

A UNIQUE DOCUMENT OF THE CONSTANTINOPLE LIBRARY DATED TO 695 AD

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At the end of the 7th century of the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium) Asia Minor and Greece had hardly remained within it under the blows of the Arab Caliphate. The signs of the former glory of the Romans were merely the appellation of Constantinople as a *Universal capital city* and “The Ecclesiastical History” (in Greek) of the 5th century church historian Socrates Scholasticus¹ where he mentioned the name “deutevran ĩRwvmhn”² (“the Second Rome”) or “nevan ĩRwvmhn”³ (“the New Rome”)⁴ given to Constantinople by Emperor Constantine in 324.

“The Ecclesiastical History” of Socrates Scholasticus was much respected in the Byzantine Empire and for the Emperor Justinian II (685-695/705-711), who acted in a passionately fanatic manner, its translation into any other foreign language was equal to recognition of the domination of the Byzantine Empire. Because of that he made the Armenian Catholicos Sahak III Dzoraporetsi (677-703) (who together with his five bishops was held in Constantinople) to take part in the (Quinisext) Council of Trullo (692 AD), which conformed to the Creed of Chalcedon⁵. At the same time the Emperor Justinian wished to keep the Greek to Armenian skillful translator Philon Tirakatsi as a hostage in Constantinople to translate “The Ecclesiastical History” of Socrates Scholasticus. Then Justinian II allowed Catholicos Sahak Dzoraporetsi to return to Armenia.

In 695 Philon Tirakatsi was allowed by the Emperor Leontios (695/6-698) to return to Armenia from Constantinople. He brought with him the Armenian translation of “The Ecclesiastical History” of Socrates Scholasticus and handed it to Catholicos Sahak Dzoraporetsi in Dvin. The translation of “The Ecclesiastical History” had the following colophon: «Յամի վեցիազարերորդի երկե[ւ]րերորդի չորրորդի կենցաղում անցաւորի որպէս ունի ժամանակագրութիւն սուրբ Սոփի աւագ եկեղեցի տիեզերական մայրաքաղաքին Կոստանդնուպոլիս, եւ յելթն հարիւրերորդի չորրորդի Քրիստոսի

¹ The Ecclesiastical History of Socrates Scholasticus. Revised, with Notes, by the Rev. A. C. Zenos, D.D. Professor of New Testament Exegesis in the Theological Seminary at Hartford, Conn., [http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0380-0440,_Socrates_Scholasticus,_Historia_ecclesiastica_\[Schaff\],_EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0380-0440,_Socrates_Scholasticus,_Historia_ecclesiastica_[Schaff],_EN.pdf).

² Historia ecclesiastica, ΣΟΚΡΑΤΟΥΣ ΣΧΟΛΑΣΤΙΚΟΥ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣΤΙΚΗ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑ, I.16, p. 22.

³ Ibid., I.17, p. 23, V.8, p. 126.

⁴ The Ecclesiastical History of Socrates Scholasticus, pp. 53, 55, 225-226, 253.

⁵ The Canons of the Eastern Orthodox Church, The Canons of the Council in Trullo. Canon I. – *Labbe and Cossart, Concilia, Tom. VI., col. 1135 et seqq.* <https://sites.google.com/site/canonsoc/home/canons-of-the-ecumenical-councils/quinisextum-trullum-692>

գալստեանն, և ի հարիւր քառասուն և ի չորս թուականին. ի յիներորդումն ընդիքորոնին յառաջնումն ամի թագաւորութեանն եր[ր]որդ Ղեւոնի ինքնակալի աւգոստոսի՝ թարգմանեաց Փիլոն Տիրակացի առաջին ձեռնարկութեամբ զգիրս զայս մասնաւոր ծայրաքաղ [արարեալ] ի Սոկրատայ եկեղեցական պատմութենէն...»⁶.

M.Ter-Movsesyan, I. Orbeli, R. Blake, N.Adontz, P.Mouradyan and R.Vardanyan paid attention to this colophon. M.Ter-Movsesyan was sure of the originality of the four system dating in the colophon and tried to correlate with each other. I. Orbeli considered the synchronism of dates as the most vulnerable point in this colophon⁷. He suggested that there was denoted only a kind of original date the rest were developed later. R. Blake considered quite the possible existence of a chronology based on the Birth of Christ in the Christian Orient in the 7th century⁸. And it had been proved by the studies of a cryptographic inscription from Eghvard, a colophon notion by Anania Shirakatsi and the colophon of the translation of Socrates Scholasticus' work⁹.

As noted by R.Vardanyan, according to M.Ter-Movsesyan, R.Bleik and P.Mouradyan¹⁰, Philon writes about 6204 (5508+696) as the date of Creation following the "Constantinople (Byzantine) calendar" (the date of Creation at 5509/8 before the Birth of Christ), but the Christian date calculated 704, i.e. 6204-5508 is equal to 696 and not 704, and 6204-704 is equal to 5500¹¹. At the same time, R.Vardanyan suggested that Philon while computing the indiction was basing on the "Byzantine date" of the Creation (5508, which was introduced later than the Greek one)¹².

N. Adonts noted: "Philon's proper colophons have not been preserved, but one of the subsequent scribes summed up their content and added on his behalf the date of the Coming of Christ according to the Alexandrian calendar¹³ contrary to the Constantinople calendar used by Philon. Justly, according to the latter, from the beginning of the world until 696 are counted 6204 years, which is completely correct: 6204-5508=696. The Alexandrian calendar counts 5500 years and not 5508, thus an unknown scribe denoted 704 as the Coming of Christ (6204-5500=704) without noticing

⁶ See «Արշալոյս Արարատեան», օրագիր Զմիւռնիայ, 23 նոյեմբերի 1868, թիվ 845: Սոկրատ Սքոլաստիկոսի եկեղեցական պատմութիւն, թարգմանեաց Փիլոն Տիրակացի եւ Պատմութիւն վարուց սրբոյն Սեղբեստրոսի եպիսկոպոսի Հռովմա, թարգմանեալ սրբասուն Գրիգոր Զորափարեցւոյ, աշխատասիրութեամբ Մ.Վ. Տեր-Մովսէսեան, Վաղարշապատ, 1897, էջ ԺԷ:

⁷ И. А. Орбели, Две строительные надписи князей Камсараканов, ХВ, т. III, вып. 3 (1915), с. 303-304 (= "Избранные труды", Ереван, 1963, стр. 435-436).

⁸ Р. Блейк, По поводу даты армянского перевода «Церковной истории» Сократа Схоластика.- Христианский Восток, т. VI, вып. II, Петроград, 1918, с. 188.

⁹ П. Мурадян, Хронология систем летосчислений по армянским источникам. - ՀՍՍՀ ԳԱ "Լրաբեր հաս. գիտ.", 1975, N 10, с. 80-83.

¹⁰ Р. Блейк, ук. соч., с 173-185, П. Мурадян, ук. соч., с. 78-79.

¹¹ Ռ. Հ. Վարդանյան, Անանիա Շիրակացու հիշատակարանների մեկնության շուրջը և մի քանի տոմարական-ժամանակագրական հարցեր, - ՊԲՀ, 1987, N 1, էջ 198-199:

¹² Նույն տեղում, էջ 201:

¹³ About the Alexandrian and some other calendars see: O. Neugebauer, Astronomy and History. Selected Essays, New-York, 1983, p. 529, R. Hannah, Greek and Roman Calendars, New York, 2005, p. 154.

that it does not correspond to the other dates: 'the ninth year of indiction'=696 and the first year of the Emperor Leontios = 696"¹⁴.

It might be a colophon-like unique reference of an early medieval library file which was usual in Byzantium. It could be given out on the occasion of finishing the translation of the work of Socrates Scholasticus in the Constantinople library. Thus it may be supposed that, according to the accepted order, the library inspector gave Philo Tirakatsi a reference in Greek stating that he finished the translation of the book of Socrates Scholasticus in 695/6, indicating the date by the calendar of the Creation of the World and the Coming of Christ accepted in Byzantium. That date is followed by information about the year 144 [695, according to the Armenian calendar (551+144); there is mentioned a date according to the calendar of the country where the visitor of the library had arrived from] and 'the ninth year of indiction), i.e. the first year of the reign of the Emperor Leontios, Augustus (695-698) [with almost similar names (in Armenian: ՂԷԼՆՆ) before him were: Leo I (457-474) and Leo II (474), and after: Leo III (717-741)].

Unlike the remark of N. Adonts that "the year of the Coming of Christ was not in use not only in Philon's time but also in the following centuries"¹⁵, now, involving the "Chronology" of the Byzantine chronicler of the 8th century, Theophanes the Confessor, may be seen that there is no distortion in our document.

The "Chronography" of Theophanes the Confessor proves that Philo's colophone in reality is the above mentioned translated Armenian reference. The dates mentioned there are in complete cohesion with the official Byzantine chronology of the end of the 7th century. In the reference it is called «Տիեզերական մայրաքաղաք Կոստանդնուպոլսի Սուրբ Սոփի ավագ եկեղեցու կենցաղում անցաւորի ժամանակագրութիւն»:

The Greek original reference had to contain a real trap in the Byzantine Chalcedonic manner. It is possible to think that the translated into Armenian expression «կենցաղում անցաւորի»¹⁶ in the Greek original, in Chalcedonic sense, referred to Christ. Thus, this expression could be used while mentioning 704 ("the Coming of Christ"). Meanwhile, translating the reference into Armenian, in order to avoid the Chalcedonic trap, Philon moved the expression «կենցաղում անցաւորի» to the beginning of the reference¹⁷.

In fact, the chronologies of St. Sophia church and Theophanes accept only the Alexandrian calendar of the Creation of the world which lasted 5500 years, because

¹⁴ Ն.Ադոնց, Փոքր Սոկրատի հեղինակը, Երկեր հինգ հատորով, հ. Բ: Հատորը հրատարակության պատրաստեց Պ.Հ. Հովհաննիսյանը, Երևան, 2006, էջ 355:

¹⁵ Ն. Ադոնց, Փոքր Սոկրատի հեղինակը, էջ 355:

¹⁶ This expression of the Armenian reference P. Muradyan translated: "мира переходящего" (П. Мурадян, Хронология систем летосчислений по армянским источникам, с. 82).

¹⁷ From this reference some researchers wrongly concluded that while being in Constantinople the translator had adopted Chalcedonism.

according to Theophanes, the year 6188 of Creation is “the year 688 of Christ becoming Human (Incarnation)”¹⁸: $6188-688=5500$, and similarly the year 6204 according to the St. Sophia chronology (in the Armenian reference) is the year 704 (Coming of Christ): $6204-704=5500$. It means that it is the Alexandrian calendar and not a “Constantinople calendar”.

By an interesting coincidence the above mentioned reference of the Constantinople library and Theophanes the Confessor both mention the first year of the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Leontios, which by the indiction calculation corresponded to 695 AD, according to Theophanes, to the year 688 of Christ's Becoming Human¹⁹.

It is also noteworthy that the Byzantine chronology is not synchronic with the Roman one. Since the Alexandrian calendar of the Creation of the World was borrowed by the Byzantine church from the Roman church, in order to show the independence of the *universal capital Constantinople* from Rome, the year of the Creation was dated seven years later than the Alexandrian calendar of Rome, i.e. the year 5500 of the Roman or Alexandrian calendar corresponds to the year 5493 of the Byzantine chronology. That year is justified by the calendar used by Theophanes the Confessor; and according to the data almost contemporary to him the Armenian reference under consideration: $6188-695=5493$. Thus, the year 5501 of the Roman or Alexandrian calendar (which is the year 5494 of the Byzantine calendar) is 1 AD. And in the Byzantine Chalcedonian calendar the first year of the Coming of Christ is the 8 AD.

It can be inferred from the above-mentioned that while using the so-called Roman chronology it is necessary to add seven years to the year mentioned by Theophanes the Confessor in order to determine the right year corresponding to the Christian era²⁰. It is surprising that this unique document of the Byzantine library work with its incomprehensible dates remained unaffected in Armenian literature for 13 centuries, being copied and subjected to every kind of assessment²¹.

¹⁸ Թեոփանես Խոստովանող, Ժամանակագրություն, էջ 81:

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ It is possible to say that there was no Constantinople calendar (5508) though there were a number of interpretations on that.

²¹ As a result of different assessments even Philo of Tirak and others were unjustly accused of adhering to Chalcedonism.