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INTERNATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ARMENIAN LITERATURE OF THE GOLDEN AGE

Abstract

Since the 18th century, when the Whiston brothers translated Movses Khorenatsi's "History of Armenia" into Latin, Armenian historiography has attracted the attention of European scholars.

Saint-Martin played a great role in the process of the international recognition of Armenian studies, who in the two prefaces of the book «Mémoires historique et géographique sur l'Arménie» (1818) speaks admiringly about the historiography of the 5th century and the Armenian Middle Ages in general. According to him, the importance of Armenian historians is that when talking about ancient times, they usually paid more attention to the events they

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narrated, tried not to talk about events of little importance, and treated the style of their stories more carefully than Arab and Persian historians.

The Armenian historiography of the Golden Age provides important information about the neighboring peoples: Persians, Greeks, Assyrians, Georgians, and Caucasian Albanians, often confirming this information by facts from other sources and archaeological excavations.

Harlez, an important figure of the French Avestology, notes that with the facts brought by Movses Khorenatsi and Yeghishe, it is possible to restore the lost parts of the "Avesta", the sacred book of the Zoroastrian religion.

Pavstos Buzand's "History of Armenia" is a unique source on the history of the Arshakid dynasty of Persia and Armenia.

It should not be forgotten that in the Middle Ages Agathangelos' "History of Armenia" was translated into eight languages.

Jean-Pierre Mahe, a prominent French Armenologist of our time, also makes a focus on the international value of Armenian historiography of the Golden Age.

Keywords: *Movses Khorenatsi, Saint-Martin, Avesta, Jean-Pierre Mahe, Victor Langlois, Yeghishe, Felix Neve.*

Introduction

After the creation of the Armenian alphabet by Mashtots, literature began to flourish from the very beginning of the 5th century. Armenian literature developed in two main directions: independent national literature and translated literature. According to Frederic Fady, in the 5th century, Armenians created such literary values that place them on the same level with the Greeks, Romans and Syrians.¹ This century was called the "Golden Age" because of its rich literature.

The Old and New Testaments of the Bible left a deep mark on Armenian medieval literature, and due to their accurate translation, the famous French Armenologist M. Lacrosse calls them "the queen of all ancient translations".²

When in 1666 Voskan Yerevantsi published the first Armenian printed Bible in Amsterdam, it attracted the attention of Richard Simon, an expert in religious sacred texts, who included it in his work "The Old and New Testaments", published in 1685 and 1690.

¹ **David de Sassoun** 1964, Preface.

² **Mahe** 2012, 371.

In 1679, Colbert instructed Antoine Galland, the future translator of “A Thousand and One Nights”, to buy Armenian books and find the very old history of a certain Movses, published in Amsterdam, which sets out the history of Armenia from Noah’s Ark to the translation of the Bible into Armenian at the beginning of the 5th century.

It was this book that formed the basis of the Latin translation of Movses Khorenatsi’s History of Armenia by the Whiston brothers in 1736.³ The Latin translation of Khorenatsi’s book immediately attracted the attention of European historians. To date, Khorenatsi’s work has been translated into many languages of the world. After the Latin translation, it was translated into Russian, Italian, French, German, Hungarian, Persian, English, Georgian, Arabic, Turkish, Swedish, and in 2020 into Serbian.⁴

Armenian Historians of the 5th Century on World History

The first to address Khorenatsi’s “History of Armenia”, and the Armenian historiography and literature of the 5th century in details in the first volume of his monumental book “Mémoires historique et géographique sur l’Arménie”(published in Paris in 1818) was J. Saint-Martin, the founder of French Armenology. Saint-Martin believes that the significance of Armenian historians lies in the fact that they usually cared about the importance of the events they narrated. They tried not to speak about events that were less noteworthy, and treated the style of their works more carefully than Arab and Persian historians when speaking about ancient times. He is also sure there won’t be any exaggeration to mention that Armenian historians Movses Khorenatsi, Yeghishe, and Ghazar Parpetsi deserve to be known by European readers. With the purity of their style, their eloquence, and their publicism, they are interesting even from the viewpoint of the outstanding examples from ancient Greece and Rome.

Saint-Martin dreamed of translating all the works of Armenian historians into French. He was particularly impressed by the work of the 5th century historian Pavstos Buzand, particularly his “History of Armenia”, which he considered a unique source from the point of view of studying the history of the Armenian-Persian Arshakid dynasty.

³ **Movses Khorenatsi** 1736.

⁴ **Movses Khorenatsi** 2020.

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In 1850, the first volume of Saint-Martin's history of the Arshakid dynasty was published in Paris.⁵ In this book, he made an extensive use of Pavstos Buzand's "History of Armenia".

The name of Movses Khorenatsi, as an outstanding historian, was included in a number of encyclopedias around the world.

Let us give some examples:

a) Encyclopedic Dictionary, volume XIX A. Publishers F.A. Brockhaus, I. A. Efron, St. Petersburg, 1896, pp. 610–611.

b) Nouveau Petit Larousse illustré, Paris, 1932, 1543 p.

c) L. Gumilyov, Encyclopedia, Moscow, 2017, 452 p.

In Gumilyov's encyclopedia we can read: "Moses Khorensky (c.370/407–487/492) is a famous Armenian writer. Author of the famous "History of Armenia". Gumilyov turned to the works of Khorensky and made references to his works.

The famous French Armenologist Victor Langlois, who personally translated Khorenatsi's "History of Armenia"⁶ and placed it in the second volume of the collection of Armenian historians' works, made efforts to prove that Movses Khorenatsi was a historian of the 5th century. To this end, he wrote a study dedicated to the sources of Movses Khorenatsi's "History of Armenia",⁷ where Langlois repeated the words of the respected Armenian cleric: "The day will come when scientific Europe will declare him (that is, Khorenatsi – A.D.) GREAT for the time in which he lived, the day will come when the accusers of our historian will justify him, because if they study our Khorenatsi well, they will recognize his sincerity, and agree to call him the father of Armenian historiography, as our ancestors have always done."⁸

In 1903, the Armenologist Frederick Macler published an Arabic translation of Mar Abas Katina's chronicle in the *Journal Asiatique*,⁹ parallel to his French translation, proving that Khorenatsi had indeed used the work of this ancient historian.

⁵ **Saint-Martin** 1850.

⁶ **Langlois** 1861.

⁷ **Langlois** 1861.

⁸ **Langlois** 1861, 368.

⁹ "*Journal Asiatique*" 1903, 492.

On March 10, 2015, Nicholas Wade published a report in the New York Times¹⁰ periodical titled “Armenian Birth Date Shown in the Fifth Century.” This was confirmed by the genetic analysis of the blood of Armenians and the natives of historical Armenia and its settlements. The scientific results showed Movses Khorenatsi’s impartiality when he indicated 2492 B.C. as the exact date of the formation of Armenians as a nation, “a date usually regarded as legendary, though he claimed to have traveled to Babylon and consulted ancient records. Whatever the case, Khorenatsi either made a lucky guess or did really gain access to useful data, because a new genomic analysis suggests that his date is entirely plausible”.¹¹

The Armenian literature of the 5th century was highly appreciated by the 19th century Belgian Armenologist Felix Neve in his renowned work “L’Arménie chrétienne et sa littérature”. He writes that the great Armenian writers who appeared in the 5th century created works worthy of taking as an example. No other Christian nation of the time had created a literature that could equal the 5th century Armenian literature. Armenian translators also did unequalled work translating the preferred religious and scientific literature created in other languages into their mother tongue. “The version of the Armenian Bible... is a valuable work, which renders honor to the authors of the translation with its antiquity and depth.”¹²

In his book, Neve devoted a separate chapter to Yeghishe and his history. He writes with admiration about the last part of the Armenian historian’s book, dedicated to the gentle Armenian ladies. This is a wonderful poem about the wives of the husbands who died or were captured for their devotion to their motherland, about the ladies who stood out for the beauty of their souls.

In 2002, a wonderful book entitled “L’épée de Jean-Pierre Mahe” was published in Paris. The book presents the ceremony of electing Jean-Pierre Mahe, a famous Armenologist, member of several European academies, foreign member of the National Academy of Armenia, and member of the French Academy of Records, which awarded him with the Academician’s Sword. He was dressed in an academician’s special, expensive, and luxurious uniform with gilded patterns. The ceremony took place on October 24, 2002, in the large amphitheater of the

¹⁰ **Wade** 2015, March 10.

¹¹ **Wade** 2015, March 10.

¹² **Nève** 1886.

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Sorbonne University. After many speeches and greetings, Mahe delivered a speech of gratitude and spoke about his scientific career, pointing out its most important stages. The distinguished Armenologist, orientalist, linguist, translator, and specialist in Caucasus Studies concluded his speech of gratitude by noting that today, as yesterday, it is useful and necessary to study the Armenian translations of Greek chroniclers, as well as translations from Syriac and Arabic. In this regard, Armenian sources are incomparable with any others. In what other language can one find such precious texts, such irreplaceable sources? He lists Hermes Trismegistus, one sentence of which is engraved on the Academician's Sword, Berossus, Eusebius's Chronicle, numerous works by Philo of Alexandria, and many authors of the first centuries of Christianity, including Irenaeus, the first bishop of the Gauls. And how many more treasures are kept in the Matenadaran named after Mashtots.

There are ancient Greek originals that have disappeared forever, but they have been preserved thanks to the conscientious translations of the Holy Translators of Armenia, who were the successors of Mesrop Mashtots and his fellow campaigners. "The glory of Armenia is that it has managed to preserve the most precious memories of mankind better than other nations."¹³

Mahe rightly assesses the international significance of the national and translated works of the Armenian literature of the Golden Age. "The Cosmic Chronicle" of Eusebius of Caesarea has been preserved only in Armenian, thanks to which one can learn the Hellenistic historiography of Mesopotamia and Egypt, and owing to this, the second half of the 5th century was recognized as the Golden Age of Armenian literature.

One of the bright figures of the literature of the Golden Age is Yeznik Koghbatsi, whose work "The Refutation of Heresy" received international recognition and was translated into many languages in the 19th and 20th centuries. His work is very important for the restoration of the lost parts of the sacred book of the Zoroastrian religion, the Avesta. But the work of Yeznik Koghbatsi is not the only one. The famous French art historian C. de Harlez, who published the sacred book of the Zoroastrian religion Avesta in Paris in 1881, refers to facts from the works of the 5th century historians Movses Khorenatsi and Yeghishe. He recalls

¹³ **Mahé** 2002, 54.

the part of Khorenatsi's "History of Armenia", telling of the clash between Mar Zarathustra and Semiramis.¹⁴

It is known that the original of the Avesta has survived to this day incompletely. Yeznik Koghbatsi knew this back in the 5th century and therefore considered the sacred book of the Zoroastrian religion "a patched-up absurdity."¹⁵

The critical text of the Avesta, published by C. de Harlez, does not contain passages related to the birth of Zrvan and his two sons, Hormizd and Arkhm, contained in Yeznik Koghbatsi's work and Yeghishe's book "About Vardan and the Armenian War." In order to restore them, the French art historian turns to Yeghishe's work.¹⁶

The works of Yeznik Koghbatsi and the Armenian historians of the Golden Age are also mentioned in the 20th century Persian literature studying the Avesta. It is known that during the Achaemenid and Sassanid eras, the Avesta was a powerful political instrument of the domestic and foreign policy of Persia. It was banned twice, the first time by the order of Alexander the Great, then it was restored during the Sassanid Dynasty, and the second time during the Arab rule, when this religion was completely banned and replaced by Islam. Art historian Poure Davoud, an expert on the Holy Gathas passage of the Avesta, tries to explain the word Avesta with an Armenian word borrowed from the Pahlavi language: "In the Pahlavi renderings of the Avesta, this word was used as Apastan, and the Armenian language borrowed it as Apastan, meaning confidence or reliance".¹⁷

In the Armenian literature of the Golden Age, Agathangelos' "History of Armenia", translated into several languages in the Middle Ages (Greek, Syriac, Arabic, Latin, Ethiopic, Georgian, Coptic (fragment) and Slavic), even before the invention of printing, is considered an international literary monument.

In the 18th century, European Armenology had already begun the scientific study of Agathangelos' work. H. Stilling published the Greek text of the history in

¹⁴ **Avesta** 1881, XXIII.

¹⁵ **Yeznik Koghbatsi** 1970, 86.

¹⁶ **Avesta** 1881, XXXVI–XXXVII.

¹⁷ **Holy Gathas** 1927, 28.

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1762 in the series "Lives of the Saints", placing an abridged Latin translation next to the Greek one.¹⁸

The international significance of Agathangelos' work is clearly explained by the Caucasus expert Paruyr Muradyan: "Today, studies dedicated to Agathangelos unite many leading branches of oriental studies - Armenology, Byzantium, Georgian studies, Arabic studies, etc. Therefore, their special achievements and research methods significantly complement each other, creating a guarantee of new and significant research."¹⁹

Recently, there has been great interest in Agathangelos' "History of Armenia". Therefore, new translations have been made into Italian, French, English and Russian.

Since the biography of Gregory the Illuminator is included in this book, the world Christian church has shown him great honor. He was the Catholicos of Armenia, the first country to proclaim Christianity as the state religion. This was given such importance that in 2001, when the entire Christian world celebrated the 1700th anniversary of the adoption of Christianity in Armenia, a large white marble statue of Gregory the Illuminator was erected in the Vatican.

The first and second books of the "History of Armenia" by Movses Khorenatsi contain verses of the ancient Armenian epic performed by poets of the Golden Age, translated into Russian and European languages. Valery Bryusov included some of them in the collection "Poetry of Armenia". He writes: "Armenia is the vanguard of Europe in Asia, this long-proposed formula correctly defines the position of the Armenian people, prompted by the entire course of its development: to seek and find a synthesis of the East and the West. And this aspiration was most fully expressed in the artistic creativity of Armenia, in its literature, in its poetry."²⁰

After all, one of the most important monuments of the Armenian literature of the Golden Age is Koryun's "Life of Mashtots", which presents the life of Mashtots and the circumstances of the creation of the Armenian alphabet. This book has been translated into Russian and European languages.

¹⁸ **Agathangelos** 1989, 503.

¹⁹ **Muradyan** 1982, 9.

²⁰ **Poetry of Armenia** 1987, 23.

The Armenian literature of the Golden Age is important not only from the point of view of studying the history of the Armenian people. It provides an opportunity to study individual episodes of the history of the Greeks, Romans, Mars, Syrians, Persians, Jews, Georgians, Caucasian Albanians and the peoples of the North Caucasus. It is also of great value from the perspective of the establishment of early Christianity as the dominant religion, around which a rich original and translated literature was created in the 5th century.

Conclusion

In the 18th century, the Whiston brothers' Latin translation of Movses Khorenatsi's "History of Armenia" was paramount in introducing Armenian historiography and literature to European scholars. Later, great was also the role of Saint-Martin in international recognition of Armenian studies, as in his works he expressed his estimation of Armenian historians of the 5th century and the Armenian Middle Ages with admiration. Utmost attention was paid to the fact that the Armenian historiography of the Golden Age provided important and reliable information about the neighboring peoples, always referring to different sources and the results of archaeological excavations. Besides, he always thought highly of their accurate and careful treatment of the narrative style.

The Armenian historiography of the Golden Age has also attracted the attention of other prominent European scholars such as C. de Harlez, Felix Neve, Jean-Pierre Mahe, and others for whom the historical reliability of the facts presented by Armenian historians is beyond doubt. Their fair-minded and appreciative attitude to such Armenian historians of the Golden Age as Movses Khorenatsi, Yeghishe, Agathangelos, Yeznik Koghbatsi, Pavstos Buzand and others, deserves great respect and acknowledgement.

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Ամփոփում

Արդեն սկսած XVIII դարից, երբ Վիստոն եղբայրները լատիներենի թարգմանեցին Մովսես Խորենացու «Հայոց պատմությունը», հայ պատմագրությունն իր վրա գրավեց եվրոպացի գիտնականների ուշադրությունը:

Հայագիտության միջազգային արժեքի գործում մեծ դեր կատարեց Սեն-Մարտենը, որը «Mémoires historique et géographique sur l'Arménie» գրքի (1818թ.) երկու առաջաբաններում բարձր է գնահատում V դարի և ընդհանրապես հայ միջնադարի պատմագրությունը: Նրա կարծիքով հայ պատմիչների կարևորությունն այն է, որ վաղնջական ժամանակների մասին խոսելիս նրանք սովորաբար ավելի խնամք են տարել պատմվող իրադարձությունների նկատմամբ, ջանացել են շրջանցել քիչ կարևորություն ունեցող դեպքերը և առավել հոգաճությամբ են վերաբերվել իրենց երկերի ոճին, քան արաբ և պարսիկ պատմիչները:

Ոսկեդարի հայ պատմագրությունը կարևոր տեղեկություններ է հաղորդում հարևան ժողովուրդների՝ պարսիկների, հույների, ասորիների, վրացիների, աղվանների մասին: Դրանք հաճախ հաստատվում են այլ աղբյուրների փաստերով ու հնագիտական պեղումներով:

Ֆրանսիական ավեստագիտության կարևոր դեմքը՝ Harlez-ը, նշում է, որ Մովսես Խորենացու ու Եղիշեի պատմությունների հաղորդած փաստերով կարելի է վերականգնել զրադաշտական կրոնի սրբազան մատյանի՝ «Avesta»-յի կորած հատվածները:

Փալստոս Բուզանդի «Հայոց պատմությունը» եզակի աղբյուր է Պարսկաստանի ու Հայաստանի Արշակունիների պատմության վերաբերյալ:

Հենց միջնադարում Ագաթանգեղոսի «Հայոց պատմությունը» թարգմանվել է ութ լեզուներով:

Ոսկեդարի հայ պատմագրության միջազգային արժեքն ընդգծել է նաև մեր օրերի նշանավոր ֆրանսիացի հայագետ Ժան-Պիեռ Մահեն:

Բանալի բառեր՝ Մովսես Խորենացի, Սեն-Մարտեն, «Ավեստա», Ժան-Պիեռ Մահեն, Վիկտոր Լանգլուա, Եղիշե, Ֆելիքս Նև:

МЕЖДУНАРОДНОЕ ЗНАЧЕНИЕ АРМЯНСКОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ ЗОЛОТОГО ВЕКА

АЭЛИТА ДОЛУХАНЫН

Резюме

Начиная уже с XVIII века, когда братьями Вистон была переведена на латинский язык «История Армении» Мовсеса Хоренаци, армянская историография оказалась в центре внимания европейских ученых.

В вопросе признания международной ценности арменоведения большую роль сыграл Сен-Мартен, который в двух предисловиях своей книги «Mémoires historique et géographique sur l'Arménie» (1818 г.) с восхищением говорит об историографии V века и армянского средневековья в целом.

Согласно Сен-Мартену, важным в сочинениях армянских историков является то, что обращаясь к незапамятным временам, они обычно акцентировали излагаемые события, стараясь при этом не говорить о менее важных исторических реалиях. В отличие от арабских и персидских историков они больше фокусировались на стиле собственных сочинений.

Армянская историография Золотого века сообщает важные сведения о соседних народах – персах, греках, айсорях, грузинах, алуанках, которые часто подтверждаются фактами из других источников и археологическими раскопками.

Ключевая фигура французского искусствоведения – Harlez, отмечает, что по фактам, приведенным в исторических трудах Мовсеса Хоренаци и Егише, можно восстановить утерянные отрывки священной книги зороастризма – «Авесты».

«История Армении» Фавстоса Бузанда является эксклюзивным источником по истории Персии и армянских Аршакидов.

Именно в период средневековья «История Армении» Агатангелоса была переведена на восемь языков.

О ценности армянской историографии Золотого века говорил также известный современный французский арменовед Жан-Пьер Маэ.

Ключевые слова: Мовсес Хоренаци, Сен-Мартен, «Авеста», Жан-Пьер Маэ, Виктор Ланглуа, Егише, Феликс Нев.