

Azat A. Bozoyan (ed.), *Պատկերապաշտության և պատկերամարտության խնդիրը Հայաստանում և Բյուզանդիայում (ազգային ինքնության պահպանման համատեքստում). հոդվածների ժողովածու [The Problem of Iconoclasm and Iconolatry in Armenia and Byzantium (in the Context of Identity Preservation): Collection of Articles]*, Yerevan: “Gitutyun” Publishing House of the Armenian Academy of Sciences, 2024.

An English-language review of an Armenian book may be rare, equally rare are the mostly meritorious articles contained in the book; so too the number of copies available in print — only a hundred.¹ The editor, Azat Bozoyan, details in the preface (5–19) the scholarly desiderata for complementary sources on Iconoclasm and the circumstances leading to the realisation of the project — in addition to an article of his own in which he further specifies the historiographical problematics of the primary sources on the subject (“Byzantine Primary Sources,” 41–52). The project called for a teamwork. It was on June 10 and September 23–24, 2024, when an expanded working conference was convened, where participants read their respective reports and laid plans to publish the book.

Gabriel H. Nahapetyan, in his equally introductory article “Certain Problems of Source Studies in the Historiography of the Iconoclasm Period: Problems of Byzantine Iconoclasm and Veneration of Images in the Works of George Ostrogorsky” (20–40), lays down the issues besetting earlier researchers, George Ostrogorsky in particular, and the lacunae the book intends to address. Ostrogorsky’s thesis, that the issue of icons was a subject of discussion in Byzantium and the Christian world

¹ A preferred rendition of the title would be *The Problem of Iconodulia and Iconoclasm in Armenia and Byzantium...* (“iconolatry” is mainly derogatory, implying worship of icons or images, generally understood as a form of idolatry; whereas “iconodulia” implies veneration of icons or images). Arm. պատկերապաշտություն blurs the distinction.

Abraham Terian  0000-0001-9806-8748 • St Nersess Armenian Seminary, New York (NY), USA
(Email: terian@stnersess.edu)

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long before Emperor Leo III decreed in the year 730 that all religious icons be destroyed, finds ample support in the East, where iconodulia was invariably linked to incarnational theology in Christological controversies — before the issue was politicized by the Emperor (r. 717–41).

Thereafter the book is divided into four parts. In “Part I: Historical Observations”, Nahapetyan resumes the historical aspect in two parts, under the title “Geopolitical Changes in the Caucasus from the Beginning of the seventh Century to the Beginning of the eighth Century” (53–127). In Part (a), under the subheading “The Question of Armenia’s Foreign Policy Orientation in the seventh–eighth Centuries”, he surveys the Arab conquest of the Armenian Highlands and the rest of the South Caucasus in c. 645, soon after the fall of Sasanian Persia. The Arab incursions further north, after establishing the administrative Emirate of Arminiya, were hampered by the Khazars who also threatened the rule of the Caliphate in the South Caucasus. To counter the threat, the Arabs empowered the Armenian princely dynasty of the Bagratids and dealt a decisive blow to the Khazars in 737. Within this historical context, Nahapetyan raises the question in Part (b): “Why did Iconoclasm emerge in Aghuank’ and Siwnik’ at the beginning of the seventh century?” (83). He begins with a description of a weakened Armenian Church due to heretical movements such as the *Phantasiae* (Arm. *Erewut’akank’*, a resurgent Docetic movement, uncharacteristic of the Armenian Church as a whole), allowing the hierarchies of Georgia, Aghuank’, and Siwnik’ yet another reason to want to secede from the Armenian Church while providing grounds for the spread of iconodulia, only to be confronted with the consequent rise of Iconoclasm by the end of the century and the ensuing reactionary polemics waged by the iconodules; a cycle which repeated itself eventually within the Armenian Church.

Part II is entirely the work of the V. Rev. Fr. Zakaria Baghumyan, an archpriest of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, under the title “The Treatment of the Issue of Icons in Armenian Literature” (128–212), where after a brief historical introduction to contextualise the Armenian sources dated to the period before and during the Arab domination, he follows chronologically to treat the subject as reflected in native works: by Vrt’anes K’ert’ogh and Hovhan Mayragomets’i (sixth–seventh centuries), and the Catholicoi Sahak III Dzorap’orets’i and (St.) Yovhan III Odznets’i (in office 677–703 and 717–28, respectively). He follows up the subject in sources from the eleventh–twelfth centuries, concluding with the liturgy of consecrating images in the Armenian *Euchologion*, distinguishing the four distinct canons for the consecration of various kinds of images: of a church and its frescoes, those of saints in general, those of Christ, and those of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In “Part III: Canonical Works during the Period of Iconoclasm”, Sargis Melkonyan addresses the subject with a title of his own: “The Canons and Statements of Faith Adopted at the Councils of Elvira (early fourth century), Quinisext (691/2), Hieria (754), and Nicaea II (787) Regarding Images” (213–98). His article consists mainly of the texts of the canons mandated at the respective councils, with parallel Armenian translation. Since non-Armenian readers are capable of accessing these

canons in multiple western publications, this part of the book is relevant mainly to Armenian readers.

The final, “Part IV: Numismatics and Art,” is comprised of two articles: “The Issue of Images in the Middle Ages according to Numismatic Evidence” by Armine Zohrabyan (299–328, including 23 illustrations); and “Iconoclasm and the Early Medieval Armenian Art Forms” by Zarouhi Hakobyan (329–43, including 6 illustrations). The former underscores the practice and significance of messaging through coinage — albeit all Byzantine and Islamic and drawn mostly from Brubaker and Haldon’s edition, and the latter the constancy of Armenian art in favor of iconodulia, placed within a brief historical context — both Armenian and non-Armenian. The book ends with a rich bibliography (344–78).

All contributors to the volume are engaging in their articles mainly because they follow a chronological scheme. They all provide a genuine service to the Armenian reader. The first half of the book (Parts I–II) merits translation for the benefit of the non-Armenian reader, to become acquainted with the Armenian sources bearing on the subject. However, “Identity Preservation” remains a rather elusive subject, especially in Parts III–IV.

The editor and his collaborators are to be commended for managing a major task set forth in the preface.