

VARDAN AREVELTSI AND HIS “ASHKHARHATSOYTS”

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Abstract

The medieval period of Armenian history is perhaps the most complex, yet also the most interesting and least studied, and still needs to be illuminated. Perhaps Medieval Armenia is rich in historians who not only authored historical works and left a rich heritage, which are indispensable sources for future generations to discover the Middle Ages, but who, to this day, are outstanding historians whose lives, activities, and legacies we are only partially familiar with. One of these outstanding historians is Vardan Areveltsi, whose life and activities are highly contradictory, but very important. He authored not only historical works but also geographical works, which are valuable sources for studying the administrative–territorial divisions of medieval Armenia. It not only studies the system of administrative–territorial division of medieval Armenia, but also provides information on a number of monasteries previously unknown in Armenian history. “Ashkaratsoyts” sometimes provides important source information that is no longer mentioned anywhere else. In this regard, it draws on not only the sources known to us but also on oral narratives and written sources that have not reached us, such as the historiographical works of Hovhannes Sarkavag, Mkhitar Anetsi, Vahram Tigranakertsi, and Hovhannes Vanakan. Its importance also lies in the fact that it is not only an important source for the study of the historical geography of Armenia but also of Asia Minor as a whole.

Thus, the topic of the research is “Vardan Areveltsi and his ‘Ashkharhatsoyts’,” the study of which may have a turning point for Armenian medieval historiography.

Keywords: Vardan Areveltsi, Vanakan vardapet, Khor Virap, “Ashkharhatsoyts”, brief and extensive originals, Hayk Perperyan.

ՎԱՐՂԱՆ ԱՐԵՎԵԼՅԻՆ ԵՎ ԻՐ «ԱՇԽԱՐՀԱՑՈՅՑ»-Ը

ԼԻԱՆՆԱ ԱՎԵՏԻՍՅԱՆ

Երևանի պետական համալսարանի
հայոց պատմության ամբիոնի հայցորդ

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Համառոտագիր

Հայոց պատմության միջնադարյան ժամանակաշրջանը թերևս ամենաբարդ, սակայն ամենահետաքրքիր և մասամբ չուսումնասիրված ժամանակաշրջաններից է, որն առ այսօր ունի լուսաբանման կարիք: Միջնադարյան Հայաստանը հարուստ է պատմիչներով, ովքեր ոչ միայն հեղինակել են պատմական աշխատություններ և թողել են հարուստ ժառանգություն, որոնք հետագա սերունդների համար միջնադարը բացահայտելու անփոխարինելի սկզբնաղբյուրներ են, սակայն առ այսօր կան ակնավոր պատմիչներ, որոնց կյանքին, գործունեությանը և թողած ժառանգությանը մենք մասամբ ենք ծանոթ: Այդ ակնավոր պատմիչներից է Վարդան Արևելցին, ում կյանքի և գործունեության մասին տեղեկությունները խիստ հակասական են, սակայն շատ կարևոր: Նա հեղինակել է ոչ միայն պատմական, այլև աշխարհագրական աշխատությունների, որոնք արժեքավոր սկզբնաղբյուր են միջնադարյան Հայաստանի վարչատարածքային բաժանումներն ուսումնասիրելու գործում: «Աշխարհացոյց»-ը ոչ միայն ուսումնասիրում է միջնադարյան Հայաստանի վարչատարածքային բաժանման համակարգը, այլև տեղեկություն է տալիս մի շարք վանքերի մասին, որոնք մինչև այժմ անհայտ էին հայոց պատմությանը: Այն երբեմն այնպիսի կարևոր աղբյուրագիտական տեղեկություններ է տալիս, որոնք այլևս ոչ մի տեղ չեն հիշատակվում: Նա այս առնչությամբ տեղեկություններ է քաղում ոչ միայն մեզ ծանոթ սկզբնաղբյուրներից, այլև բանավոր պատմություններից և մեզ չհասած գրավոր այնպիսի աղբյուրներից, որոնցից են Հովհաննես Սարկավագի, Մխիթար Անեցու, Վահրամ Տիգրանակերտցու, Հովհաննես Վանականի պատմագրական երկերը: Սույն աշխատությունը կարևոր է նաև նրանով, որ կարևոր սկզբնաղբյուր է ոչ միայն Հայաստանի, այլև ամբողջ Փոքր Ասիայի պատմական աշխարհագրության ուսումնասիրման դիտանկյունից:

Այսպիսով՝ այս հոդվածի թեման է «Վարդան Արևելցին և իր Աշխարհացոյցը», որի ուսումնասիրությունը կարող է շրջադարձային նշանակություն ունենալ հայ միջնադարյան պատմագրության համար:

Բանալի բառեր՝ Վարդան Արևելցի, Վանական վարդապետ, Խոր Վիրապ, «Աշխարհացոյց», համառոտ և ընդարձակ բնագրեր, Հայկ Պերպերյան:

Introduction

Vardan Areveltsi is one of the most prominent representatives of medieval Armenia, but his biographical information is scarce. Only contemporary historians provide fragmentary information about his life and activities. There is no accurate information about his birthplace. According to M. Chamchyan, Vardan Areveltsi was born in Gandzak (Chamchyan, 1984), but he is rarely referred to as “Gandzaketsi”. According to H. Voskryan, Vardan Areveltsi was born in Armenian Aghvank or its surroundings, since in many places “Vardan Vardapet Aghvanets” is mentioned (Voskian, 1922), and the forms “Areveltsi” or “Aghvanits” are also found. Gh also expresses this opinion. Alishan, noting that Vardan’s homeland, that is, his place of birth, is not remembered, but he is called Areveltsi like Kirakos, and to distinguish him from the Vardans of the same time, he is called Metsn (Vardapet) (Alishan, 1901, vol. A). In any case, Vardan Areveltsi is one of the outstanding figures of medieval Armenia, who enriched Armenian medieval historiography not only with historical, but also with geographical works. One such masterpiece is his “Ashkharhatsoyts”, which, in terms of the territorial and chronological coverage of its materials and its historical and geographical value, is the second among all works of this nature that have come down to us from the Middle Ages, after the famous “Ashkharhatsoyts” of the 5th century. However, from the point of view of source studies, Areveltsi’s “Ashkharhatsoyts” is a unique work and is very rarely related to the “Ashkharhatsoyts” of the 5th century.

Discussion

To this day, there are disagreements about Vardan Areveltsi’s birth date, death date, grave, the publication of “Ashkharhatsoyts”, and the author. The prevailing view in philology is that Areveltsi must have been born in 1200–1210, since in 1238, or more precisely, in 1239–1240. leaves for the Holy Land, and in 1240–1241 for Cilicia, where he receives the patronage of the Catholicos and Hetum I. This could have been at the age of maturity (30–40). However, one more speech is known from the manuscripts that have come down to us, and according to its extensive original, which was extracted from various books by the hand of Vardan Areveltsi, it is said: “The example was translated from the forgotten script into the Armenian script in the year 1221.” It is undeniable that Areveltsi was fluent in Greek, Assyrian, Hebrew, Turkish, and, probably, Persian. In addition, the title mentions the full name of Vardan Areveltsi, along with the nickname “Areveltsi.” Most likely, he translated this speech and sent it to Hromkla. If this is the case, then it must be assumed that Vardan Areveltsi must have been at least 25 years old to be able to translate this speech. Therefore, he must have been born between 1197 and 1200 and not later (Antapyan, 1987, vol. A).

He must have received his primary education in his birthplace. He certainly studied under Hovhannes Vanakan in Tavush, from whom he learned the art of writing. The monk Vardapet was Vardan’s main teacher, about whom we learn

from the following words: “What the nation of Netoghac has done, our glorious father, the monk Vardapet, and our kinsman Kirakos, have written in detail” («Ձոր ինչ արարին ազգն Նետողաց գրեալ են մանրամասնաբար փառավորեալ հայրն մեր Վանական վարդապետն և հարազատ մեր Կիրակոս») (Voskian, 1922). He probably studied at the school in Nor Getik, where he became friends with Kirakos Gandzaketsi in 1210–1214.

1225 To escape Jaleddin’s persecution, Hovhannes Vanakan moved to an isolated place in the southern parts of Tavush, founded a new church there, and continued his teaching. Among the students, who were mainly his former students, Kirakos Gandzaketsi and Vardan Areveltsi are also mentioned. When Hovhannes Vanakan was released from captivity after paying a large ransom, the Mongols did not release Kirakos Gandzaketsi so that he could serve of their translator–scribe. Vardan Areveltsi was also well–suited for such work, as he was fluent in the relevant languages, but Kirakos Gandzaketsi does not mention Vardan Areveltsi or their subsequent relations. There is no doubt that Vardan Areveltsi was not with them in captivity. What happened to him at that time is unknown. He probably founded the Kayenaberd area with a group of Hovhannes Vanakan’s students from the Khoranashat monastery in Tavush, following the example of his teacher’s example. school and engage in teaching. This was probably accomplished by 1225.

He taught until 1240–1241, when he left for Jerusalem and Cilicia. In 1243, Vardan Areveltsi participated in the church council of Sis in Cilicia, which was headed by Catholicos Constantine of Bardzraberdti (1220–1268). However, Areveltsi was present at the national–church council held in Sis not as an ordinary observer, but as one of the authoritative participants. He was also in close contact with the royal house and palace. He authored a very remarkable work, “Zhghlank”, for King Hetum I.

The Eastern Catholicos Constantine brought the “Letter of the Circular” to Eastern Armenia in 1246. According to this, he stayed in Jerusalem for one year and in Cilicia for five years. However, in 1247–1248, he left again for Cilicia, where he stayed until 1251.

In 1251, he finally returned to Armenia from Cilicia and settled in the monastery of St. Andrew in Kayenaberd. This time, he stayed here until the end of the 1250s. He was engaged in “vardapet” teaching in the monastery of St. Andre in Kayenaberd, which means that he was entrusted with the most complex and responsible material of the church, because it is known that the one who held the vardapetakan staff or authority had such a right canonically. Vardan Areveltsi, Kirakos Gandzaketsi and other students received the vardapetakan staff from the Vanakan vardapet (Kirakos Gandzaketsi, 1961). In the monastery of Andre, he had 40 students, of whom only Gevorg Skevratsi, Nerses Mshetsi, Grigor Baluetsi, and Hovhannes Yerznkatsi are known (Voskian, 1922).

Then we see him at Khor Virap, but the motives for his move here are unknown to historians. Only Garegin Hovsepyan testifies that Vardan Areveltsi

taught in Khor Virap for many years (Hovsepyan, 1944). Here, people from Cilicia, Erznka, Balu, Mush and other places came to study with him. Among his students were Hovhannes Erznkatsi (Pluz), Grigor Baluetsi, Gevorg Skevratsi, Nerses Mshetsi, Grigor Bjnetsi, and Sargis (Antapyan, 1987, vol. A).

The Khor Virap school enjoyed fame during the teaching of Vardan the Easterner; it was considered “Space-famous”, where he himself “shone like the rising sun” («իբրև զարեգակն փայլեր»), otherwise, people from Far Cilicia, Bardzr Hayq, Balu, Mush would not have come here to study. Therefore, Vardan Arelveltsi must have come to Khor Virap at least a few years before 1260, probably in 1257–1258 (Antapyan, 1987, vol. A).

In 1264, a memorable event occurred in the life of Vardan Arelveltsi. At the invitation of Hulavu Khan, he, as a representative of Eastern Armenia, together with the archpriests Sargis and Grigor, and the elder of Tphghis, traveled to Tabriz to participate in the festivities of the Elkhanate and was honored with great honors (Alishan, 1901, vol. B). King Hetum, the Georgian king David, the Persian sultan, and others were also there. Here, Arelveltsi asked Hulavu for mercy for his nation (Voskian, 1922), and after that, Hulavu Khan ordered his agents to soften the tax policy in Armenia.

Gevorg Lambronatsi (Skevratsi) reports that in the spring of 1267, Vardan Arelveltsi, together with his students, moved to Saghmosavank, Aghjots St. Stepanos and Tegheniats monasteries. Then, in the memoir attached to the “Interpretation of Daniel”, Vardan Arelveltsi reports that he began writing the aforementioned work in 1267 at Khor Virap, continued it at Saghmosavank, and finished it in 1268 at the monastery of Aghjots St. Stepanos. Thus, he was absent from Khor Virap in 1267–1268, but at the end of 1268 he returned and resumed his pedagogical activities. He was probably absent from Khor Virap because of the Mongol raids. In addition, he wanted to be close to the relatively safer Proshyan house, especially to Prince Kurd.

In the autumn of 1267, Arelveltsi completed his work “The gathering of history” («Հավաքումն պատմութեան») in Khor Virap. Here, he also composed the “Interpretation of Daniel”. There is no doubt that he also wrote his “Ashkharhatsoyts” (1268–1270) and some of his other works here, because until the end of his life, Khor Virap was his permanent place of residence (Antapyan, 1987, vol. A).

There are also differences of opinion about the date of death of Vardan Arelveltsi. Several dates are mentioned in historiography, of which 1271 is the most accurate. First, in the minor chronicles, the year “ՉԻ” (1271) is also mentioned. In addition, according to the testimony of one of his students, Grigor Aknertsı (Maghakia), “Ի թուականին ՉԻ (1271) փոխեցան ի Քրիստոս փառաւոր վարդապետքն Հայոց՝ Վարդան և Կիրակոս” (Grigor Aknertsı, 1974) and finally, in G. Hovsepyan’s work “The Khaghbakians and Proshians in the History of Armenia” the autograph memoir of Vardan Arelveltsi, written in Khor Virap and dated ՉԻ (1271) (Hovsepyan, 1944).

The burial place of Vardan Areveltsi has not been specified to this day. From written monuments, it is possible to trace 3 main places: the monasteries of St. Andre of Kayenaberd, Haghpat, and Khor Virap. Accordingly, historians are also divided into 3 parts. Those who consider Vardan Areveltsi buried in the monastery of St. Andre of Kayenaberd are based on the conclusions that he worked there for a very long time. However, this point of view is not proven. Those who point to the monastery of Haghpat also proceed from the assumption that Vardan Areveltsi carried out more or less literary and pedagogical activities here. In addition, literary sources state that the grave of Vardan Vardapet is located in Haghpat and, in their view, it is that of Vardan Areveltsi. However, this is not specified in the sources. Khor Virap remains, where Vardan Areveltsi is supposed to be buried. This is evidenced not only by the fact that he spent the last years of his life here or by the fact that he had connections with the Prosh and Kurd princes, but also by the fact that there are several accurate written testimonies about this: the autograph memoir of Vardan Areveltsi, written in 1271 in Khor Virap, which is the most recent information about his life, in addition, there is a report in the “Ashkharatsoys”, which is the result of an interpolation at the end of the 13th century: “ And at the entrance of Virap are the tombs of the deceased and famous people, and of the three great ones, the cosmically luminous Vardapet Vardan...” («և ի բերան Վիրապին հանգուցեալ կան շիրիմ մեծամեծք և մեծահռչակ, և եռամեծին՝ տիեզերալոյս վարդապետին Վարդանայ...») The interpolation should have made such an addition when he was convinced that it was not only important, but also a correct and well-known fact. In addition, the end of the 13th century is not so far from his death in 1271 that traditions could not have arisen showing his grave in several places at the same time. This point of view is also supported by the kondak of David Virapetsi, written in 1669. It is described here that during the renovation of Khor Virap, several of the graves there were excavated, knowing in advance that one of them was that of Vardan Areveltsi, and the other that of the vardapet Nerses Mshetsi (Antapyan, 1989, vol. B). David Virapetsi lived in Khor Virap, and not as an ordinary monk. Therefore, it is impossible that he was not familiar with the historical past of the monastery and the biography of the people who lived and worked there, especially with the biography of a person like Vardan Areveltsi. All this confirms beyond a doubt that Vardan Areveltsi died in 1271 and was buried at the Khor Virap monastery (Antapyan, 1987, vol. A).

Methods

To conduct this study, we used research, comparative, and analytical methods, since, to study the medieval period, one must examine a sufficient number of manuscripts and analyse the opinions of contemporary and later historians about Vardan Areveltsi and his “Ashkharatsoys”. The comparative method is also important for comparing available information and drawing accurate conclusions.

Results

Vardan Areveltsi is one of the prominent figures of medieval Armenia, enriching Armenian medieval historiography not only with historical but also with geographical works. Thus, a remarkable geographical work by Vardan Areveltsi has been preserved in the Armenian manuscript heritage. In terms of the territorial and chronological coverage of its materials and its historical and geographical value, it is the second among all works of that nature that have come down to us from the Middle Ages, after the famous “Ashkharatsoyts” of the 5th century. However, from the point of view of source studies, Areveltsi’s “Ashkharatsoyts” is a unique work and is very rarely related to the “Ashkharatsoyts” of the 5th century.

Vardan Areveltsi supplements his historical and geographical reference material on Armenia and neighbouring countries with detailed analysis in “Ashkharatsoyts”. He presents perhaps the most important part of the border, administrative, and nominal changes that took place on the territory of Armenia during the 11th and 12th centuries and thereafter, until the 1270s, which are reflected here in considerable detail (Antapyan, 1989, vol. B).

“Ashkharatsoyts” sometimes provides important source information that is no longer mentioned anywhere else. It is an important basis for studying the territorial changes that occurred in various administrative units at different times, since from the middle of the 11th century to the 30s of the 13th century, the administrative-political system of Armenia underwent radical changes several times, and this was the result not of shifts in internal economic life, but of external conquerors. Thus, when Byzantium conquered Armenia, it introduced its administrative and tax system, dividing the country into 3 katapanies. The Seljuks who followed it applied their administrative-political system; during their reign, Armenia was already divided not only into small kingdoms and principalities but also into emirates. From the end of the 12th century onward, in northeastern Armenia, which was liberated from the Seljuk yoke with the help of the strengthened Georgian state, the Armenian authorities of the previous period regained strength. New authorities emerged, among them the most powerful was the Zakaryan dynasty. However, in 1220, the Mongol invasions into Transcaucasia began, and four khanates were created, of which Armenia was included in the Western khanate.

In addition to the above circumstances, there is also mention here of numerous monasteries that are now unknown and have disappeared. The names of numerous figures of Armenian culture, who played a very important role in the life of the Armenian people, are associated with these monasteries. Vardan Areveltsi’s information also acquires great importance for the study of the Seljuk invasions, destructions, and socio-economic policies in Armenia. In this regard, he draws on not only primary sources familiar to us but also on oral narratives and written sources that have not reached us, such as the historiographical works

of Hovhannes Sarkavag, Mkhitar Anetsi, Vahram Tigranakertsi, and Hovhannes Vanakan.

Its importance also lies in the fact that it is not only an important source for the study of the historical geography of Armenia, but also of all of Asia Minor.

“Ashkarhatsoyts” has been published several times: first in 1728 in Constantinople, in conjunction with the Dictionary of Yeremia Meghrets; second, in 1819 in Paris; and third, in 1887 in Venice (Antapyan, 1989, vol. B). However, none of the above-mentioned ones presents the critical-comparative original of “Ashkarhatsoyts”. However, the French-Armenian Armenianist H. Perperian undertook a new, fourth edition, published in 1960 in Paris. In addition to the above-mentioned editions, he subjected 24 manuscripts to critical comparison. He included them, which are kept in the archives of Jerusalem, Venice, the National Museum of Paris and the British Museum in London.

“Ashkarhatsoyts” has come down to us only in later copies, the earliest of which is from 1565. It has come down to us in two editions: brief and expanded. Information about Armenia is included in both the abridged and expanded editions, and information about foreign countries is included in the expanded edition (Antapyan, 1987, vol. A). It was widely distributed and apparently used as a teaching manual. It was most likely composed in 1269–1271 by Vardan Areveltsi.

Saint-Martin, in a footnote to his translation, states that publishers and writers attribute this work to Vardan Vardapet of Bardzraberdtsi, who enjoyed great fame in Armenia in the 13th century and died in 1271 (Perperyan, 1960). However, Saint-Martin, in his description of the Khor Virap church, mentions that the tomb of the famous Vardan is located here. It is assumed that this author was one of Vardan’s disciples, and that is why the book was attributed to him.

M. Chamchyan has a well-founded objection to attributing the authorship of “Ashkarhatsoyts” to the historian Vardan, who writes that the author of “Ashkarhatsoyts” is a later Vardan, whose student was Hovhannes Erzknatsi (Chamchyan, 1984).

H. Voskryan brings a strong argument to reject the authorship of Vardan Areveltsi (Voskryan, 1922). The point is that the death of Vardan Vardapet is mentioned in “Ashkarhatsoyts”. If the author of “Ashkarhatsoyts” is Vardan Areveltsi, then he could not have written about his death. However, all the above-mentioned authors did not pay attention to another mention in “Ashkarhatsoyts”, which could attribute the editing of “Ashkarhatsoyts” to an author who lived after the first thirty years of the 14th century, since some of the manuscripts mention where Khachatur Kecharetsi, who died around 1330–1331, was buried.

Ashot Hovhannisyanyan also finds new evidence against Vardan’s authority, who dates the time of the editing of “Ashkarhatsoyts” to the end of the 14th century or the beginning of the 15th century (Hovhannisyanyan, 1957). The point is that Vardan Areveltsy considers Samarkand “the seat of the Netoghats nation”, which could have been during the time of Lenk Temur in 1370, and Moscow the centre of the

Russian nation, which could have been in 1389. However, “Ashkarhatsoyts” was written before 1453, because K. Polis is mentioned as a Greek city. However, all the above-mentioned references are found only in the extensive edition and do not constitute evidence against Vardan Areveltsy’s authority, since they could be the result of interpolation. In addition, the manuscript tradition recognises the author of “Ashkarhatsoyts” as the “new translator and second Enlightener” Vardan Vardapet, who could only be Vardan Areveltsi. Naturally, Vardan, different from Vardan Areveltsi, could use these adjectives for Vardan Areveltsi.

G. Hovsepyan, speaking about Vardan Vardapet, also mentions “Ashkharhatsoyts”, saying that its origin is no later than the second half of the 13th century, except small innovations that were introduced later (Hovsepyan, 1944).

All this shows that Vardan Areveltsi was specifically engaged in geography. In fact, in this regard, he is the second figure in the entire Middle Ages after Movses Khorenatsi, the author of the 5th century “Ashkarhatsoyts”. This is already a serious circumstance for assessing him as a geographer.

Conclusion

Thus, we can state that Vardan Areveltsi is one of the most prominent representatives of Armenian medieval historiography, who was highly appreciated by his contemporaries during his lifetime, and “Ashkarhatsoyts” is unsurpassed in its importance, since it is the second most important in all medieval historiography after the famous “Ashkarhatsoyts” of the 5th century. It is, first of all, a very important source for getting acquainted with the situation in Armenia in the 13th century. The study of this period is perhaps of key importance for medieval Armenian historiography. This was a period when both the administrative-territorial, economic and demographic picture of Armenia underwent radical changes. “Ashkarhatsoyts” not only provides important information about the above-mentioned changes, but is also an important source for studying a number of settlements and monasteries that existed during this period, many of which have not even been preserved today.

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