

ON THE DATE OF ALTERNATIVE CATHOLICOS AZARIA KARKARETSI OF CILICIA (17th–18th CENTURIES)

(According to the Arabic Inscription of the Aleppo Sharia Court's Document)

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The Armenian community of Aleppo is the main Armenian community of Syria. Armenians have been mentioned in Aleppo since the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 6th centuries when they passed through the historical city of Aleppo, or Berya, on their way of making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem¹. As a viable Armenian community it was formed in the first half of the 14th century which is confirmed by the colophons of Gospels written there².

¹ **Syurmeyan A.**, History of the Aleppo Armenians, vol. 3, Paris, 1950, p. 1–2 (in Armenian).

² The oldest of them was written in 1329 in Aleppo “In the Church of the Holy Virgin”, scribe Stepanos Kraktsi “I wrote it in Aleppo, which is Berya, in the year of 1329”. There is inexactness concerning the date of this Gospel's colophon. Speaking about the mentioned manuscript in the *Catalogue of Armenian Manuscripts of the Aleppo Church of Forty Saint Martyrs and the Sasnavorats*, composed by Syurmeyan, as well as in the 3rd volume of the *History of the Aleppo Armenians* the date of its writing is noted as 1429. Mentioning him, Hovhannes Topuzian adds, “This is the first piece of certain information about the existence of an Armenian church and an organized Armenian community in Aleppo”. But Father Nerses Akinian, who presents in the mentioned issue of the journal *Handes Amsorya* the *Catalogue* composed by Syurmeyan, carries out analysis and introduces precisions about the listed manuscripts and writes ‘1329’ on page 442 and then putting in brackets: ‘not 1429’ and he precisely notes the page on which the date is mentioned: 214 v (**Syurmeyan A.**, History, vol. 3, p. 24 (in Armenian); also **Topuzian**, History of the Armenian Communities of Lebanon and Syria, Yerevan, Printing House of the Academy of the Arm. SSR, 1986, p. 31 (in Armenian); also **Akinian N.**, “Catalogue of Armenian Manuscripts of the Aleppo Church of Forty Saint Martyrs and the Sasnavorats, composed by Archbishop A. Syurmeyan, Chief of the Armenian Diocese of Aleppo” in *Handes Amsorya*, 1935, p. 442 (in Armenian); also **Abrahamian A.**, Brief Essay about the History of Armenian Communities, vol. I, Yerevan, Armenian State Printing House, 1964, p. 433 (in Armenian).

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The Armenian dioceses of Aleppo, Antioch, Beylan and Northern Syria are under the auspices of the Cilician Catholicosate, while the communities of Latakya, Damascus and Beirut are under the auspices of the Jerusalem Patriarchate³.

The Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia is the second largest and oldest diocese. Archbishop Hovakim (1432–1442)⁴ for the first time was mentioned as the Chief of Diocese in 1439. The Chronological Table of Armenian Catholicoses and Patriarchs of Berya mentions sixty chiefs of dioceses⁵.

From the 1660-s until the 1920-s Aleppo was the administrative and spiritual center of the Cilician Catholicosate⁶. The Holy See was the Mother Church of the Forty Saint Martyrs of Aleppo.

In the 17th century a new wave of unrests began in the Catholicosate of Sis due to internal disagreements between the Catholicosate of Cilicia and the Armenian Church in general, alongside with the spread of Catholicism. The situation resulted in the emergence of an alternative Catholicosate of Cilicia in the Aleppo diocese⁷.

Parallel to the prelature of Hovhannes IV Ayntaptsi (1601–1621) in 1601, at the end of the same month of December, an alternative Catholicosate was founded in Aleppo with Petros Karkaretsi as Catholicos⁸. And even when two years later reconciliation was established, according to Grigor Daranaghtsi it was “superficial and not from the depth of the heart”⁹. And after the death of Petros

³ **Makarian V.**, “About the Formation of the Armenian Nation and the Auspices of the Armenian Patriarchs of Constantinople” in Echmiadzin, 2016, p. 121 (in Armenian); also **Mikayelian V.**, History of the Armenian Diaspora, vol. 2, Yerevan, Printing House “Gitutiun” of the National Academy of Sciences of the RA, 2003, p. 332 (in Armenian).

⁴ **Syurmeyan A.**, p. 21–22.

⁵ **Azejian H.**, “The Diocese of Berya and its Churches” in Armenological Yearly Hask, 9th year, 1997–2001, Antelias-Lebanon, 2001, p. 390 (in Armenian).

⁶ Encyclopedia of the Armenian Diaspora, Yerevan, Printing House of the Armenian Encyclopedia, 2003, p. 520 (in Armenian).

⁷ See also about this: **Sanjian A.**, The Armenian Communities in Syria under the Ottoman Dominion, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965, p. 230.

⁸ **Gyuleserian B.**, Co-Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, History of the Cilicia Catholicoses, Antelias-Lebanon, Printing House Darekanuts, 1939, p. 207, 245–298 (in Armenian).

⁹ Chronicle of Archimandrite G. Daranaghtsi, Jerusalem, Printing House of the Apostolic See of Saints Hachob, 1915, p. 330 (in Armenian).

(1608) Hovhannes Ayntaptsi was the only Catholicos and the discord was liquidated¹⁰.

The history was repeated at the time of Catholicos Khachatur III Gaghatantsi (Sebastatsi, 1657–1674) when, in 1663, Davit Beryatsi became alternative Catholicos in Aleppo; he was of Karkar¹¹ origin. Ormanian, citing Chamchian, gives the year 1679 as the date of death of these two persons. He also notes that in 1665 Khachatur Sebastatsi sent a letter of “true conversion” to Pope Alexander VII and alternative Catholicos Davit Beryatsi sent an analogous letter to Pope Clement IX in 1668¹².

After the deaths of Catholicos Khachatur and alternative Catholicos Davit, the schism was not liquidated: “... as Sahak Meykhaneji has succeeded Khachatur Minterji, and Azaria succeeded Davit, instead of one Karkaretsi another Karkaretsi”¹³. However, as Ormanian writes, “We do not have any more details about the internal events of the Cilicia Catholicosate and the relationship of the double Catholicosates”¹⁴

After the Catholicos Khachatur III of Cilicia, the history of his followers is not known, even partly. So, there were disagreements about the dates of prelationship of Sahak Meykhaneji and alternative Catholicos Azaria Karkaretsi.

In order to precise the dates of the abovementioned Catholicoses’ prelationship, we have studied and compared sources and works introducing information about them.

Thus, in his list of Cilician Catholicoses Chamchian cites only the name of Sahak putting 1679 as the date of the beginning of his prelationship as Catholicos and estimating it as of ten years, while he mentions the name of the alternative

¹⁰ **Gyuleserian B.**, p. 265–266.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 394.

¹² **Ormanian M.**, National History, vol. II, Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin, 2001, p. 2998 (in Armenian); also **Chamchian M.** History of Armenia, vol. III, Yerevan, Printing House of Yerevan State University, 1984, p. 698, 699 (in Armenian).

¹³ **Ormanian M.**, p. 3004. The information communicated by Ormanian about the abovementioned two Catholicoses is limited to their names’ explanation. “We cannot find any explanation for the nickname of Sahak Meykhaneji, if he was a wine seller or the son of a wine seller, or simply a dissipated man. As for Azaria, he was from the family of Ganepian and had received the nickname of Ghatran which signifies “being as black as resin”.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

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Catholicos Azaria Karkaretsi in 1683 and only for five years¹⁵. The data given by Chamchian were used by Ormanian and other contemporary authors. In his *Dictionary of Armenian Proper Names*, Hrachya Ajarian mentions the years 1679–1683 for Catholicos Sahak's prelateship, referring to Ormanian¹⁶. But he also mentions 1679 as the beginning of his prelateship as alternative Catholicos and 1683 as the date of his departure for Rome, citing the works *National History* and *History of the Province of Sisvan*¹⁷, as well as the manuscripts N 105 (Typicon and Gospel, 1679) and N 108 (Typicon, 1681) of the Catalogue of Aleppo¹⁸ written during the years of prelateship¹⁹ of Sahak Meykhaneji and Azaria Karkaretsi. However it is noteworthy to state that in the same work *History of the Province of Sisvan* Father Ghevond Alishan mentions the date 1679 as the beginning of Sahak Meykhaneji's prelateship and the date 1683 as that of Azaria Karkaretsi's²⁰.

We have succeeded in finding some information about the date of Sahak Meykhaneji's prelateship in the Archives Department of the Matenadaran, in the Arabic document N 4 of the "Unstudied Fund of the 17th–19th Centuries' Arabic and Ottoman Turkish Documents"²¹.

This is the confirmation given the month Zul-haji, 13, 1087 of the Hegira/February 16, 1677, by the Sharia court of Aleppo²² about the fact that on

¹⁵ **Chamchian M.**, p. 111.

¹⁶ **Ajarian H.**, *Dictionary of Armenian Proper Names*, vol. IV, Yerevan, Printing House of Yerevan State University, 1948, p. 370 (in Armenian).

¹⁷ **Alishan Gh.**, *History of the Province of Sisvan*, Venice-Saint Lazarus, 1885 (in Armenian).

¹⁸ **Syurmeyan A.**, *Catalogue of the Armenian Manuscripts of the Aleppo Church of Forty Saint Martyrs and the Sasnavorats*, vol. I, Jerusalem, Printing House of Saint Hacob, 1935, p. 183, 186.

¹⁹ **Ajarian H.**, *Dictionary of Armenian Proper Names*, vol. I, Yerevan, Printing House of Yerevan State University, 1942, p. 57 (in Armenian).

²⁰ **Alishan Gh.**, p. 218.

²¹ About the Arabic documents of this fund, see details in **Makarian V., Khecho M.** "Inscriptions of the Sharia Court about the Statute of the Aleppo Armenians (XVII–XIX centuries), (According to the Information of Mashtots Matenadaran Arabic Documents)", under press, *The Messenger of Matenadaran*, N 23 (in Armenian).

²² Islamic religious courts. In the ante-Ottoman period Sharia courts were equivalent of the *mağlis al hukm* and of the less utilized *mağlis al qadā*. While in the Ottoman period the Sharia courts were called *maḥkama* (**Hallaq W.B.**, "The Qadl's Diwan (sijill) before the Ottomans", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, vol. 61, No. 3 (1998), p. 415–436, p. 418).

this date the Bishop Poghos walad Azar of the Armenian Christian community of Aleppo was the *vekil* (representative) of Azaria al-Nasrani²³, Patriarch of the Armenian community, while Poghos walad Murad was confirmed as the *vekil* of Poghos walad Azar and the tax collector of the Diocese.

We do not see any Patriarch in 1677 either in the list of Armenian Patriarchs or among those of Constantinople or Jerusalem. Studies allowed to think that certainly Azaria Karkaretsi is meant, the alternative Catholicos of Sahak Meykhaneji, Catholicos of Sis²⁴. However the use of the term ‘Patriarch’ (Arab. بطریق) instead of ‘Catholicos’ (كاثوليكوس) is not exact.

As it was noted above, there is inexactness concerning the years of these two Catholicoses’ prelateship, as it was also mentioned by Cilician co-Catholicos Babken I Gyuleserian in his work *History of the Cilicia Catholicoses*. The latter makes a critical comparison between a number of manuscripts, colophons and sources, trying to complete the historical lacuna and to introduce some precisions in the issue of Sahak I Catholicos’ and alternative Catholicos Azaria’s prelateship dates.

Manuscripts compared by Babken I are:

1) Manuscript N 331 of Bzommar (1687), in the starting list of which it is said, “In the year 1674 the Patriarchal See was occupied by Ter Sahak, Catholicos of the House of Cilicia, i.e. Kilistsi”²⁵. We must note that the date and the place of birth mentioned here are exact. This list is partly borrowed from the *Mother Register* of Cilician Catholicoses and has been enriched by further additions.

2) Lectionary of Ayntap written in round letters, “And the manuscript was written in 1677 by the humble and unworthy Hovhannes in the province of

²³ In the inscriptions of the Sharia courts (sijill, sijilat) the words al-Nasrani (Christian), as well as al-Rumi, al-zimmi added to the names of Christian plaintiffs in an obligatory way. But, it must be said that it was not obligatory to mention the religious allegiance of Moslem plaintiffs. The use of these and some other terms in the inscriptions of Ottoman religious courts was called ‘textual differentiation’ (For details, see: Najwa al-Qattan, “Textual Differentiation in the Damascus Sijill” Women, the Family, and Divorce Laws in Islamic History, Amira El Azhary Sonbol (ed.), Syracuse University Press, 1996, p. 191–202.

²⁴ Gyuleserian also gives other pieces of information about the name of the alternative Catholicos Azaria, “Azaria is also known as Ganepiants as family name. While on his gravestone it is written Azzaria Carib, which must be said Caribian or Gharibian in Armenian. It is difficult to precise which one is right: Ganepiants or Gharibian” (Gyuleserian, p. 418).

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 411.

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Germanik, in the town of Zeytun, in the monastery of the Blessed Holy Virgin and Saint Gregory the Illuminator and the other seven churches which are here for the protection of Christians. At the time of the Catholicos Ter Sahak of Cilicia", etc.²⁶.

3) Manuscript N 77 of the Red Monastery of Ankara (Miscellany, "I wrote this Book of Sermons in the year of 1677 in the province of Germanik, in the town of Zeytun,... at the time of the Catholicoses Sahak and Ter Azaria of Cilicia", etc.²⁷.

4) Typicon N 105 of Aleppo (1679), "And I copied this Typicon and other songs from an excellent exemplary on April 11, 1128 in the capital town of Aleppo... And the Typicon was finished at the time of the Catholicoses Sahak and Ter Azaria of Cilicia"²⁸.

5) Typicon N 106 of Aleppo (1671), "And I copied this Typicon and the other songs from an excellent exemplary on August 4, 1120, in the capital town of Aleppo... And the Typicon was finished at the time of the Catholicoses Sahak and Ter Azaria of Cilicia by the ... priest Atzatiur"²⁹.

The date of prelationship of Sahak I is also mentioned in the manuscript N 307 of Jerusalem on the last empty page of which the burglary and the murder of pilgrims are mentioned in 1677, at the time when Ter Sahak was Catholicos in Sis"³⁰.

At last, Catholicos Babken also cites a document which has been preserved namely from Catholicos Sahak, "Sahak, servant of Jesus-Christ, Catholicos of all Armenians, Patriarch of the Holy See of Jerusalem and servant of the Dexter of Saint Illuminator until the moment when the debt will be paid; it was written on August 2, 1680". It is sealed by the Catholicos seal on which it is graved: "Jesus-Christ's servant, Sahak Catholicos of Armenians, Patriarch of Saint Jerusalem, in 1674"³¹.

Catholicos Babken with certitude notes that Sahak Meykhaneji's dates mentioned by Chamchian must be precised according to the abovementioned

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 413. The manuscript was transferred to Jerusalem.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 414.

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ For more details about the other cited colophons, see Gyuleserian, p. 413–415.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 414.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 413.

colophons, as well as according to the date mentioned on the Catholicos seal: 1674.

And if immediately after his death in 1686 he was followed by Catholicos Grigor II Adanatsi (according to the date of his official seal), Sahak I was Catholicos for 12 years and passed away in 1686 and not in 1689. But unfortunately his activities during those long years are unknown to history.

In none of the abovementioned sources the fact of Azaria Karkaretsi's being the Chief of Aleppo Diocese is mentioned. Only Archbishop Artavazd Syurmeyan is writing about it, citing the brief colophons of Ter Ghazar Zeytuntsi and Ter Astvatzatur Urfatsi. According to these colophons, we find the first reference of Archbishop Azaria as the Chief of the Aleppo Diocese in the Typicon written in Aleppo on October 21, 1671 and the second one in 1673 at the end of the small Ritual N 102 of the Aleppo collections³². Syurmeyan also supposes that the alternative Catholicos Davit had ordained Azaria as his successor and he notes with precision the dates of his prelationship as alternative Catholicos according to Gyuleserian³³.

Until 1677 the alternative Catholicos Azaria Karkaretsi is not mentioned along with Catholicos Sahak I of Cilicia. Chamchian mentions 1683 as the date of Azaria's prelationship as alternative Catholicos during five years³⁴. However, according to the abovementioned documents, the date 1677 should be mentioned, i.e. the third year (1674) of Sahak's prelationship.

Until 1681 Sahak I and the alternative Catholicos Azaria are almost always mentioned together, while beginning with 1683 only Sahak is mentioned in the colophons. This must be explained by the fact that Azaria, taking a great interest in Catholicism, despite his age left for Rome in 1683 (as it is mentioned on his gravestone)³⁵. According to Gyuleserian, the fact of renunciation was the result of persecutions of Catholics, as Turks compelled the Catholics to adopt Islam. Some of them fell as brave martyrs, others renounced their religion and were released,

³² **Syurmeyan A.**, History, p. 622; also Depository of Jerusalem Manuscripts, N 2497 (in Armenian). Also **Syurmeyan A.**, Catalogue, p. 180.

³³ **Syurmeyan A.**, History, p. 623, 626.

³⁴ **Chamchian M.**, also Chronicle, p. 111.

³⁵ **Gyuleserian B.**, p. 416.

and some others falsely renounced and fled from the danger to find refuge in foreign countries³⁶.

In Rome the alternative Catholicos Azaria passed away on May 23, 1710, at the age of 92 and was buried in the Church of Saint Mary the Egyptian³⁷. After him the alternative Catholicosate of Berya ceased to exist, but the discord was not liquidated.

So, in addition to the voluminous study and the precisions made by Catholicos Babken we have another source, that is the abovementioned Arabic document of the Matenadaran. The data and dates given by this document are also important, because as an inscription of the Sharia court it is in fact an official document. But another important circumstance is testified by this document: even if the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire were given some freedom in the frame of the millet system in the field of communal and religious issues³⁸, every change in the internal ecclesiastic life was authorized and controlled by the Ottoman authorities.

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(ըստ Հալեպի շարիաթական դատարանի արաբերեն արձանագրության)

ՄԱԿԱՐՅԱՆ Վ.

Ամփոփում

XVII դարում Կիլիկիո կաթողիկոսության Հալեպի թեմում առաջացան հակաթոռություններ, որոնց ժամանակագրական պատմությունը թերի է ներկայացված: Տարակարծություններ կան մասնավորապես Խաչատուր Գ. Գաղատացի (Սեբաստացի) (1657–1674 թթ.) կաթողիկոսին հաջորդած Սահակ Մեյխանեջիի և նրա հակաթոռ Ազարիա Կարկառեցու պաշտոնավարման թվականների շուրջ:

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 415–416.

³⁷ Ibidem, 416.

³⁸ About this see details in Makarian.

Մ. Մաշտոցի անվան Մատենադարանի Արխիվային բաժնի «17–19-րդ դդ. արաբերեն և օսմաներեն վավերագրերի անմշակ ֆոնդի» N 4 վավերագիրը՝ (արաբերեն, Հալեպի Շարիա դատարանի արձանագրություն) վերոնշյալ կաթողիկոսների պաշտոնավարման թվականների ճշգրտման աղբյուր է: Վավերագրի հաղորդած տվյալները համեմատելի են Կիլիկիկոն Բաբկեն Ա. Աթոռակից կաթողիկոս Կյուլեսերյանի կատարած լայնածավալ հետազոտությանն ու ուղղումներին և Մ. Չամչյանի. Մ. Օրմանյանի և այլոց հաղորդած տեղեկություններին:

О ХРОНОЛОГИИ ПРАВЛЕНИЯ АЛЬТЕРНАТИВНОГО КАТОЛИКОСА КИЛИКИИ АЗАРИЯ КАРКАРЕЦИ (XVII–XVIII ВВ.)

(согласно арабскому документу шариатского суда Алеппо)

МАКАРЯН В.

Резюме

В XVII веке католикосат Киликии переживал период волнений, связанных с появлением альтернативных католикосов Киликии в епархии Алеппо, хронология правления которых представлена не полностью. В частности, имеются расхождения в датах правления последующих католикосов Хачатура Галатаци (Себастаци, 1657–1674) – Саака Мейханеджи и его альтернативы, католикоса Азарии Каркареци (1677–1683).

На основе представленного в статье архивного документа шариатского суда Алеппо (на арабском языке), хранящегося в Матенадаране имени Маштоца (Архив Матенадарана, Необработанный фонд арабских и османских документов с XVII–XIX вв., N 4), удалось установить даты правления вышеупомянутых католикосов. Был проведен сравнительный анализ указанных в этом документе дат с уточнениями, сделанными сокатоликосом Сиса (Киликии) Бабкеном I Кюлесеряном, апеллировавшим к данным М. Чамчяна, М. Орманяна и др.