

SEN AREVSHATIAN AS SYSTEMATIST OF ARMENIAN PHILOSOPHIC THOUGHT OF THE 5TH - 6TH CENTURIES

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The latest version of the systematization of Armenian philosophical thought of the 5th - 6th centuries, which is now in scientific circulation and has not lost its monumental significance, is described in the work *Formation of Philosophical Science in Ancient Armenia (5th - 6th centuries)* by academician Sen Arevshatian. The author wrote it in Russian, presenting his deep research comments to a wider circle of scientists.

Sen Arevshatian was not only a skilled researcher of Armenian philosophical thought of the 5th - 6th centuries, but also of the entire Middle Ages, as the Armenian Middle Ages began from the Golden Age and lasted until the 17th - 18th centuries.

It is extremely important that the works of the Armenian philosophers of the 5th - 6th centuries were investigated in the context of ancient and all-Christian philosophical thought. This is a scientific requirement that Sen Arevshatian conscientiously carried out. He was also one of the unique specialists who mastered the ancient Armenian language grabar and deciphered medieval manuscripts, revealing crucial facts.

The views of ancient and Christian authors that have influenced philosophical thoughts of the 5th century are continuously compared in Arevshatian's books.

After the creation of Armenian letters by Mashtots in 405, Armenia experienced a spiritual uplift in literature, historiography, theology and science. At that very time philosophy became a separate branch of science and its first representative, as Sen Arevshatian has actually stated, was Mesrop Mashtots in his *Faithful Speeches*.

All the specialists of the Armenian Middle Ages know that *Faithful Speeches* have been and are published under the name of Gregory the Illuminator.

Basing himself on the testimony of *The Life of Mashtots* by Archimandrite Koriun, the German Armenologist Vetter proved that the author of the speeches was Mashtots. At the time of Gregory the Illuminator, the Armenian Arshakuni Kingdom was in a flourishing state. In the *Dictionary* by F.A. Brockhaus and I.A. Efron we can read about this: «Tiridate III the Great, the son of Khosrow I, Armenian king of Parthian origin, ruled by 286-342, and successfully fought against the Sassanids (the new Persian kings).

In 302, Tiridate adopted Christianity, replaced pagan temples with churches and cathedrals, invited many clergymen from Syria and Asia Minor and proclaimed Christianity State religion. The period of his reign is the brightest period in the history of the Armenian people»¹.

¹ Brockhaus and Efron 2012: 691.

This fact was well-known to Vetter, so he mentioned that the *Faithful Speeches* spoke about the decline of the Arshakuni dynasty and there was a hint about the last King Artashes IV (422-428)².

Sen Arevshatian presents how the development of philosophic thought was accompanied by the apparition in Armenian of words expressing philosophical terms. The translations into Armenian of the works by Greek philosophers and early Christian thinkers contributed to the apparition of these terms. First of all, new words were introduced in the Armenian language through the translation of the *Art of Grammar* by Dionysius Thrax and the works of his Armenian commentators.

In his book *Dionysius Thrax and his Armenian commentators*, Nikoghayos Adontz has an apt remark about the interconnection of grammar, philosophy and rhetoric: «Though the science of grammar was from long ago a separate and an independent subject, but in ancient times it was studied together with rhetoric and philosophy, and was considered in general as a necessary link in the scientific meditative system»³.

The translation of the works by Greek philosophers began in the 5th century and got great development thanks to the formation of the Hellenophil School at the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 6th century.

The Armenian philosophical thought of the 5th century was influenced by the writings of Philo Judaeus, Hermes Trismegistus, Augustus the Blessed, Porphyry, Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras and other thinkers of the ancient world.

Mesrop Mashtots was acquainted with these works; his speeches were theological and ethical, and also examined philosophical questions.

According to Arevshatian, Mashtots' *Faithful Speeches* are examples of typical patristic philosophy. In his speeches Mashtots is examining a number of philosophical problems, one of which is the problem of the relationship between evil and good. And Eznik Koghbatsi contradicts the dualism of the Zoroastrian religion, according to which the evil is from Ahriman, and the good from Ahura Mazda⁴.

According to Mashtots, God created every good thing. He has given the human and the angels the right of free will, which can lead man either to the good or to the evil.

Freedom of choice granted to man is the greatest gift that a person should use to do good deeds.

According to Arevshatian, from the viewpoint of idealistic monotheism Mashtots does not regard God as a participant in the evil works of the world. This approach identifies his doctrine with Christian canonic conclusions⁵.

Mashtots attaches great importance to the human mind, which lives in the brain and directs all organs of the human body⁶.

² Arevshatian 1973: 46.

³ Adontz 2008: XV.

⁴ Arevshatian 1973: 61.

⁵ Ibid: 65.

⁶ Ibid: 71.

Faithful speeches clearly explains the role of the soul in human life: «The mouth is speaking, the eyes are seeing, the ears are listening, the nostrils are smelling, the hands are touching, the feet are walking; the heart moves with the soul, glorifies God with the vivifying soul, every sensation is moved by the Lord. And when the soul is parted from the body, the body dies and the members of the body are divided one from another»⁷.

Sen Arevshatian pointed out that immediately after the adoption of Christianity, the Armenian philosophical thought used Persian, Greek and Syriac scriptures and used them for state and religious needs⁸.

Based on these premises, the Armenian philosophical thought of the 5th century began to emerge, the first prominent representative of which was Eznik Koghbatsi.

In 1940 V. Chaloyan published in Russian the monograph *The Issue of the Doctrine of Eznik Koghbatsi, Armenian philosopher of the 5th century*, in which he says that in his book *The Refutation of Sects* Eznik is struggling against the materialistic and atheistic views of Epicurus⁹. Chaloyan stresses that according to Eznik the world consists of four elements: fire, air, water, soil. «In another place, Eznik uses the words warmth, coldness, moisture and drought under the influence of Aristotle. In these two types of enumerations Eznik sees no difference, and he presents either the first one or the second by the word element»¹⁰.

In Chaloyan's opinion, Eznik defined in the 5th century the material as Paul Holbach, German philosopher of the 18th century, and, of course, it will be absurd to think that Holbach was acquainted with Eznik, but the fact is that the German philosopher says the same thing as Eznik¹¹.

Chaloyan appreciates Eznik as a highly advanced philosopher who does not accept the fate of the destiny and insists that the destiny of a man is in his own hands¹².

Sen Arevshatian thinks that Eznik, the brilliant representative of the Armenian «School of Translators», probably did not write a single philosophic work, even if the *Refutation of the Sects* is the most important source of philosophical thought in the first half of the 5th century¹³.

In his research, Arevshatian mentions the sources Eznik used to write his masterpiece:

- 1) Matthew of Olympia – † 312
- 2) Aristides the African – 2nd century
- 3) Epiphanius of Cyprus – 315-403

⁷ Gregory the Illuminator: 1838: 155.

⁸ Arevshatian 1973: 51.

⁹ Chaloyan 1940: 27.

¹⁰ Ibid: 30.

¹¹ Ibid: 32.

¹² Ibid: 43.

¹³ Arevshatian 1973: 76.

- 4) Basil of Caesarea, or the Great – 330-379
- 5) Hippolytus – 170-235
- 6) Theodore of Mopsuestia – 4th – 5th centuries
- 7) Origen Adamantius – 185-253
- 9) Diodore of Tarsus – 4th century
- 10) Ephrem the Syrian – 306-373
- 11) Irenaeus – 130-200
- 12) Cyril of Alexandria – † 444

Besides these works, Eznik also used Mashtots' *Faithful Speeches* and Grigor Parthev's *Book of Questions*.

Eznik Koghbatsi's *Refutation of the Sects* was translated into several European languages in the 19th and 20th centuries and is well-known in international armenology.

Especially French armenologist Louis Mariès was interested in Eznik's work. After the translation of Vaillant de Florival he once again translated Eznik's *Refutation of the Sects* and during his entire scientific career his attention was concentrated on it¹⁴.

On the occasion of the translation and commentaries by Louis Mariès in 1924, N. Adontz wrote an extensive and remarkable article entitled *Critical Remarks about Eznik* (on the occasion of Mariès' work). He writes: «Among the ancient writers, Eznik Koghbatsi is one of those unique figures who have kept at last until now their traditional fame strong and impeccable. ... Not only by the style and content, but also from the viewpoint of credibility, the little work by Koghbatsi is considered the pride of the Armenian literature»¹⁵. Eznik's work has reached our days without title. Arsen Bagratuni has called it *Refutation of the Sects*¹⁶.

Mariès changed this title and turned it into *De Deo*. Adontz does not accept this title. The title *De Deo* would have been unacceptable for Eznik for the simple reason that in his preface he found it necessary to emphasize that the essence of God is inaccessible and incomprehensible¹⁷.

According to Adontz, in Part I of his book, Eznik denied the famous Gnostic Valentianus and did not need to call *De Deo* his contradiction¹⁸.

Arevshatian dedicates a separate fragment to the problems of Eznik's book. He cites the opinion of German armenologist Heinrich Geltzer (1847-1906) who says that Eznik is more an antic Armenian than a Christian archimandrite¹⁹.

Confirming the priority of the Divine substance and the secondary nature of the material world as God's creation, Eznik denies the viewpoints of Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras, Stoics and Epicureans²⁰.

¹⁴ Mariès 1924; 1928; 1959.

¹⁵ Adontz 2006: 131.

¹⁶ Ibid: 134.

¹⁷ Ibid: 135.

¹⁸ Ibid: 135.

¹⁹ Arevshatian 1973: 85.

Eznik strongly condemns pagan superstitions, animism and Satanism²¹. The Armenian philosopher does not accept Plato's view of immortality of the soul. He accepts the viewpoint of the Christian doctrine that the human soul is immortal and continues to live in the inner world, deprived of its body and earthly desires²².

Naturally, Arevshatian touches upon the strict criticism of the Persian religion and the Chaldean astrology by Eznik.

One of those who shaped the philosophical thought of the 5th century was also Eghishe, in whose views some manifestations of the Neo-Platonist doctrine appear for the first time²³.

The examination of the theological and philosophical works of Eghishe reveals the truth that his mentality shared the doctrines of the predecessors of Neo-Platonism Philo of Alexandria, Hermes Trismegistus, as well as Neo-Platonists Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus and others²⁴.

Following the predecessor of Neo-Platonist Hermes Trismegistus, Eghishe writes: «There are three worlds, God, nature, man. God is the spiritual world, nature the sensual world, man is the spiritual and the sensual world»²⁵.

Arevshatian's examination of the philosophical-scientific terminology of the 5th-6th centuries is important for the systematization of the Armenian philosophical thought of that period. Philosophical neologisms especially increased thanks to the activity of the Hellenophil School. New words such as 'acquire a skill', 'skillfulness', 'homonym', 'sexuality', 'logically reasoning', 'philosophy', etc. were introduced in Armenian²⁶.

Arevshatian substantiates: translations of the works by Dionysius Thrax, Antonius, Theon of Alexandria, Philo Judaeus, Irenaeus, as well as *Definitions* by adjoining them Hermes Trismegistus, the *Romance of Alexander of Macedonia* by Pseudo-Callisthenes and other translations were carried out in the 450s and end up in the mid-480s; they influenced the works of the writers of that time Eghishe, David the Grammarian, Movses Khorenatsi and Mambre the Decipherer²⁷.

Arevshatian presents the division into periods of the Hellenophil School activities, dividing them into four periods²⁸. These translations have international value because the originals of some of them has been lost, and only the Armenian translations are known to the scientific world, as for instance, seven out of the fourteen works by Philo of Alexandria which have been preserved only in Armenian²⁹.

²⁰ Ibid: 88.

²¹ Ibid: 104.

²² Ibid: 108.

²³ Ibid: 120.

²⁴ Ibid: 120.

²⁵ Ibid: 128.

²⁶ Ibid: 158.

²⁷ Ibid: 166.

²⁸ Ibid: 186-188.

²⁹ Ibid: 151-152.

Arevshatian clarifies an important question: the time of the translation into Armenian of Plato's *Dialogues*. In his epistle addressed to Archimandrite Sarkis, Grigor Magistros, philosopher, statesman, translator, writer, pedagogue and scientist of the 11th century, writes that he has started translating Plato's *Timon* and *Phedon* dialogues, as well as the *Euclidean Geometry*³⁰.

In another epistle, addressed to two of his prominent disciples, Barsegh and Eghise, Magistros testifies that he recommended them to read Aristotle³¹. This means that the philosophy that originated in Armenia in the 5th century has already become a subject taught in advanced schools.

Sen Arevshatian considers as a basis to determine the time of translation of Plato's works their vocabulary and style, which clearly coincides with the linguistic mentality of the first half of the 6th century of the Hellenophil School and is contemporary with the Armenian versions of works by David the Invincible and Pseudo-Aristotle³².

At the same time, he notices a linguistic affiliation with earlier translations so that they could have been translated earlier³³.

Among the creators of the 5th century philosophical science, Arevshatian is giving a place, after David the Grammarian, to Movses Khorenatsi. This is not surprising because in his famous Epistle Ghazar Parpetsi names Khorenatsi «Blessed Movses the Philosopher (Khorenatsi), who, even if he was living in the flesh, was nearly a member of the heavenly army. Did not these Armenian monks persecute him from here to there?»³⁴.

In the part devoted to Khorenatsi, S. Arevshatian comes to a conclusion that is a powerful argument to prove that the Father of Armenian Historiography lived and worked in the Golden Age: «It was precisely in the 480s, when some of the feudal princes were ready for an armed struggle against the Persians, while among some other part of the society moods of despair and hopelessness appeared, Khorenatsi's *History of Armenia* was penetrated by a high spirit of patriotism and the idea of national independence»³⁵.

The last part of Arevshatian's book refers to David the Invincible, the most prominent representative of Armenian philosophical thought. Arevshatian devoted a lot of studies to this philosopher and translated his works into Russian.

In 1999, the scientist dedicated to the 1700th anniversary of the adoption of Christianity as State religion in Armenia in 2001 the publication of the *Definitions of Philosophy* of David the Invincible, his *Analysis of Porphyry's Introduction* and his *Analysis of Aristotle Analytics*.

³⁰ Ibid: 218.

³¹ Grigor Magistros 1910: 105.

³² Arevshatian 1973: 221.

³³ Ibid: 222.

³⁴ Nalbandian 1983: 320.

³⁵ Arevshatian 1973: 256.

«In the history of Armenian ancient philosophy, a most prominent role belongs to David the Invincible. His works marked a turn from ecclesiastic-theological thought to secularism, toward scientific orientation, based on antique heritage»³⁶.

David defines what philosophy is and what its role is in human life. In these issues he opposes skeptics and agnostics, who rejected the philosophy as science and the possibility of knowledge of the world³⁷.

David the Invincible puts forward six philosophical definitions, relying on the ideas of ancient classics Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, who give the ultimate idea of the notion of philosophy, the essence and significance of the subject³⁸.

The first definition is that philosophy is a science about the being; the second that philosophy is a science about the divine and the human; the third that philosophy is the thought of death; the fourth that philosophy is to be similar to God in the limits of human possibilities; the fifth that philosophy is the art of arts and the science of sciences, and finally the sixth that philosophy is the love of wisdom³⁹. Arevshatian presents separate explanations for these six definitions.

David divides the philosophy into two parts, theoretical and applied. The supreme degree of knowledge relies on human conscience, and that is philosophy, as the supreme form of intelligence knowledge, generalizing in it the whole perception of the surrounding world⁴⁰.

David the Invincible defines very correctly science and art. Science is precise, while art is flowing. According to David, philosophy helps a person to reasonably recognize and achieve divine heights by restraining himself from the beastly nature. The ultimate goal of David's philosophy is «to be similar to God in the limits of human possibilities»⁴¹.

The Neo-Platonist philosophical orientation also exists in Grigor Narekatsi's *Book of Lamentation*, in which the genius thinker laments on the remoteness of man from divine commandments. The reference to this phenomenon can be met near French illuminators, as well as near German philosopher I.Kant.

In Voltaire's articles in the *Philosophical Dictionary* we see the sharp criticism of the Christian thinker on atheists and pagans. «Atheism – defect of some intelligent people, lack of faith - defect of stupid people; and what are deceivers? Well, just deceivers»⁴². Or «The misfortune of the Romans was that they were not acquainted with the Law of Moses, and later upon the law of the disciples of our Savior Jesus

³⁶ Ibid: 269.

³⁷ Ibid: 297.

³⁸ Ibid: 298.

³⁹ Ibid: 298.

⁴⁰ Ibid: 302.

⁴¹ Ibid: 307.

⁴² Voltaire 2004: 603.

Christ, that they had no faith and mixed the supreme divine worship with Mars, Venus and Apollo, gods that did not exist»⁴³.

The concept of David the Invincible about the man being a benefactor exists in Emmanuel Kant's philosophy: «It is the duty of every human being to make charity, that is to say, to help people and to contribute to their happiness, without any hope of receiving any reward»⁴⁴.

In nominalist problems, David the Invincible is a follower of Aristotle's doctrine, followed by the late Armenian nominalist philosophers Vahram Rabuni, Hovhan Vorotnetsi, Grigor Tatevatsi. The latter followed David's views and created their own nominalist doctrine relying on it⁴⁵.

In his book *The Formation of Philosophical Science in Ancient Armenia (5th-6th centuries)* Sen Arevshatian presents the development of Armenian philosophical thought from the period of the adoption of Christianity in Armenia to the first half of the 6th century. The scientist precisely systematizes the periods of patristic philosophy, marking it's the transition of the latter to scientific philosophy. The most important achievement of this systematization is to make it evident that at the end of the 5th century and the first half of the 6th century the Armenian philosophical mind was keeping pace with the philosophical thought of civilized Christian countries and in its time aspect, it was professing such progressive ideas that have not lost their relevance even today.

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⁴³ Voltaire 2004: 618.

⁴⁴ Kant 1999: 849.

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