk-Qashunik, province of Syunik, of which informs us Stepannos Orbelyan.<sup>56</sup> Before us it was suggested by academician Gr.Kapancyan who wrote: "In Syunik, in the region of Qashuni was a village Anatadzor that originates from Anahta dzor, hence it

<sup>52</sup> Recently bears the name Egin, now Kemalieh (transl.).

<sup>53</sup> Movses Khorenatsi, *Matenagrutyunk*, p.294.

<sup>54</sup> N.Sargsyan, *The Topography of Lesser and Greater Armenias*, Venice, 1864, p.235.

<sup>55</sup> Movses Khorenatsi, *Matenagrutyunk*, p.126.

<sup>56</sup> History of the province of Sisakan by Stepannos Orbelyan, archbishop of Syunik, Tiflis, 1911, p.519.

means the gorge of Anahit. This could speak in favor of the existence of the cult of Anahit in ancient Syunik".<sup>57</sup>

In the chapter "Asia Minor" of his study "The Topography of Lesser and Greater Armenias" N.Sargisyan divides Lesser Armenia into several districts; the district of Atapazarı consists of 29 villages one of which bears the name Anahtacılar. The suffix *cılar* is extant in some other village-names, thus Toğancılar, Gırclar, Hacılar etc. We assume that this suffix *cılar* shows place-names, hence Anahtacılar means the place of Anahit. It seems that in antiquity in that place was located one of the temples of Anahit.

Worth to mention the information of Atrpet that in the Chorokh basin (Turkish Chorukh – transl.) was a village with the name Gül-Anahit where in the past was one of the temples of Anahit.<sup>58</sup>

G.Srvandztyanc in his "Manana", describing in details the festivities near the monastery of St.Tiramayr of Arcesh, which exactly resemble that of dedicated to Anahit, writes with some caution: "Now does not this location, that ceremonies, that name show the specialists of the past what was this place before Christianity".<sup>59</sup>

Relying also on the descriptions of some other ethnographers it could be stated that in the remote past in this place was a pagan temple dedicated to Anahit. Such an assumption is based on the next arguments:

1. Here was built a church of St.Mariam and we know that almost all temples of Anahit were replaced by the churches of St.Mariam. And this practice took place not only in Armenia but everywhere; in the places where exist temples dedicated to the Mother-goddesses were erected churches of St.Mariam. For example, in Georgia in the place of the temple of Levkote, goddess of fertility and love, was erected the famous temple of the godmother Atskuri.
2. For the St.Tiramayr church of Arcesh people collect cattle which has a white sign on the forehead, and this is a practice that was used only in regard to Anahit. From the history it is known that the cattle dedicated to Anahit also bear such signs and they freely graze around the temples dedicated to her. Thus, collecting of cattle which have white sign is a reminiscence of the cult of Anahit.
3. To the St.Tiramayr were ascribed curing abilities which among pagan deities characterize only Anahit. For that same reason it could be assumed that the church dedicated to Mariam the godmother of Verin Agulis in the past also was a temple of Anahit. In this regard Ye.Lalayan writes: "Traditionally it is told that this was a pagan house (the church of Mariam the godmother of Verin Agulis – K.V.Melik-Pashayan), and that St. Thaddeus had destroyed the idols and erected a church in that same place. All residents of Agulis tell that during the reconstruction of the church were found idols and fanatically broken".<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Gr.Kapancyan, Historical-linguistic significance of the toponymy of Armenia, Yerevan, 1940, p.292.

<sup>58</sup> Atrpet, The Chorokh basin, Vienna, 1929, p.91.

<sup>59</sup> G.Srvandztyanc, Manana, Constantinople, 1876, p.123.

<sup>60</sup> Ye.Lalayan, The district of Nakhijevan, part 1, Goghtn, «Ethnographic journal» 11, Tiflis, 1911, p.304.

In the records of Ter-Hakob from Agulis, a copy of which was in the possession of Ye.Lalayan, in this regard is written: "... From inside the earthenware table were found idols made of clay and cast iron".<sup>61</sup> Here the information deals with the same church. Unfortunately, the idols were destroyed by the local population.

It would be worth to remember that Agulis is located in the place of the historical district of Goltn where paganism was so strong that Mesrop Mashtots was forced to visit it for the second time in order to suppress the insurgent pagans.

In antiquity it was customary to dedicate towns, districts to gods and name after them. As it was mentioned above, the district Ekeleac was called Anahtakan, there were towns dedicated to Shamiram, Artemis, Khaldi etc. Worth to mention the towns Artimed (in the district of Vagharshapat) and Artamet (in Van). It could be assumed that the names of both towns were originated from the name of the goddess Artemida. For that reason in Armenia under the influence of Hellenism was in use the Greek terminology of naming the deities as it was done in the studies of Movses Khorenatsi, in the Arabic version of Agatangelos, partly by Agatangelos and Pawstos Buzand, where Anahit is called Artemis, Aramazd as Zeus, Astlik as Aphrodite etc. Therefore, it is not impossible that these two towns were dedicated to Anahit and were named Artemida (Artimed, Artamet). A noteworthy information concerning the town Artimed is contained in the Arabic version of Agatangelos where it is mentioned that after the destruction of the pagan temple in Artashat Trdat and Grigor "... reached the town of K-sat and ordered to destroy the temple of Artemid".<sup>62</sup> Linguistically it is proved that K-sat is the river Kasakh, next to which was located the town Artimed of Vardges, and since the town was dedicated to Artemid, it is clear that here should have been the temple of Artemid about which is spoken in the Arabic version of Agatangelos. Hence, undoubtedly, the town K-sat is identical with Artemid.

The study of the places of worship of Anahit convinces us that Upper Armenia (Eriza, Throne of Anahit) was the original center of her cult, from where it spread to the Ararat plain and were established great centers of the cult of Anahit such as Artashat, Armavir, Bagavan. This cult was widespread also in southern Armenia – Vaspurakan (Darbnac qar, Artamet, Arcesh), Sassoon (Tirinkatar), and in Syunik (Anahtadzor), Goltn, Taron (Ashtishat).

According to references familiar to us, it becomes clear that the cult of Anahit was widely spread over the western, southern, eastern and central regions of Armenia. In the northern regions of Armenia temples of Anahit are not recorded, but it does not allow us to say that in these areas Anahit was not worshipped.

Out of Armenia, in Asia Minor, Central Asia (Inner Asia in the original – transl.), Media, Persia and elsewhere are recorded places of worship of Anahit.

The city of Comana of Pontus, on the river Irida (also Iris – transl.) was a temple dedicated to Anahit. Strabo writes on that matter: "Comana is a populous city and a

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> N.Marr, The baptise of Armenians, Georgians, Abkhazians and Alans, p.51.



famous market for items brought from Armenia. During the outing of the goddess people are gathered from everywhere – towns and villages, men and women for that festival ...”<sup>63</sup>

According to the historian Procopius, the temples of both Comana's had erected Orestes son of Agamemnon, for his sister Iphigenia.

By the reference of the same Procopius the temple of Comana used to exist still in his times (late V – early VI centuries) and he saw it.<sup>64</sup>

One of the big temples of Anahit, as writes Strabo,<sup>65</sup> was on the mound of Shamiram, in the town Zela. Later Zela had become part of Lesser Armenia. G.Srvandztyanz writes about Zela: “In these lands are found coins and antiquities. Probably, on this mound was erected the statue of Anahit”.<sup>66</sup>

Temples dedicated to Anahit were in Ecbatana, Bactria, Suza, Germanicopolis and elsewhere.

Out of Armenia the cult of Anahit was spread over the whole Asia Minor, Central Asia (where recently were unearthed some statues of Anahit), partly in Persia and Media. Thus, the cult of Anahit encloses an enormous territory.

Unfortunately, due to the absence of materials it is impossible to judge about the architecture of the temples of Anahit. From the sketchy information of Agatangelos we learn that the temple at Eriza had high walls which were difficult to destroy. We bring the passage from Agatangelos full of fantastic tones: “The demons gathered together and gave battle in the form of an army carrying shields; with a tremendous shout they made the mountains echo. They were put to flight, but as they fled, the high walls collapsed and were flattened”.<sup>67</sup>

The demons mentioned there were those soldiers who ferociously defend the temple of their beloved goddess. From the description it becomes clear that Grigor Lusavorich and Trdat had succeeded to capture and destroy the temple with great difficulty, first of all due to its fortifications, and then the resistance.

Now let us discuss the statues of Anahit. As historians mention, one of the golden statues of Anahit stood in Eriza of the district of Ekeleac. It was taken of by Antonius, but the Armenians again erected a new golden statue. The latter was destroyed 300 years later by Trdat and Grigor Lusavorich. The second golden statue was in Ashtishat which also was annihilated at the hands of Grigor Lusavoric. The statue located in Artashat, according to Movses Khorenatsi, was made of gilded copper.

Indeed, in other places of the cult of Anahit were also statues but we do not possess with information about them. Unfortunately, none of them reached us.

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<sup>63</sup> Strabo, p.79.

<sup>64</sup> Procopius of Caesarea, The history of wars ..., p.85.

<sup>65</sup> Strabo, p.79.

<sup>66</sup> G.Srvandztyanz, Toros akhpar, part 1, Constantinople, 1879, p.71.

<sup>67</sup> Agathangelos, p.409 (R.Thomson, History of the Armenians, p.325-327)].

Only at the end of the XIX century, to the south of Trapizon, in Satala was found a head made of copper which was ascribed to Anahit. Along with the head was found also a part of the hand. Both the head and the hand had traces of blows. The head is decorated with round circle and rich headband, the opening on the circle, and as it was rightly noticed by Enkelmann,<sup>68</sup> the head was decorated with the crown. Curly hairs are combed to the back and two curls on the forehead are designed like half-moon. Places for the eyes are empty, probably in the past they were filled with some material, half opened lips are graciously stepped forward. That head now is kept at the British museum.

In 1940 at the village Hacarat, Kamo district, accidentally was found a golden medallion of the Hellenistic period where is pictured mother embracing a child;<sup>69</sup> we assume that on the medallion is depicted the goddess Anahit.

Temples of Anahit possess with households. According to historiographers, temples of Anahit were very rich, they had numerous slaves, vast land resources, uncountable cattle, as well as gold, silver and precious stones.

The sources of the wealth of the temples were the next: 1. Donations from kings and priests, 2. Income from the economic structures of the temple, 3. Huge share from the spoils of war and war-prisoners.

It was customary that after a successful wars Armenian kings were obliged to send 1/5 of the spoils of war to the temples. Thus Khosrov, by his return from a victorious campaign ordered to send to the temples "... honored the sites of the ancestral worship of his Arsacid family with white oxen and white rams, white horses and white mules, gold and silver ornaments, fringed and tasseled silks, gold crowns and silver altars, beautiful vases with precious gems, gold and silver, shining raiment and lovely decoration".<sup>70</sup>

It is clear that most of the sacrifices and gifts were given to Anahit "... who is the glory of our race and our savior".<sup>71</sup>

People who serve in the temples were called priests (*qurm* – transl.) and their leader – chief priest (*qrmapet* in Armenian – transl.). In pagan Armenia priesthood comprise an extensive social group and as such arose from the material basis of slave economy and by its character it was completely social one. According to Strabo, Armenians donate numerous female and male slaves to the goddess Anahit and temples were full of them which were called temple slaves. Besides them, temples of Anahit own many *dastakerts* (estates – transl.), villages, settlements, many lands, forests etc.

<sup>68</sup> Enkelmann, A copper head found in Armenia, Bazmavep, 1883, p.135.

<sup>69</sup> V.Abrahamyan, Crafts in Armenia in the 4-18th centuries, Yerevan, 1956, p.89.

<sup>70</sup> Agathangheos, p.18-19 (R.Thomson, History of the Armenians, p.41)).

<sup>71</sup> Agathangheos, p.408 (R.Thomson, History of the Armenians, p.65)).

After the elimination of paganism all possessions of the priesthood had passed to the churches and clergymen. "And they devoted to the church's service the (temple's) all villages along with estates and territories".<sup>72</sup>

Chief priests had extensive rights and play significant role in the political life. The chief priest was regarded as the second in the country after the king and, as it was described by Strabo, as a rule, the king and the chief priest belong to the same family. In Armenia it was exactly the same. According to Movses Khorenatsi, Yervand built a city of Bagaran and appointed his brother Yervaz as chief priest. Mazhan, the chief priest was the brother of Tigran. Moreover, in his study "Tigran the Great according to his coins" prof. St.Lisitsyan demonstrates that Tigran the Great was also a chief priest: "The crown of Tigran the Great and all decorations on it convince us that he was a priest, particularly of Anahit. His authority had not lost theocratic principles yet and this had to be strongly reflected on all aspects of the feudal system. In his struggle against Rome he was backed not only by nakharars, civil aristocracy, but also all priesthood which look on him as the chief priest of the most respected goddess".<sup>73</sup>

It is known that the king Trdat I also was a priest.<sup>74</sup>

Not only in Armenia but elsewhere the priests experience great authority and play an important role in the political life. In this regard the famous English Assyriologist A.H.Sayce in his study "The Hittites. the history of a forgotten empire" writes the next: "Komana in Kappadokia and Ephesos on the shores of the Aegean are typical examples of such holy towns. The entire population ministered to the divinity to whom the city was dedicated, the sanctuary of the deity stood in its centre, and the chief authority was wielded by a high priest. If a king existed by the side of the priest, he came in course of time to fill a merely subordinate position".<sup>75</sup>

In ancient Rome priesthood also played significant role, after the elimination of the kingship chief priest became the most influential person. The great influence of the priesthood is explained by the economic power. Priests were very rich. Thus, the priestly family of Vahuni of Taron owned six villages, 12,298 houses, 7847 soldiers and the district of Hashteank.

In order to have an idea about the wealth of the temples of Anahit we can recall the next reference of Pliny; some soldier who became very rich after he robbed the temple of Anahit at Eriza, invited the emperor Augustus to a feast. During the feast Augustus asked that soldier whether the first soldier who attacked the statue of Anahit

<sup>72</sup> Agathangelos, p.38 (R.Thomson, History of the Armenians, p.321)).

<sup>73</sup> Scientific conference dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the establishment of Soviet system in Armenia, Yerevan, 1941, p.122-123.

<sup>74</sup> Tacitus, Works, book XV, vol.II, St.Petersburg, 1887, p.478.

<sup>75</sup> The author refers the Armenian translation of the study of A.H.Sayce published in "Banaser", Paris, 1900, p.250. For the sake of accuracy we have replaced the quoted passage with the original English publication (London, 1890, p.113).

had become handicapped, the soldier answered with smile, no, conversely, with the part of the calf of that golden statue which became mine I am happy to honor you.<sup>76</sup>

To the priests were given also judiciary functions, in antiquity pagan temples were cultural centers. Besides their spiritual job priests were busy with scholarship, curing, astronomy, history etc. They administer also education since the schools function at temples. Pagan Armenians had two types of archives – secular and religious. The first record political events and these books were called “Books of kings”, the second – “Temple history” where first of all are written mythological histories, and the political events occupy secondary role.

Anahit was greatly used for political purposes; in this regard is of interest the following speech of Cicero: “For fear had been inspired in these nations, whom the Roman people had never thought, either should be harassed by war, or attempted. There was also another serious and potent belief, which had prevailed through the minds of the barbarous nations, (that) our army was led into these regions for the purpose of despoiling of a most rich, and most sacred temple”.<sup>77</sup>

Th.Mommsen thinks that this mentioning refers to the temple of Anahit of Elymais, but he is wrong since:

1. The temple of Elymais was too far from the itinerary of Lucullus,
2. The temple of Elymais has been robbed since long by the Parthians,
3. Among the Persians there was not a custom to have luxurious and rich temples.

So, without doubt, as it was rightly noticed by H.Gelzer, the mention of Cicero refers to the famous temple of Anahit at Eriza, district of Ekeleac. The latter was distinguished in the East for its wealth and authority.

So, Tigran and Mithridates had masterly made use of the great authority of Anahit saying that the Romans want to insult and rob the temple of Anahit. This point gave a reason to some scholars (Mommsen and others) to regard Mithridatic and Tigranian wars against Rome as a religious war between East and West, wrongly ignoring their political and economic background.

Taking into account great authority of Anahit, Lucullus as well as Pompeius did not harm the temples of Anahit; moreover, as more farsighted person, Pompeius was trying to please the priesthood and he donated some estates to the temple of Anahit of Zela.

The study of historical sources show that Tigran II was eager to perform religious reforms and introduce stable religious norms. He adopted the Greek terminology of naming the gods. This, indeed, met an opposition since in that period in different provinces and districts of Armenia exist many local deities which express the ideology of Armenian tribes.

After erecting temples for the Greek deities Tigran ordered to make sacrifices and worship them. On this occasion against Tigran revolted Vahunis and Bagratids which

<sup>76</sup> C.Plini Secundi, *Naturalis historiae*, p.18.

<sup>77</sup> Cicero, Pompey's military command (this citation is taken by the author from H.Gelzer, *A Study on Armenian mythology*, Venice, 1897, p.44).

resulted in the takeover of religious functions from Vahunis, Tigran also ordered to cut off the tongue of Asud Bagratuni and took over the command of the army leaving them only the office of coronants (*tagadir aspet* – in Armenian). Thus, in order to create a strong centralized authority Tigran fought also for the establishment of unitary religious system aimed on the submission of numerous Armenian tribal groups.

The idea of monarchy brought with it the idea of supremacy of one god. Making Anahit a chief goddess, Tigran himself became her priest, as it was demonstrated by St.Lisitsyan.

Thus, the contemporary politicians in their political struggle made use of religious factor.

***Translated from the Armenian by Aram Kosyan***