

ԼՈՒՍԻՆԵ ՎԱՐԴԱՆՅԱՆ

Բանասիրական գիտ. թեկնածու, ՀՀ ԳԱԱ ԳԻ

## ԱՍՏՈՒԱԾԱՆՉԵԱՆ ՔԱՂՈՒԱՍՆԵՐ ՍՏԵՓԱՆՈՍ ՏԱՐՈՆԵՏԻ ԱՍՈՂԻԿԻ ՏԻԵԶԵՐԱԿԱՆ ՊԱՏՄՈՒԹԵԱՆ ՄԷՋ

### ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

Յայտնի է, որ միջնադարեան պատմագիրներն իրենց երկերը կառուցում էին ըստ Սուրբ Գրքի աշխարհայեցողության, դէպքերը մեկնաբանում մարգարէական կանխասացութիւններով եւ որպէս փաստարկ յաճախ ուղղակի կամ անուղղակի վկայակոչում էին Աստուածաշնչեան տեղիները: Այս առումով բացառութիւն չէ նաեւ Ստեփանոս Տարօնեցի Ասողիկի Պատմութիւնը (Ժ.-ԺԱ. դդ.), որի ընդհանրական լինելն արդէն իսկ Սուրբ Գրքի ձեւաբովանդակային նմանութիւնից է բխում: Յօդուածում դիտարկոււմ են երկում առկայ ուղղակի մէջբերումները եւ դրանց նշանակութիւնն Ասողիկի բնագրի համար:

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## BIBLE REFERENCES IN THE “UNIVERSAL HISTORY” BY STEPANOS TARONETSI ASOGHIK<sup>1</sup>

*Medieval historians are known to have constructed their writings according to the biblical worldview, interpreting events with prophetic predictions, often directly or indirectly citing biblical passages as arguments. The “History” of Stepanos Taronetsi Asoghik (10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries) is no exception in this respect, the universality of which already originates from similarities between the form and content of the Holy Bible. The article discusses direct quotations presented in the work and their significance for Asoghik’s text. It is interesting to compare these quotations with the*

<sup>1</sup>\* Ստացուել է՝ 4.04.2023, գրախօսուել է՝ 5.05.2023:

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*relevant verses of the Bible, which reveals the close connection between the two texts, more precisely, the derivation of the historical work of the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries from the Scriptures.*

*The three parts of the “Universal History” start with the description of the Creation of the world, therefore the biblical quotations are directly involved in the construction of the narrative. They are fewer in the first two parts. The third one, “Stepanos Taronetsi’s History of Monologue Times”, which describes the historian’s own time, is more abundant in such verses. The purpose of the article is to analyze that material. It should be added that for this analysis an important precondition is the existence of the critical text<sup>2</sup> of the “Universal History”, which was first of all compiled on the basis of the oldest, best and relatively complete manuscript N 2865 (13<sup>th</sup> century).*

*Bible citations and references are made according to the Holy Bible, King James Version.*

The Bible, “Chronicles” by Eusebius of Caesarea, “History of Armenia” by Movses Khorenatsi and other historians preceded to Asoghik himself (Sebeos, Ghevond, Hovhannes Draskhanakertsi, etc.) have served as sources for the “History” of Stepanos Taronetsi<sup>3</sup>. Stepanos Taronetsi refers to all of them name by name and with precise definitions, having in advance the perception of the sacredness of the word as the privilege of the Incarnate Word<sup>4</sup>.

The “History” consists of three parts, which the author called “reviews” and, among many other issues, tried to present the three Armenian dynasties: Haykazid, Arsacid and Bagratid. The work ends with the following passage: “Glorifying last words of this complete colophon”. The narration of the story that starts with Adam’s exit from paradise and extends to 1004, when Gagik I of the Bagratid dynasty reigned, tries to create a complete picture of the world, in accordance with the medieval historiographical tradition, a general story that becomes a “book of world history with a wonderful composition”<sup>5</sup>, according to the description of Aristakes Lastivertsi who succeeded Stepanos Taronetsi.

2 STEPANOS TARONETSI ASOGHIK, Universal History, Armenian Classical Authors (henceforth - ACA), vol. 15., 10<sup>th</sup> century, book II, Antelias-Lebanon, 2010. Criical text, footnotes and preface by G. Manukyan.

3 See STEPANOS TARONETSI ASOGHIK, Universal History, Yerevan, YSU edition, 2000, “Introduction” by V. Vardanyan, pp. 3—4.

4 STEPANOS TARONETSI ASOGHIK, Universal History, ACA, vol. 15, 10<sup>th</sup> century, book II, Antelias-Lebanon, 2010., p. 640.

5 See “History of Archimandrite Aristakes Lastivertsi”, ACA, vol. 16, 11<sup>th</sup> century, Yerevan,

The integrity of the world in the minds of medieval Christian historians was shaped according to Scriptural references. The first affirmant of the truthfulness of their words was the Bible, making the intertextuality constant with a special significance of the Holy Bible. Such intertextuality can be found in the works of Tovma Artsruni and Anonymous historian, Patriarch Hovhannes Draskhanakertsi, Archimandrite Aristakes Lastivertsi, who were closer to Asoghik in terms of time. Of course, each historian has his own peculiarities and preferences in its application.

In the first part of the “Universal History”, direct citations have two functions: in biblical translations, they are either ordinary, thought completing quotes that are woven into the plot<sup>6</sup>, or substantiations that have a value of a dictum. It turns out that Asoghik more frequently turns to the Bible for help in more independent parts of his narration, in which he describes contemporary events or makes his own analysis and not retells what have been written by others. Obviously, in his own analysis or in the records of contemporary events, Scriptural substantiations and references to the Bible are more necessary. We find such a reference with substantiating function at the beginning of the first part, “It is said that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul” (Gal. 3.17)<sup>7</sup>. In addition, with this reference to the Epistle of Apostle Paul to the Galatians, the historian emphasizes and makes the connection between the Old and New Testaments obvious to his readers, thus providing another important function of medieval works, i.e. the instructive function.

The parts of the work, in which he simply presented the story of his predecessors, he narrated without excessive emotions, in this respect greatly imitating Movses Khorenatsi, though he did not keep the latter’s strong and consistent narration and sometimes presented the same event twice, according to different historians. Instead, Asoghik is persistent in presenting Bible quotations accurately, as evidenced by the

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2012., p. 530.

6 Ibid. p. 643. Cf. 1 Sam. 13.1, 2 Sam. 2.10, 3.

7 Ibid., p. 641. We should also mention that this reference is slightly different in the Venetian edition of the Bible of 1860, “And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God *in Christ* (italic by L.V.), the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect” (Gal. 3.17; see the Bible, St. Lazarus island, Venice, 1860, p. 1148). In 1994, in the modern Armenian translation of the Bible published by the order of Vasken I, Catholicos of All Armenians, it is stated in the footnote that the best Greek texts do not contain the expression “in Christ”. See the Bible, Old and New Testaments, republished by the order of His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Bible Society of Armenia, 2010, p. 244.

vast majority of examples. Let us mention only one among many. The fourth chapter of the first part entitled “On the Kings of Assyria, Media and Persia”, contains an interesting geographical passage, which speaks about the human race descended from Noah’s three sons, including Europe that descended from Japhet. The direct references refer to Babylon. Let us quote some of them, in which nothing is changed in the historian’s text compared to the Holy Bible, although the passage is abbreviated, there is some choice<sup>8</sup>, “And Cush begat Nimrod”<sup>9</sup>. “He began to be a mighty one in the earth. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh”<sup>10</sup>.

There are also mediated references in Asoghik’s work. By quoting some passages accurately, for example from the works of Movses Khorenatsi, he keeps the references of that text, too. Thus, in speaking of Abgar (Abgar V Ukkama, 1st century BC – 50 AD), he preserved identically one indirect reference to the Gospel of Luke, “Abgar, son of Arsham, came to the throne in the twentieth year of Arshavir, king of Persia. In the second year of his reign all the regions of Armenia became entirely tributary to the Romans. For a command went out from Augustus, as it said in Luke,s gospel”<sup>11</sup> (italic by L.V.), and one direct reference to the Gospel of John (John 12:20) made by Movses Khorenatsi. It refers to the story telling about King Abgar’s postmen’s meeting with Christ in Jerusalem. “To this bears witness the saying of the gospel: “There were some of the Gentiles who had come to him”” It was written by Movses Khorenatsi and repeated by Stepanos Taronetsi<sup>12</sup>.

In the third part of Asoghik’s “History”, which, as already mentioned above, is the most valuable part of his work as an independent narration, we see the opposite

8 The Bible passage, “And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah: the same is a great city” (Gen. 10.8–12).

9 STEPANOS TARONETSI ASOGHIK, *Universal History*, ACA, p. 652. Cf. Gen. 10. 8.

10 Ibid., cf. Gen.10.10–11.

11 See MOSES KHORENATS’I, *History of the Armenians*, Translation and Commentary of the Literary Sources by Robert W. Thomson, London, Harvard University Press, 1978, p. 163. See also STEPANOS TARONETSI ASOGHIK, *Universal History*, ACA, vol. 15, 10<sup>th</sup> century, p. 665. Cf. Luke 2.1.

12 MOSES KHORENATS’I, *History of the Armenians*, p. 169, as well as STEPANOS TARONETSI ASOGHIK, *Universal History*, ACA, vol. 15, 10<sup>th</sup> century, pp. 666–667. We should mention that in the English translation of the Bible, we find the following version. “There were certain Greeks among them”. As we can see, here the word “Gentiles” is replaced by “Greeks”. In his translation, Thomson remained faithful to Khorenatsi’s text, and consequently to Armenian translation of the Bible.

phenomenon. The historian indirectly uses a reference, which is later used also by Aristakes Lastivertsi. For portraying the welfare in Armenia during the reigns of King Smbat and his father, Asoghik writes, “During his reign and that of his father, there was welfare and peace in the Armenian land, in accordance with the prophecy, they used to sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree”<sup>13</sup>. This quote from Micah’s prophecy was preserved almost identically by the historian, only the tense form was changed, making the occurrences of the future seem as a *fait accompli*. Cf. “But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree” (Micah 4.4). For Asoghik, the lines are characteristic of peace and harmonious life. He goes on with his own descriptions of how farms were transformed into burrows, burrows - into crowded and affluent cities, where even shepherds and herdsmen were dressed in silk robes<sup>14</sup>. Lastivertsi again uses the same quote as an indicator of a peaceful and harmonious life to describe David III Kuropalates and to mourn his unjust death<sup>15</sup>.

In the medieval conceptions of Christian thinkers, the world lived in a cycle of sin and retribution, though sin being viewed more as a reality of one’s inner world, and accordingly trials of the outer world were considered as God’s answer to the sins of the inner world. In this respect, Archimandrite Asoghik is no exception, either. He explains both the peace and the attacks of the enemy by the inevitable sequence of the committed sins and imminent punishment by God. The peace and prosperity established during the reign of Smbat changed into the raids of the Ishmaelites (i.e. Arabs), because people used to forget God’s commandments living in prosperity. It was again substantiated by the Bible, this time by the prophecies of Ezekiel and Jeremiah about Jerusalem, “But when you became waxen fat, great, rich and revolted against beloved God, forgetting the Creator of peace and giver of all goodness, clergymen and people, elders and youngers gossiped in fulness of bread and in abundance of wine, according to the prophet”<sup>16</sup> (cf. Ezekiel 16:49, Jeremiah 5:27–28). The Bible completes what was not said by the historian, listing all the sins that may cause God not to hearken the voice of those who turn to Him. They are the following: judge not with justice the cause of the fatherless and the right of the needy.

13 Ibid., p. 742.

14 Ibid.

15 See “History of Archimandrite Aristakes Lastivertsi”, ACA, vol. 16, 11<sup>th</sup> century, Yerevan, 2012., p. 527.

16 STEPANOS TARONETSI ASOGHIK, *Universal History*, ACA, p. 743.

The fact that for Asoghik the references mostly had a function of confirming the aforesaid, was best manifested in his polemic letter-response included in the third part, which was written by the order of Catholicos Khachik I and addressed to the Chalcedonian metropolitan of Sebastia. This voluminous response is the fullest of references in his entire “History”. The references are mostly to the New Testament and Apostle Paul’s epistles. It is rightly considered to be “one of the masterpieces of the dogmatic literature with religious-philosophical insight and arguments”<sup>17</sup>.

Interpreting everything, even the natural disasters according to the Bible, makes the historian in this case, too, quote from the Scripture. He writes about the earthquake occurred in Hashtyank, Khordzan, Tsopk, Palu and Paghmatun provinces of the 4<sup>th</sup> Hayk, “And all the buildings were totally ruined trembling from the base, according to the writing, “Which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble”<sup>18</sup>, or “He looketh on the earth, and it trembleth”<sup>19</sup>. However, the references present only primary similarities. The first reference is made to a passage in the book of Job, in which God’s might is evident, which perhaps gives reasons to the historian himself for the calamity and innocent victims caused by the earthquake. The reference to Psalm 104, on the one hand, describes the creation of God with a cheerful mood, on the other hand, highlights the aim of the historian to show the inevitability of the divine will.

## EPILOGUE

In his “History”, in one of the chapters (9) of the third part, Asoghik writes about the reign of Catholicos Khachik, about the construction of the church of Argina village and of the Catholicos’ residence. During his pontificate, for about nineteen years, the Armenian land enjoyed peace, and the historian happily describes the Holy Kathoghike Church as a sacred, heavenly place on earth. This is a wonderful description of an architectural structure, in which one can find almost all the elements of medieval aesthetics at the same time – the harmony of color, light, time and space, and the divine word. “In the same village, he also built the Holy Kathoghike Church with a stone structure, a sky-like domed altar with solidly fixed statues, together with three other identical churches with a magnificent and marvelous composition; dec-

17 Ibid., G. MANUKYAN, Stepanos Taronetsi and his “Universal History”, p. 622.

18 Ibid., p. 813. Cf. Job 9. 6.

19 Ibid., cf. Psalm 104.32.

orated it with splendid, purple flowered, gold wire fabrics, with gold, silver and all kinds of jewelry, with the brightness of luminous vessels shining like a torch, as well as frequently attended to the Testaments declared by God, writings of saint apostles and oracles preached by the prophets together with all the songs of monks”<sup>20</sup>.

The passage reveals the attitude of the historian, and in his person, also of the medieval faithful to the Bible. In the continuation, Asoghik praises the skillful teachers of the Holy Bible during the reign of this Catholicos: Archimandrite Hovhannes, who interpreted the Holy Bible skillfully, though with a poor speech; Father Hovsep with abundant knowledge, who was the abbot of the Monastery of Hendzouts in Karin province; a scholar named Kirakos, who taught more by his behavior than by his words. And he especially praises a man whom he calls “elocutionist Sarkis”, and mentions that he knew the Holy Bible by heart since his childhood<sup>21</sup>.

This reference, on the one hand, reveals the patriotic and church-loving historian’s perception of the significance of the Bible and, on the other hand, carries out the instructive function of his work from the distance of centuries, and motivates even the people living today to memorize the Bible as much as possible.

#### KEY WORDS:

“Universal History”, Stepanos Taronetsi Asoghik, Holy Bible, reference, historiographer, quotations, biblical passages, Aristakes Lastivertsi

#### РЕЗЮМЕ

Известно, что средневековые авторы в частности историки выстраивали свои труды в соответствии мировоззрения Священной Книги, толковали события пророческими предсказаниями и часто прямо или косвенно ссылались на библейские отрывки в качестве аргумента. В этом отношении не является исключением и «История Степаноса Таронети Асогика». В статье исследуются прямые цитаты из священного Писания и их значение для труда Степаноса Асогика.

20 Ibid., p. 759.

21 Ibid.