

ՀՈՒՄԱՆԻՏԱՐ
ՀԵՏԱԶՈՏՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐ

CHURCH AND COUNCILS IN ANOTHER CHRISTENDOM: THE ARMENIAN EXPERIENCE¹

NAZENIE GARIBIAN

PhD in Art History (Paris)

Head of the Museum Department and

Senior Researcher at Matenadaran

Associate Professor at SAFAA

ABSTRACT

The study of the history of the Armenian Church through the local councils of the early period is essential for understanding many of the traditions maintained for centuries. The article thus highlights some of the particular aspects of the first Armenian councils and the early Church institution. After the conversion to Christianity, the new religion slipped into the features of the former one without changing much the social order and the functioning of the traditional institutions. Also, the national synods of this period, while accepting the canons of the universal Church, such as Nicaen Canons, the Apostolic Canons or the Antiochian Canonical Collection, made certain modifications or additions, which aimed at better adapting them to the local conditions. On the other hand, dealing with the constant threat, that was coming from the Sassanian court or the Byzantine religious politics, the Armenian Church had to take canonical decisions that allowed them to change the hierarchical order and become autocephalous. As a reference to the former "General-Assembly-of-the-REALM", Armenian synods were always held in concert with the representatives of the secular power, and the Armenian Church has retained to this day the collegial principle of leading and decision-making. In this way, the Church shared with the secular power the leadership and responsibility of the whole people.

¹ The present article is based on the paper "The Armenian Experience: Church and Councils in another Christendom", given at the XXIII International Conference of International Congress of Historical Sciences (Poznan 21-27.08.2022), under the Panel: "The Councils and the Churches: History of an Institution Between Texts, Ideas and Practices". I am thankful to my colleague and friend Vahe Torosyan for his precious help and advise concerning the main features of the Armenian councils in the medieval period.

Keywords: ecclesiastical Council, synod, Armenian Church, Shahapivan, Ashtishat, conversion to Christianity, Tiridates, Gregory the Illuminator, early Christian Church

The Armenian Church was founded and developed in a particular context, which conditioned the nature of its institutions, including the canonical assemblies, until the late Middle Ages and beyond². The study of the history of the Armenian Church through the councils of the early period is therefore essential for understanding many of the traditions maintained for centuries.

The kingdom of Greater Armenia was officially converted to Christianity by the political decision of Arsacid King Tiridates III (IV). Following the resolution of the General-Assembly-of-the-REALM (Աշխարհամոլոյ), Gregory, a Cappadocian Christian who had been in the service at the court and then imprisoned for his faith, was then sent to Caesarea of Cappadocia to be consecrated bishop in 314.³ On his

² On the history of the early Armenian Church, see in particular: **N. Adontz**, *Armenia in the Period of Justinian: The Political Conditions Based on the Naxarar System*, Translated with partial revisions, a bibliographical note and appendices by **N. Garsoïan**, Lisbon, 1970; **Ե. Տեր-Մինասյան**, *Հայոց եկեղեցին* (**E. Ter-Minassian**, *The Armenian Church*), Ejmiatsin 2014; **Հ. Պ. Անանեան**, *Քրիստոնեության հեղինակը Հայաստանի մէջ Ս. Գրիգոր Լուսավորչի թարգմանչութիւնէն առաջ*, (**P. P. Ananean**, *Traces of Christianity in Armenia before the preaching of St. Gregory the Illuminator*), Venice, St. Lazarus, 1979; **R.G. Hovannisian** (ed.), *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, vol. 1: *the Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, New York, 1977; **N. Garsoïan, J-P. Mahé**, *Des Parthes au Califat: Quatre leçons sur la formation de l'identité arménienne*, Travaux et mémoires, Monographies 10, Paris 1997; **N. G. Garsoïan**, *L'Église arménienne et le grand schisme d'Orient*, Louvain, 1999; **A. & J-P. Mahé**, *Histoire de l'Arménie des origines à nos jours*, p. 74-104, 113-114 Paris 2012; **A. Mardirossian**, *Le livre des canons arméniens (Kanonagirk' Hayoc') de Yovhannēs Awjenc' i. Église, droit et société en Arménie du IVe au VIIe siècle*, Louvain, 2004; *Հայոց պատմություն* (*History of Armenia*) vol. II, part I (ch. 1-10), Erevan 2018, p. 15-294; **N. Garibian de Vartavan**, «Les traditions dynastiques parthes et le siège patriarcal en Arménie au IV s.», *Bulletin of Parthian and Mixte Oriental Studies*, 1 (2005), 43-65; **Ն. Ղարիբյան**, «Հայ քրիստոնեական ավանդույթի ակունքներում», *Պատմության և մշակույթի հարցեր: Օժանդակ ձեռնարկ զրոսավարների, երկրասարդ գիտաշխատողների, ասպիրանտների և հայցորդների համար* ("At the Origins of the Armenian Christian Tradition", *Problems of History and Culture. Manual for the Guides and Ph.D. Students*), Matenadaran, Yerevan, 2020, p. 247-272; **J. Mécérian**, *Histoire et institutions de l'Eglise arménienne*, Beyrouth, 1965 (esp. p. 19-99);

³ On the history of the conversion of Armenia, see the two main versions of the historical tradition: the Armenian *Agathangelos*, *History of Armenia* (Aa) and the *Vita Gregorii* translated in Greek and in Arab (Vg-Va) – **G. Garitte**, *Documents pour l'étude du livre d'Agathange*, Studi e Testi, n° 127, Vatican 1946; **R.W. Thomson**, *The Lives of Saint Gregory*, Caravan Books, Michigan, 2010. For the date of the consecration of St. Gregory, see **Հ. Պ. Անանեան**, «Սուրբ Գրիգոր Լուսավորչի ձեռնադրության թվականը և պարագաները» (**P. P. Ananean**, "The date and the Circumstances of the Ordination of St. Gregory the Illuminator"), *Bazmavep* 1959 (n° 117), p. 90-23, 129-142, 225-238, 1960 (n° 18), p. 53-60, 101-113; **N. Garibian de Vartavan**, *La "Nouvelle Jérusalem" et les premiers sanctuaires chrétiens de l'Arménie*, London-Fribourg-Erevan 2009, part III, p. 205-282.

return, he undertook the Christianisation of the country with the help of the king, and founded the institution of the Armenian Church. Called "Illuminator" return, he undertook the Christianisation of the country with the help of the king, and founded the institution of the Armenian Church. Called "Illuminator" in the national tradition, Gregory is thus considered to be the baptizer of the Armenians. in the national tradition, Gregory is thus considered to be the baptizer of the Armenians.

However, we know that a primeval church had existed in the southern regions of Armenia as early as in the second century.⁴ The See of its bishop was fixed in Ashtishat, an important centre of Armenian pagan worship, was considered to be the throne of the apostle Thaddeus already in the 5th century. It was here that Gregory was enthroned on his return from Caesarea, reuniting his See with this previous one.⁵ Yet according to the sources, Ashtishat was not only the first and main church in Armenia, but also the place of the former synods, and continued to be such in the 4th century:

"They assembled in the village of Aštišat, where the first church was built, for this was the mother-of-all-the-churches and the site of the earlier synods".⁶

The king Tiridates tried to Christianize his realm without changing the traditional political and social order, which was based on the patriarchal and hereditary dynastic family. According to this very ancient system, a number of large clan families called *town* (house), shared all the territories

⁴ Անանյան, *Traces of Christianity*; N.G. Garsoïan, *The Epic Histories (Buzandaran Patmut'ivnk')*, Attributed to P'awstos Buzand, Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies 8, 1989, p. 16, 46-47, 498-99; Idem, "JANUS The formation of the Armenian Church from the IVth to the VIth century" and "Taron as an Early Christian Center", in: *Studies on the Formation of Christian Armenia*, Aldershot 2010, (ch. VI and VII), p. 79-95, 59-69; Mahé J.-P., « Le premier siècle de l'Arménie chrétienne », C. Mutañian (ed.), *Roma-Armenia. Catalogue de l'exposition*, Vatican 1999, p. 64-72.

⁵ *Moses Khorenatsi*, II.74 (English Translation by R.W. Thomson, *Moses Khorenats'i, History of the Armenians*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge-Massachusetts-London, 1978, p. 220-221; French translation by A. and J.-P. Mahé, *Histoire de l'Arménie par Moïse de Khorène*, Paris 1993, p. 225-226, n. 9, 10); See also Adontz, *Armenia in the Period of Justinian*, p. 274, et n. 50, 50a; J.-P. Mahé, « La christianisation de l'Arménie », in *Armenia Sacra*, Exhibition catalogue, J. Durand, I. Rapti, D. Giovannoni (eds.), Paris 2007, p. 21-27.

⁶ *Pavstos Buzand*, IV.4 (Garsoïan, *Epic Histories*, p. 113).

and the important offices of the kingdom. Royalty was also part of this system: one could not be king if not belonging to a family whose hereditary office it was. The spiritual leader - the High Priest, was second in importance after the king; he was a descendant of the royal family (was often the king's brother) or was related to it by matrimonial links.⁷

The Armenian Church, as soon as it was officially recognised, had to adapt to this social order despite of some apparent contradictions with the canonical law of the Universal Church. According to the sources, the first adaptations seem to have been introduced by St. Gregory himself on the set of canons of the Council of Nicaea in which the Armenians had taken part.⁸ It can therefore be assumed that the first council of the officialised Armenian Church was held on this occasion, although the sources are silent on this point. If this were the case, this council, that certainly had the character of a General-Assembly-of-the-REALM, would have had to gather in Ashtishat, the place of ecclesiastical councils, as the source states.⁹

As a result, the ecclesiastical hierarchy was established by borrowing much from the order and habits of the old priestly institutions. In a way, the essence of these adaptations, which forged the national character of the Armenian Church, seems to be the "dynastisation" of its institution.¹⁰ Accordingly, bishops were not elected on merit and their territorial jurisdiction was not limited to dioceses. They succeeded each other according to their family affiliation and represented their clan or province. In most cases, they were the spiritual leaders of pagan sanctuaries having converted into Christian bishops. In this way, the hereditary priestly

⁷ See **Mahé**, *Moïse de Khorène*, p. 196, 202; **Idem**, « Le site arménien d'Armawir : d'Ourartou à l'époque hellénistique », *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 140^e année (1996), n^o 4, pp. 1279-1314.

⁸ Aa, 884-885 (**Thomson**, *The Lifes*, p. 489-490). See the discussion in **Mardirossian**, *Le Livre des canons*, p. 510-513.

⁹ See above, n. 6.

¹⁰ **Adontz**, *Armenia in the Period of Justinian*, p. 282; **C. Toumanoff**, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*, Georgetown 1963, p. 118-23, 138-39; **Garibian de Vartavan**, « Les traditions parthes ».

office, and the property having been confiscated from the temples for the benefit of the Church remained in the hands of the same families.

The office of the spiritual leader was also established in this same spirit. Called "patriarch", "chief bishop", "high priest", and then "catholicos", the bearer of this dignity had to belong to a large family, which had to be related to the royal one. It was granted to Saint Gregory, thereby creating a new dynasty within the existing social system. To this end, Gregory and his successor descendants acquired the rank of princes and received vast estates in several provinces, which were taken from the landholdings of the royal families.¹¹ We have information that some of his descendants married the royal princesses.

In this respect, it is interesting to notice that the Sassanid monarch revoked the dignity of spiritual leader from the family of Gregory at the same time as he removed the Arsacid family from the royal power in Armenia, in 428.¹² The Catholicossal office was thus divided: the king of kings himself appointed the prelates for the direction of the administrative duties, while the last descendant of St Gregory, Sahak the Great, was only allowed to deal with spiritual matters, including the consecration of bishops whom the new prelate would present.¹³ Yet the intervention of the king of kings in the ecclesiastical affairs of Armenia favoured the growing influence of Syrian Christianity, the only one authorised in his empire, in opposition to the faction who was faithful to the Hellenic traditions of Saint Gregory and was concerned to maintain the union with the Universal Church.

After the death of St. Sahak in 438, the male line of the Gregorid family was extinct. The Armenian Church, left without the royal protection

¹¹ For more information on these estates, see **Mardirossian**, *Le Livre des canons*, p. 46-51.

¹² As Lazar Parpetsi explicitly states (I.14): "Then he ordered that Artašēs should be deprived immediately of the throne, and likewise [he ordered] that the House of Catholicos should be taken from Sahak for the benefit of the court..." (և այնուհետև հրաման տայր վարվարակի ի բաց անուղ զթագաւորութիւնն յԱրտաշէսէ. ընդ նմին և զտունն կաթողիկոսական ի սրբոյն Սահակայ՝ յարքունիս ունել...) Our translation differs slightly from that of **Robert Thomson**: see *The History of Lazar P'arpec'i*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1991, p. 59-60. See also **Adontz**, *Armenia in the Period of Justinian*, p. 287.

¹³ See **Garsoïan-Mahé**, *Quatre leçons*, p. 40-41; **Garsoïan**, *L'Eglise arménienne*, p. 59-65; **Mahé**, *Histoire de l'Arménie*, p. 91.

and the spiritual prestige of the Parthev House, found itself in an unprecedented and dangerous situation and had to be reorganised quickly under the new circumstances. Therefore, a very important synod was convened at the former royal camp of Shahapivan in 444/45.¹⁴ The participants intended to adopt the *Antiochian Canonical Collection* of the Byzantine Church and the *Apostolic canons* of Syriac origin¹⁵, though not without adding some new stipulations, just as St. Gregory had done at his time. The Synod of Shahapivan is the first of which we have a canonical corpus; it consists of a *Prologue* and 20 chapters¹⁶.

Two of the decisions taken at this synod are qualified as revolutionary.¹⁷ One denounced the heredity of ecclesiastical dignities, including that of the Catholicos, in favour of the election to the ministries of the most deserving, regardless of their social origin: this decision aimed at limiting the dangers coming from the Persian Church. The other, still under the threat of the authority of the Sassanian kings, changed the hierarchical order having been established at the time of Gregory and Tiridates, according to which the Armenian prelates received their ordination in Caesarea of Cappadocia. Being elected by the national synods, the atholicoses received the right to consecrate C bishops.

In this way, the Armenian Church was not only and not so much freeing from the Greek Church (as supposed widely), the union with

¹⁴ See on this council, **Ն. Ակիսեան**, «Շահապիվանի ժողովին կանոնները» (**N. Akinean**, "The Canons of the Council of Shahapivan"), *Handes Amsoreay* 63 (1949), p. 141-170; **Հ. Պ. Համլեան**, «Հայ եպիսկոպոսներու ինքնագլուխ ձեռնադրութեան մասին նկատողութիւն մը» (**P.P. Hamelean**, "Note on the Autocephalic Consecration of the Armenian Bishops"), *Bazmavep* 1952/7-9, p. 149-152; **Հ. Ս. Կոզեան**, *Հայոց եկեղեցին մինչև Փղորենպեան ժողովը (1439թ.)* (P. S. Kogean, *The Armenian Church until the Council of Florence (1439)*), Beyrouth 1961; **Mardirossian**, *Le livre des canons*, p. 41-43 and 501-532. For the Armenian text, see **Վ. Հակոբյան**, *Կանոնագիրք Հայոց (V. Hakobian, The Armenian Book of Canons)*, vol. I, Yerevan 1964, p. 422-466. For the English translation, see **V. S. Hovhannessian**, "The Canons of the Council of Şahapivan", *Revue des Etudes Arméniennes*, 37 (2016-2017), p. 73-95; For the Italian translation, see **A. Orengo**, "Canoni conciliari armeni: Şahapiwan e Dovin", *Augustinianum*, (annus LVIII), December 2018, p. 533-595

¹⁵ **Mardirossian**, *Le livre des canons*, p. 41-43, 510-533.

¹⁶ According to **Aram Mardirossian** (*Le livre des canons*, p. 508), initially there were only 15 canons, augmented by Yovhannes Mayragometsi in the 7th century.

¹⁷ **Hamelean**, "Note on the Autocephalic Consecration"; **Kogean**, *The Armenian Church*, p. 144; **Mardirossian**, *Le Livre des canons*, p. 151-164, ; **Idem**, « Ecclesia non abhorret a sanguine. Les élections épiscopales dans l'Eglise arménienne aux IVe-Ve siècles », in: **J. Leemans, P. van Nuffelen, S.W.J. Keough, C. Nicolaye** (ed.), *Episcopal Elections in Late Antiquity*, Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 119, De Gruyter 2011, p. 437-447; **Mahé**, *Histoire d'Arménie*, p. 89-90.

which had already been formally forbidden by the Sassanian authorities, but also and above all from the Persian Church, which was already reorganised under the patronage of the Sassanid King at the council of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 410.¹⁸

These synodic decisions were applied for the first time in the election of the Catholicos Giwt of Arahez in 461.¹⁹ However, the elective system was not established in an essential way in the Armenian ecclesiastical institution, leaving room rather for latent forms of dynasticism: for example, for a long time, the Catholicoses appointed their successors themselves, who were often a relative through the indirect line: a brother, a nephew or a cousin.²⁰ Nonetheless, by force of the old dynastic tradition, nepotism was never condemned in medieval Armenian society.

Since the head of the Armenian Church received his office by hereditary privilege rather than by the distribution of the grace of the Holy Spirit he held in the manner of secular society, the same status among the bishops as the king had vis-à-vis the princes: the first among equals (*primus inter pares*). Indeed, the bishops of the provinces, while accepting his primacy and responding to the call of councils convened by him, enjoyed a certain freedom and independence within their lands of jurisdiction. This relationship between the prelate and the bishops contributed greatly to the formation of the collegial principle within the Armenian Church. While being the head of the Church, the Catholicos did not have the jurisdiction to personally make decisions concerning confessional, ritual and especially Church union matters. This right was exclusively reserved for the Ecclesiastical Council, which in fact was presented as the

¹⁸ See on this council J-B. Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale ou Recueil des synodes nestoriens*, Ed. du texte syriaque et trad. française, introd. et notes, *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale et autres bibliothèques*, T. 37, Paris 1902, p. 252-262; P. Maraval, « Les nouvelles frontières », *Histoire du christianisme II*, Paris 1995, p. 937-951, here 942; Garsoïan, *L'Eglise arménienne*, p. 49 and *passim*.

¹⁹ See Garsoïan-Mahé, *Quatre leçons*, p. 83; Mardirossian, *Le Livre des canons*, p. 14, 69; Mahé, *L'Histoire d'Arménie*, p. 91, 94.

²⁰ Garsoïan-Mahé, *Quatre leçons*, p. 84; See also Mardirossian, *Le Livre des canons* p. 353-355.

supreme authority for the direction of the ecclesiastical unity.²¹

This state of affairs sometimes considerably helped the Armenian prelates by allowing them to show deft flexibility during diplomatic talks on religious policy. To mention only one of the important cases, I would like to highlight the negotiations that the Armenian Catholicossate, having been established in Romkla, had with the Byzantine and Latin Churches during the 12th century. Among other issues, the main question was about the confessional union of the Churches.²² While negotiating with the Byzantine authorities in 1165-1178, the Catholicos Nerses IV the Gracious stressed that no decision concerning the union of the churches could be considered canonical without the favourable opinion of the doctors and bishops of Greater Armenia. Addressing Emperor Manuel I Komnenos, the patriarch argues: *"...without consulting their opinion, it will not be possible to give a definitive answer to your requests, so that instead of uniting we would not give rise to division. (...) Therefore, we would not consider it appropriate to write the answer to the Great Council, having the assistance only of those around us, until we send [a letter] to Greater Armenia and other provinces (...) and present to them what you ask of us concerning confession and liturgical celebrations..."*²³

Knowing well that the Byzantine Empire had no power over the clergy of Greater Armenia and that the latter had no interest or expectation from the Byzantines, Nerses IV could indeed seemingly satisfy the demands of the Emperor while being secure in the fact that the Armenian ecclesiastical authorities were not forced to accept them.

²¹ See Ա. Մանուկեան, «Հայ և հռոմէական կաթոլիկ եկեղեցիներու միութեան վերջին փորձը Փլորենտիոյ մէջ և *Decretum pro Armenis* կամ *Հրահանգ առ Հայս կոնդակը*» (A. Manoukian, "The Last Attempt of Unity Between the Armenian and the Catholic Church in Florence and the *Decretum Pro Armenis*"), *Sen Arevshatyan-90, Proceedings of the International Armenological Conference* (May 22-23, 2019), Yerevan 2020, p. 58-94

²² Վ. Թորոսյան, «Սսի ԺԳ դարասկզբի եկեղեցական ժողովը հայ-լատին հարաբերությունների համատեքստում» (V. Torosyan, "The Council of Sis in the context of the Latin-Armenian Relations"), *Yearbook of Academy of Fine-Arts 11* (2021/2), p. 125-139.

²³ *Ընդհանրական թուղթք Սրբոյն Ներսիսի Շնորհալոյ (Encyclical Letters of Saint Nerses the Gracious)*, Jerusalem, 1871, p. 147.

The Catholicoses used this diplomatic ploy also in later inter-ecclesiastical relations, especially with the Papacy.²⁴

Again, borrowing from earlier pagan traditions, St Gregory and his descendants had inherited the other offices of the High Priest, which related to public affairs and social works. Such were the titles of Supreme Judge, Protector of the Poor and Head of the Hospices.²⁵ In order to increase the efficiency of the management of the Church, they had the right, like kings, to appoint delegates or agents to carry out various missions. The sources describe the mission of the chorbishop Daniel the Syrian, designated as the *"overseer, low-giver, supervisor and guardian of all the churches of Greater Armenia"*.²⁶

As a result, the Church seems to have had the right from the beginning to deal with social relations of a secular character as well. As is generally accepted, the first council recorded in the historical sources was held around the middle of the fourth century, at Ashtishat. The canons are not preserved, but the text states that it deliberated profitably *"to perfect the secular regulations of the Church and the uniformity of beliefs."*²⁷

This council met mainly to restate the Nicean Canons and to accept the Apostolic ones, to which the patriarch of the time, Nerses the Great, made some modifications following the example of his forefather Gregory; these modifications concerned precisely the lay social issues. Moreover, Movses Khorenatsi states, that the council of bishops was held in concert with the laity.²⁸

²⁴ Torosyan, "The Council of Sis".

²⁵ See on this N. Garsoïan, « Sur le titre de Protecteur des Pauvres », *Revue des études arméniennes* 15 (1981), p. 21-32; *Idem*, "Secular Jurisdiction over the Armenian Church (Fourth-Seventh Centuries)", *Okeanos. Essays Presented to Ihor Ševčenko on his Sixtieth Birthday*, Harvard Ukrainian Studies 7 (1984), p. 220-250.

²⁶ Pavstos Buzand, III, 14 (Garsoïan, *The Epic Histories*, p. 86).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, 4 (Garsoïan, *Ibid.*, p. 113); *Movses Khorenatsi III*, 20 (Thomson, *Movses Khorenats'i*, p. 274-275; Mahé, *Moïse de Khorène*, p. 264-265; A. Orenco, "Legge e religione nell'Armenia del IV e V secolo", *Lex et Religio: XL Incontro di Studio dell'Antichità Cristiana (Roma 10-12 maggio 2012)*, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Roma 2013, p. 717-728.

²⁸ *Movses Khorenatsi III*, 20 (Thomson, *Movses Khorenats'i*, p. 274; Mahé, *Moïse de Khorène*, p. 264).

In this respect, the Armenian councils inherited the principle of one of the important state institutions, that of the General-Assembly-of-the-REALM (Աշխարհաժողով).²⁹ This national meeting was held in the presence of the secular and priestly authorities, represented by the king and the spiritual leader, the clergy and the dynasts, the princes and the nobles of every rank and dignity. On serious or exceptional occasions (for example the decision to embrace the Christian faith or the appointment of Saint Gregory as the Bishop of Armenia) representatives of other social groups were also invited.

This custom had already received legal status at the Shahapivan Council, the first of its kind held after the abolition of the monarchy. The Prologue to the corpus of canons begins with these words: "*These canons are agreed upon by the Armenian leaders*", among whom are mentioned (together with the spiritual leaders) the Marzpan (the governor of Armenia), the Chiliarch and the Head of the Guard, then all the other participants of both classes are listed: "*all princes, lords and heads of a district, autocrats, generals and military chiefs of various ranks, borderland governors, nobles of different origins, great lords of Armenia*". In this way, the councils shared with the secular power the leadership and responsibility of the whole people. As the same Prologue eloquently states: "*It is fitting and proper for the captain of a ship to practice the nautical art and to know the ways of the sea.*"

Moreover, it can be said that the secular power was also the guarantor of the execution of the conciliar decisions: at the opening of the Shahapivan Council, the great lords addressed the clerics by saying: "*Confirm the order that Saints Gregory, Nerses, Sahak and Mashtots established, or replace it with a better one, according to your will: we will willingly accept it.*"

²⁹ Ս. Հակոբյան, Հայ գյուղացիության պատմություն (S. Hakobian, History of the Armenian Peasantry),

Yerevan 1957, p. 205; Kévorkian-Mahé, Arménie, p. 109-111.

The primary role of the Armenian Church in secular, social and political affairs was further emphasized during the Interregnum period of the 6th-8th centuries. As the only stable national institution over the centuries, the Church represented *de facto* the whole of Armenian society gathered around it.³⁰ However, the collegiality, intrinsic to its functioning, made it possible to lead and govern this Christianity through the councils of a mixed character where the voice of the lay participants had a decisive weight. From the middle of the 11th century onwards, Armenian identity and religious affiliation were merged, and the Church became the sole criterion of national legitimacy. Its privileged position did not change much with the re-establishment of the Armenian kingship on the territory of Cilicia. On the other hand, the Catholicoses, for some centuries originating from the same princely family of Pahlavouni, legitimised their power of Caesaropapist character by claiming both Arsacid and Gregorid descent.³¹

Concerning the content of Armenian councils, they can be broadly divided into two categories: intra-ecclesiastical and inter-ecclesiastical. The first ones made decisions regarding the good functioning of institutional orders, liturgical reforms and the rules of community life. They could also deliberate on theological debates and on the different sectarian currents. Such are, for example, the synods of Ashtishat of 354, of Shahapivan of 444/45, of Duin of 645 and 719. During the latter, first the collection of Armenian canons drawn up by the Catholicos Yovhannes Odznetsi the Philosopher was accepted. Then the proposals of a liturgical nature were examined;³² this changes proved to be of great importance for the future development of Armenian Church architecture.

³⁰ See **N. Garsoïan**, *Interregnum: Introduction to a Study on the Formation of Armenian Identity* (ca 600-750), CSCO, n° 640, Subsidia 127, Leuven 2012; **Garsoïan-Mahé**, *Quatre leçons*, ch. 3 and 4 (esp. p. 63-65, 74-75, 87-89, 94-102).

³¹ On this priestly family see **Կ. Մաթևոսյան**, *Անիի ազնվականության պապ-մոթթյունից կամ երեք Գրիգոր Մաթիսարոս (K. Matevosyan, From the History of Ani or Three Grigor Magistros)*, Yerevan 2015, p. 36-83.

³² **Garsoïan-Mahé**, *Quatre leçons*, p. 65-66; **Mardirossian**, *Le Livre des canons*, p. 268-288.

The councils of the second group were held with the participation of representatives of other Churches. They were in principle devoted to dogmatic and ritual questions. For example, the issues related to the Nestorians and the rejection of the Chalcedonian creed, were dealt with at the Councils of Duin in 506 and 554, in the presence of the Syrian bishops.³³ The Council of Karin-Theodosiopolis of 633, chaired by the Byzantine Emperor himself, had as its agenda the reunion of the Eastern Churches under the aegis of the See of Constantinople, while the Manazkert Council of 726 met to accept the Christological doctrine of the Armenian Church as precisely defined by the Catholicos Yohannes the Philosopher.³⁴ The latter was an event of great importance, for here the Armenian Church took the middle way, the only reasonable one, which avoided the two reprehensible currents of dyophysitism and monophysitism: thus along with Chalcedonism, the Council condemned Julianism and Severianism.³⁵ This path, which has largely contributed to the creation of a Church-Nation, has also allowed Armenians to preserve their Christian identity - religious as well as secular - through the vicissitudes of history.

The thematic distinction between types of councils was no longer observed in the medieval period, especially in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, where intra-ecclesiastical synods, such as that of Romkla in 1178 or that of Sis in 1304, issued canons of a dogmatic nature, particularly concerning the position to be taken with regard to Chalcedon and to the councils that succeeded it.

The documentation of the Armenian canons, either as a corpus or quoted separately, is preserved in various manuscript collections. For the first time, the set of documents, entitled *Canons of the Armenians*,

³³ Garsoïan, *L'Eglise arménienne*, ch. III (p. 135-239).

³⁴ See J-P. Mahé, « L'Eglise arménienne de 611 à 1066 », in G. Dagron, P. Riché, A. Vauchez (ed.), *Histoire du christianisme*, vol. IV: *Evêques, moines et empereurs* (610-1054), Paris 1993, p. 457-547, here 469-471 and 478-486.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 484-485; Garsoïan-Mahé, *Quatre leçons*, p. 70-75; Mardirossian, *Le Livre des canons*, p. 269-274

was collected at the beginning of the 7th century by the theologian Yovhannes Mayragometsi.³⁶ A century later, this work was included in the original collection of the *Armenian Book of Canons* composed by Yovhannes Odznetsi. An important part of the canons from the early Middle Ages is preserved in the epistolary collection of the Armenian Church on dogmatic issues, called the *Book of Letters*.³⁷ The canonical decisions taken during the successive periods have come down to us through historical sources, theological treatises and documents of various kinds.

Their content testifies to the fact that, while appropriating the original canonical corpus with the Apostolic canons and those of the Fathers, as well as relying on the decrees of the first three ecumenical councils, the Armenian synods adapted them to local needs by means of original decisions which reflect the particularities of Armenian Christianity and the theological reasons for its confession.

³⁶ **Mardirossian**, *Le Livre des canons*, 263-265. On this Julianist theologian, see the whole chapter (p. 289-441).

³⁷ Գիրք թղթոց, խմբ. Ն. Պողարեան (*Book of Letters*, ed. by **N. Pogharean**), 2nd edition, Jerusalem 1994.

**ԵԿԵՂԵՑԻՆ ԵՎ ԵԿԵՂԵՑԱԿԱՆ ԺՈՂՈՎՆԵՐԸ ԱՅԼ
ՔՐԻՍՏՈՆԵՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐՈՒՄ. ՀԱՅՈՑ ՕՐԻՆԱԿԸ**

ՆԱԶԵՆԻ ՂԱՐԻԲՅԱՆ

*Արվեստի պատմության դոկտոր (Փարիզ)
Մարենադարանի թանգարանային մասի
ղեկավար և ավագ գիտաշխատող
ՀՊԳԱ դոցենտ*

ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

Հայ եկեղեցու պատմության ուսումնասիրությունը՝ վաղ քրիստոնեական շրջանի եկեղեցական ժողովների միջոցով էական դեր ունի՝ հասկանալու համար դարերով պահպանված մի շարք ավանդույթներ: Սույն հոդվածն այսպիսով ներկայացնում է առաջին հայ եկեղեցական ժողովների և Եկեղեցու հաստատության որոշ առանձնահատկություններ: Քրիստոնեության դարձից հետո նոր կրոնը սահուն տեղավորվեց հնի ակոսներում՝ առանց էապես փոփոխելու գոյություն ունեցող հասարակական կարգն ու ավանդական ինստիտուտների գործունեությունը: Նմանապես, այս շրջանի ազգային եկեղեցական ժողովները, Համընդհանրական եկեղեցու կանոններն ընդունելիս (ինչպես Նիկեական կանոնները, Առաքելական կանոնները կամ Անտիոքյան ժողովածուն)՝ որոշ փոփոխություններ և հավելումներ էին կատարում՝ դրանք տեղական պայմաններին լավագույնս հարմարեցնելու նպատակով: Մյուս կողմից, մշտապես գտնվելով Սասանյան արքունիքից կամ Բյուզանդական կրոնական քաղաքականությունից եկող սպառնալիքի ներքո, Հայոց եկեղեցին կանոնական որոշումներ ընդունեց, որոնք թույլ տվեցին փոխել ի սկզբանե հաստատված հիերարխիական կարգը և դառնալ ինքնագլուխ: Հենվելով հին ավանդական «Աշխարհաժողովի» սկզբունքի վրա՝ հայկական եկեղեցական ժողովները միշտ գումարվել են աշխարհիկ իշխանությունների ներկայությամբ, իսկ Հայոց եկեղեցին մինչ օրս էլ պահպանում է որոշումների կայացման և ղեկավարման կոլեգիալ սկզբունքը: Այսպիսով՝ հոգևոր և աշխարհիկ իշխանությունները հավասարապես բաժանում են ամբողջ ազգի առաջնորդությունն ու պատասխանատվությունը:

Առանցքային բառեր. *եկեղեցական տաճար, սինոդ, հայկական եկեղեցի, Շահապիվան, Աշորիշար, քրիստոնեության ընդունում, Տիրիդատ, Գրիգոր Լուսավորիչ, վաղ քրիստոնեական եկեղեցի:*

ЦЕРКОВЬ И ЦЕРКОВНЫЕ СОБОРЫ В ДРУГИХ ХРИСТИАНСКИХ КОНФЕССИЯХ: АРМЯНСКИЙ ОПЫТ

НАЗЕНИ ГАРИБЯН

Доктор истории искусств (Париж)

Заведующая музейным отделом и

Старший научный сотрудник Матенадарана

Доцент ГХАА

РЕЗЮМЕ

Изучение истории Армянской церкви через призму церковных соборах раннего периода играет значительную роль для понимания многих традиций, сохранявшихся веками. В этой статье освещаются некоторые особенности первых армянских соборов и учреждений ранней церкви. После обращения в христианство новая религия приобрела черты прежней, не изменив существенно социального порядка и функционирования традиционных институтов. Национальные синоды этого периода, принимая как каноны Вселенской Церкви так и Никейские, Апостольские, и Антиохийские каноны, вносили определенные изменения или дополнения, направленные на их лучшее приспособление к местным условиям. С другой стороны, имея дело с постоянной угрозой, исходившей от Сасанидского двора или Византийской религиозной политики, Армянская церковь была вынуждена принять канонические решения, позволившие изменить иерархический порядок и стать автокефальной. Что касается старого, традиционного Вселенского Собора, армянские синоды, опираясь на его догматические постулаты, всегда проводились совместно с представителями светской власти и Армянская церковь сохранила коллегиальный принцип руководства и принятия решений и по сей день. Таким образом, Церковь разделяла со светской властью руководство и ответственность всего народа.

Ключевые слова: *церковный собор, синод, Армянская церковь, Шахапиван, Аштишат, обращение в христианство, Тиридат, Григорий Просветитель, раннехристианская церковь.*