

## HISTORIAN KIRAKOS GANDZAKETSI'S "HISTORY OF ARMENIA" AS A WORK OF FICTION

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### Abstract

From the point of view of shaping the cultural context of each nation, it is necessary to identify the values of the past, to study them comprehensively and to evaluate them properly. It is also relevant in science.

Kirakos Gandzaketsi, a 13th century historian, ecclesiastical and public figure, has a valuable place in Armenian medieval historiographical prose.

The present paper touches upon the phenomenon of the work *History of Armenia* by an Armenian historian of the 13th century Kirakos Gandzaketsi as a fiction, where he is presented as an experienced creator of literary characters. The research covers in detail the approaches to the style and literary characteristics of the historian's work existent in linguistic literature, as well as many examples that indicate that this historically valuable work is also of great interest from the artistic perspective.

Having analyzed the observations on the literary features in the researched work, we can arrive at the conclusion that *The History of Armenia* by the 13th century historian Kirakos Gandzaketsi is one of the most interesting pages in the history of Armenian literature. The author describes the real picture of Armenia in a very colorful and artistic manner, and sometimes it seems to a reader that it is not a historical book, but a fiction. Gandzaketsi, using the nuances of lyricism and some rules of folk art, historical events, major issues and their analysis, tried to write in a picturesque and beautiful language.

The above goes to show that Kirakos Gandzaketsi was a master of literature and could express his thoughts and concerns so clearly that the reader would get pervaded and furthermore, sometimes he would get carried away with the description and explanation of the topic in a way that the reader would feel a very artistic satisfaction.

The historian was also skilled in terms of character creating. For instance, he has represented the portraits of the most prominent figures of the Armenian bibliography with an incredible precision. The figures are outlined with vivid colors, they are functioning as live human beings and are communicating with people. Gandzaketsi's literary style, which is founded on national customs and mentalities, serves to resuscitate the aforementioned individuals and leaves a lasting impression on the reader.

Gandzaketsi's work draws attention because of the writer's attractive portrayals, which enable the reader get thorough and profound knowledge not only of educational-cultural writers from the early centuries, but also of writers from Gandzaketsi's day.

**Keywords and phrases:** Kirakos Gandzaketsi, 13th century, History of Armenia, characterization, character, style, literary features.

**ԿԻՐԱԿՈՍ ԳԱՆՁԱԿԵՑԻ ՊԱՏՄԻՉԻ ԱՇԽԱՏՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ՝ ՈՐՊԵՍ  
ԳԵՂԱՐՎԵՍՏԱԿԱՆ ԵՐԿ. ԳԱՆՁԱԿԵՑԻՆ ՀՄՈՒՏ ԿԵՐՊԱՐԱՍՏԵՂԾ**

**ԼԻԼԻԹ ՀԱԿՈԲՅԱՆ**

Հայաստանի պետական տնտեսագիտական համալսարանի լեզուների  
ամբիոնի դասախոս, բանասիրական գիտությունների թեկնածու  
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**Համառոտագիր**

Յուրաքանչյուր ազգի մշակութային համապատկերը ամբողջացնելու տեսակետից կարևորվում են անցյալի արժեքների վերհանումը, բազմակողմանի ուսումնասիրությունը և ճիշտ գնահատումը:

Հայ միջնադարյան պատմագրական արձակում արժեքավոր տեղ ունի XIII դարի պատմիչ, եկեղեցական, հասարակական գործիչ Կիրակոս Գանձակեցին:

Սույն հոդվածում անդրադառնում ենք Գանձակեցու աշխատությանը՝ իբրև գեղարվեստական երկի, և Գանձակեցուն՝ որպես հմուտ կերպարաստեղծի: Հանգամանորեն ներկայացվում են երկի ոճի, գեղարվեստական առանձնահատկությունների վերաբերյալ լեզվաբանական գրականության մեջ առկա մոտեցումները, կերպարաստեղծման առանձնահատկությունները երկում, նաև բազում օրինակներ, որոնք վկայում են, որ պատմական առումով չափազանց արժեքավոր այս երկը մեծ հետաքրքրություն է ներկայացնում նաև գեղարվեստական տեսանկյունից:

Ուսումնասիրվող երկի գեղարվեստական առանձնահատկությունների մասով կարող ենք արձանագրել, որ «Պատմութիւն հայոց» աշխատությունը հայ գրականության պատմության հետաքրքրական էջերից է: Հեղինակը հայոց աշխարհի իրական պատկերը շատ գունեղ ու գեղարվեստորեն է նկարագրում, և ընթերցողին երբեմն թվում է, թե գործ ունի ոչ թե պատմական, այլ գեղարվեստական երկի հետ: Գանձակեցին, օգտագործելով քերթողական արվեստի նրբություններն ու ժողովրդական բանարվեստի որոշ կանոններ, պատմական իրադարձությունները, շատ լուրջ խնդիրներ ու դրանց վերլուծություններ փորձել է շարադրել պատկերավոր ու գեղեցիկ լեզվով:

Կիրակոս Գանձակեցին գրչի վարպետ է և կարողանում է իր մտքերն ու հույզերը այնքան պարզ ու պայծառ արտահայտել, որ համակում է ընթերցողին, երբեմն էլ այնքան է տարվում իր նյութի նկարագրությամբ ու վերլուծությամբ, որ գեղարվեստական հաճույք է պատճառում նրան:

Պատմիչը հմուտ է նաև կերպարաստեղծման հարցում. նրա երկում հիանալիորեն կերտված են հայ մատենագրության՝ տարբեր ժամանակների նշանավոր գործիչների դիմանկարները: Այդ մարդիկ գծագրվում են կենդանի գույներով, շարժման մեջ են դրվում, կապի մեջ մտնում ընթերցողների հետ: Գանձակեցու՝ ժողովրդական ավանդությունների ու մտածողության վրա հիմնված աշխույժ պատմելաձևը օգնում է, որ վերը նշված մարդիկ հարություն առնեն և կենդանի գծերով տպավորվեն ընթերցողի հիշողության մեջ:

Գանձակեցու երկը աչքի է ընկնում նաև պատմիչի կերտած գեղեցիկ դիմանկարներով, որոնցով ընթերցողը ամբողջական և ընդգրկուն կարծիք է ձևավորում ոչ միայն նախորդ դարերում ապրած կրթական-մշակութային հայտնի գործիչների, այլ նաև Գանձակեցու ժամանակակիցներից շատերի մասին:

**Բանալի բառեր և բառակապակցություններ.** Կիրակոս Գանձակեցի, XIII դար, «Պատմութիւն Հայոց», կերպարաստեղծ, դիմանկար, ոճ, գեղարվեստական առանձնահատկություններ:

# **ТРУД КИРАКОСА ГАНДЗАКЕЦИ "ИСТОРИЯ АРМЕНИИ" КАК ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННОЕ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЕ. К. ГАНДЗАКЕЦИ -КАК ИСКУСНЫЙ ХУДОЖНИК**

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## **Аннотация**

С точки зрения обобщения культурной панорамы каждой нации крайне необходимы выявление, всестороннее изучение и правильная оценка ценностей прошлого, что актуально и в науке.

В армянской средневековой историографической прозе важное место занимает историк, церковный и общественный деятель XIII века Киракос Гандзакеци.

В данной статье мы обращаемся к труду выдающегося армянского историка как к художественному произведению, пытаюсь представить Киракоса Гандзакеци как искусного художника. Обстоятельно представлены подходы, имеющиеся в лингвистической литературе относительно стиля и художественных особенностей произведения, принципы создания образа в произведении, а также множество примеров, свидетельствующих о том, что это весьма ценное в историческом плане произведение представляет большой интерес и с художественной точки зрения.

Обобщая наблюдения относительно художественных особенностей исследуемого произведения, можем констатировать, что его труд «История Армении» является одной из интересных страниц истории армянской литературы. Автор очень красочно и художественно описывает реальную картину армянского мира, и читателю иногда кажется, что он имеет дело не с историческим, а с художественным произведением. Гандзакеци, используя тонкости художественного творчества и определенные каноны народного фольклора, попытался изложить красивым и образным языком исторические события, весьма серьезные проблемы и их анализ.

Киракос Гандзакеци является мастером пера и умеет настолько отчетливо и ярко выражать свои мысли и эмоции, что захватывает читателя, а иногда так увлекается описанием и анализом своего материала, что доставляет ему художественное удовольствие.

Историк искусен также в создании образа: в его произведениях великолепно выписаны портреты выдающихся деятелей армянской летописи разных времен. Эти люди обрисовываются живыми красками, приводятся в движение, вступают в контакт с людьми. Живая манера повествования Гандзакеци, основанная на народных традициях и мышлении, помогает

вышеупомянутым людям воскреснуть и запечатлеться в памяти читателей живыми очертаниями.

Книга Гандзакеци выделяется и прекрасными портретами, благодаря которым у читателя складывается целостное и развернутое мнение не только о живших в предыдущие века известных деятелях образования и культуры, но и о многих современниках Гандзакеци.

**Ключевые слова и словосочетания:** Киракос Гандзакеци, XIII век, “История Армении”, художник, портрет, стиль, художественные особенности.

### **Introduction**

From the point of view of shaping the cultural context of each nation, it is necessary to identify the values of the past, to study them comprehensively and to evaluate them properly. It is also relevant in science.

Kirakos Gandzaketsi, a 13th century historian, ecclesiastical and public figure, has a valuable place in Armenian medieval historiographical prose. Due to his active work, Kirakos Gandzaketsi was well known, enjoyed tremendous respect in Armenia, and played a significant role in many issues. His bibliographic work is composed mainly of a large historical book - *The History of Armenia*- in which the historian presents deep, comprehensive knowledge.

Linguistic studies of the author's work, who lived during the Middle Armenian era but authored in Grabar (Old Armenian), contribute to a fuller scientific description of Grabar in the 13th century.

Gandzaketsi's work, covering about a thousand years, is split into two main parts, which are further divided into 65 (CE) chapters. It begins with a prologue (called "A Brief History of Times from St. Gregory," which lists the chroniclers from Agatangeghos to the Monk Vardapet).

The first section is a brief history of the period between Grigor Lusavorich's and the Tatar-Mongol invasions, while the second part is a full history of the first Mongol invasions and their reign in Armenia.

The work is incomplete. There is no doubt that the author intended to finish it, but the narrative was cut short owing to death or other circumstances.

### **The results of the research**

In his work, Gandzaketsi provides important historical-cognitive information about the peoples, social-political uprisings, sectarian movements, the existence and behavior of the feudal-ecclesiastical authorities, as well as the military, political, spiritual and cultural-scientific activities of some of their most prominent representatives. Particularly, he provides quite detailed information about Hovhannes Sarkavag, Nerses Shnorhali, Grigor Tgha, Nerses Lambronatsi, Kings Leo II and Hethum I, representative of the Zakarian (Zakarid) dynasty, Mkhitar Gosh and Hovhannes Vanakan. With anguish, he mentions the deepening social vices. The historian attaches a great importance to the church, clergy and theological issues,

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which, as is known, played an essential role not only in the religious, but also in the national-social and political spheres of Medieval Armenia.

Kirakos Gandzaketsi also refers to such Asian tribes, traces of which have not even remained. This is how important his work is for the Mongols themselves, for the countries they reigned over, and for specialists dealing with the general history of the 13th century.

The work of Kirakos Gandzaketsi is of unique significance from the point of view of the history of the political, religious, cultural, social and economic life of the 13th century in Armenia and Transcaucasia (the South Caucasus) in general.

Academician H. Manandyan, highlighting the history of Transcaucasia related to the Mongol-Tatar region, has written his story based on the data recorded in Gandzaketsi's work. In his narrative, he rarely speaks of Vardan Vardapet, Orbelyan and Hethum, as no one has depicted that region as detailed and precisely as Gandzaketsi.

However, Gandzaketsi writes not only on kings and wars, but is also interested in people's life, worship/religion, appearance, food, weapons, tactics, mental-moral understandings and language.

The historian planned to preserve the history of the period of the Mongol rule for future generations, and he has successfully accomplished it. In his work, he tells in detail about the military-political strengthening of Georgia and the Armenian-Georgian unity in the last decades of the 12th century, as well as the liberation of Armenia from the Seljuk yoke and the revitalization of its political, socio-economic and cultural life during the Zakarians.

Later, the historians used Gandzaketsi's work as a source, relying heavily on its verification. He viewed history as an objective reality that needs to be accurately passed on to future generations. That is why not only written memoirs/literary monuments, but also talks, oral stories and legends that he used indiscriminately, served as historical sources for him.

*The History of Armenia* is one of the most interesting pages in the history of Armenian literature. The author describes the real picture of Armenia in a very colorful and artistic manner, and sometimes it seems to a reader that it is not a historical book, but a work of fiction. The fact is that our ancient medieval scholars, having received theological education, also studied in-depth rhetoric, eloquence and philosophy, became well acquainted with the secrets of lyricism, and used the comprehensive knowledge gained in their works. This is noticed and recorded by the honored literary historian M. Abeghyan. In this regard, he writes very accurately and appropriately: "They employed diverse rhetorical forms, eloquent language with figurative expressions and stylistic patterns in their works. Most of our historians did so. Sometimes, their writings are a blend of poetry and prose: in the same work, both literary and non-literary elements alternately coexist with each other" [1, p. 3]. *The History of Armenia* is endowed with the qualities pointed out by M. Abeghyan. Gandzaketsi himself, using the nuances of lyricism and some rules of folk art,

historical events, major issues and their analysis, tried to write in a picturesque and beautiful language.

In Armenian Philology, *The History of Armenia* has been perceived completely differently. The appraisals and comments on this work have also been different.

In the preface to the Venetian edition, Gh. Alishan, appraising the work of Gandzaketsi, mentions that the content and the language employed in Gandzaketsi's work are weaker than those of his colleague Vardan, since his writing is neither subtle nor influential, it does not possess a profound meaning, one can find neither fables nor proverbs in the work – the phenomena present in the work of the previously mentioned author. His writing is distinguished by its dull simplicity [4, p. 7].

Continuing his thoughts, Alishan writes that when reading the historian's work, one may be dissatisfied and bored; as a communicator of his message that lacks style and meaning, one may regard the study of the book to be a waste of time, even though we enjoy history [4, p. 9].

Several years later, Gh. Alishan revises his approach to some extent. Speaking about Kirakos Gandzaketsi and *The History of Armenia*, he writes that the historian's language is fairly courteous and sophisticated, the book is skillfully written and fascinating to read, and the material is accurate and precise. Owing to these characteristics, Gandzaketsi can be considered the best of the 13<sup>th</sup> century historians [3, p. 106-107].

K. Patkanyan's approach in this matter is no different either. He says: "The style of Kirakos is clear, easy to understand, though does not excel in its rhetorical eloquence, which was of particular merit to his contemporaries" [5, p. 5]. By the same criterion, the literary value of the work by K. Gandzaketsi is also appraised by G. Zarbhanalian who mentions that the historian's language is appropriate for his era, i.e. it holds sway [6, p. 598].

The honored philologist M. Abeghyan, referring to Gandzaketsi's style and the literary value of his work, notes: "One cannot look at the work of Kirakos from a literary point of view; it is not an ordinary complete work. He tells his story by flying from one place to another. He tells it in a clear, understandable language, without striving for any rhetorical embellishment or elevation, or for any depth and delicacy, but with every detail and love. And the taste of his work is in that simple and unadorned, yet sincere and detailed storytelling. There are some passages in his work that are very beautiful and attractive for their clarity and sincerity, sometimes even for their naivety and lively feelings of the author" [2, p. 195-196].

As one may have noticed, the opinion of M. Abeghyan in fact resembles that of Gh. Alishan with a solitary difference: what was regarded by Gh. Alishan as a negative feature was unequivocally conversely described by Abeghyan. But his opinion-approach would be more valuable if it was substantiated by the analysis of some parts of *History of Armenia*. The different parts of the historian's work have different literary values as well as styles of composition which differ from one specific topic to another.

The above goes to show that Kirakos Gandzaketsi was a master of literature and could express his thoughts and concerns so clearly that the reader would get pervaded and furthermore, sometimes he would get carried away with the description and explanation of the topic in a way that the reader would feel the very artistic satisfaction.

Gandzaketsi was a skilled illustrator. *The History of Armenia* is abundant with the references to cultural life. With their content, completeness and authorial attitude, they are the most relevant expression of the history of literature.

The historian was also skilled in terms of character creating. For instance, he has represented the portraits of the most prominent figures of the Armenian bibliography with an incredible precision.

Gandzaketsi remembers his predecessors with the intention of subordinating himself to them. However, the narrator asks the readers to forgive him, and not to consider himself ignorant, not to scorn, but to "give way brotherly." Moreover, he was convinced that his work would leave a lasting memory of him. There was also another concealed desire that all our historians have, being that through mentioning the previous ones, they gradually expand their list up until their own times thus putting themselves right into the end of the cycle. Even though they modestly or flatteringly degrade their abilities and knowledge, they do still compare themselves to their predecessors having already made a bright heritage, and stand among them. It seems to be more evident in Gandzaketsi's case. He talks about the previous ones in a much more extensive way, describing them, talking about the content of their work, but not keeping the logical sequence of the historians and events represented by those. Marking the boundaries of the events covered by each historian, Gandzaketsi shows with what fashion he has accomplished his job. For example, "wonderful and sharp-minded" Agatangeghos presents his work with "beautiful and brilliant history", and "the richest with knowledge and wisdom" Khorenatsi writes his "History with a multi-talented and tiring word, with a brief history and a broad mind" "History wrote a multi-talented and indefatigable words, with a brief history and a broad mind". He mentions many writers: Parpetsi, Yeghishe and Buzand, Koryun and Sebeos, Tovma Artsruni, Shapuh Bagratuni, Movses Kaghankatvatsi, Stepanos Asoghik, Aristakes Lastivertsi, Matteos Urhaietsi, Samuel Anetsi, Vanakan the Bishop.

K. Gandzaketsi is known to almost all Armenian historians and chroniclers of ancient and medieval times, as well as to those (Khosrov, Shapuh Bagratuni, Monk Vardapet) whose historiographical works have not reached us. A fact that should be mentioned here is that Gandzaketsi does not refer to some of the Armenian historians twice; in several cases he just briefly mentions their names without citing them substantially.

For example, he writes the following about Hovhannes Draskhanakertsi, a 10th century historian: "This is for the sake of beauty of the story I wrote, and what the people of Hagar did to the world with all the greatest evil" [4, p. 82]. Gandzaketsi advances one step ahead of the rest. On another occasion, he speaks about the authors



of the 5th century, not only listing their main historiographical works, but also hymns and speeches, creating a comprehensive picture of their work.

In his work, Gandzaketsi does not forget to mention the historians' works and the genre they belong to, as well as the people who ordered these pieces. According to him, in addition to *The History of Armenia*, Khorenatsi wrote *The History of the Holy Virgin Mary*, as well as speeches and philosophical excerpts [4, p. 28]. Similar information is provided about Khorenatsi's brother, Mambre Vertsanogh, who is said to compose poems during the times when Jesus Christ rode a donkey to Jerusalem. The contents of Davit Anhaght's work are provided in detail, mentioning that the philosopher created the work *The Definition of Philosophy*, an interpretation of Aristotle's work, and poems devoted to the Holy Cross and the Nativity of Jesus Christ [4, p. 29].

Such information is critical in determining the affiliation of one or more literary works and developing a thorough and complete understanding of the author's creativity.

In contrast with the previous ones, Gandzaketsi's descriptions are not greedy, vice versa, his language is eloquent. He possesses true poetic enthusiasm with which the master praises their work. The passages in Gandzaketsi's book dedicated to the fifth-century translators are brimming with emotion.

"They were not only translators, but also teachers, prophets and fortune tellers. They were filled with divine spirit and they were simple interpreters of sophisticated words and complex ideas.

They are melodious swallows and wise turtle doves who place a great emphasis on sanctity and strongly oppose wickedness" [4, p. 27].

Gandzaketsi also refers to the historical work of his "great and intelligent" Monk Vardapet, who used it as a source, but to what extent we cannot say. Unfortunately, Monk Vardapet's work has not been preserved.

*The History of Armenia* has another advantage as well. It is a report on biographical facts about writers, philosophers and cultural activists of those times. He tells interesting stories about Hovhannes Sarkavag the Wise, Alavka son of David, son of Toqaker, Nerses Shnorhali. Gandzaketsi also provides detailed information on Mkhitar Gosh, Monk Vardapet and others. And the most important fact is that in the book their biographical data are provided based on the factual material but conveyed in a fictional manner, which makes Gandzaketsi's work even more valuable. He helps to revive their individuality, the authors' preferences and the attitude of the contemporaries towards them. The figures are outlined with vivid colors, they are functioning as live human beings and are communicating with people. Gandzaketsi's literary style, which is founded on national customs and mentalities, serves to resuscitate the aforementioned individuals and leaves a lasting impression on the reader.

It is worth noting that Gandzaketsi created images of not only men, but also ladies, fully and exhaustively presenting the idiosyncrasies of women of his day. From

that perspective, the portrait of queen Zabel is noteworthy: “Christ's devout queen Zabel, the daughter of King Levon the Great, whose name signifies Eghisabet, as she is directed by God's will, kind, gentle, and caring for the poor, according to her name” [4, p. 365].

The historian's assessment on Hulavu's wife, Toghus, is equally notable. It is stated that the woman was Christian, and despite the fact that her husband reprimanded her heavily, she was pious and assisted Christians much [4, p. 398].

Kirakos Gandzaketsi describes cultural characters in his work *The History of Armenia* neither as historical source nor with an aim of being appropriate, as a historian should write about the nation's cultural life. This feature is more typical of historians rather than chroniclers.

### Conclusion

It is by researching *The History of Armenia* by Kirakosi Gandzaketsi, the specificities in how its characters are written and scientific literature referencing it, that we have come to the following conclusion:

Kirakos Gandzaketsi is a realist and truthful historian. Because of a relatively more subjective nature of his narration, wild horizon and him being a witness, *The History of Armenia* is rightfully considered one of the best historiographic pieces, and is recognized as a primary source not only for Armenian studies, but also for Caucasian and Eastern studies.

Kirakos Gandzaketsi has a unique place in the Armenian history, especially as an observer and witness of his time, also as a historiographic writer, a representative of actual style, and as a master of literary speech. There are certain examples in his literary work that are devoid of lyrical and grandiose imaginations; they are expressed simply and unembellishedly.

Gandzaketsi's work draws attention because of the writer's attractive portrayals, which enable the reader get a thorough and profound knowledge not only of educational-cultural writers from the early centuries, but also of writers from Gandzaketsi's day.

*The History of Armenia* is a unique masterpiece, and, as Gandzaketsi mentions, “a living memorial on the grave” which makes his name immortal throughout centuries.

This is a historical, living monument, the most reliable source of historical knowledge on the Mongol invasion, and a fascinating example of historical fiction.

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