

ԱՐՓԻՆԷ ԶԱՆԹԻԿԵԱՆ

## ՅՈՎՅԱՆ Ա. ՄԱՆԴԱԿՈՒԵՆՈՒ ԿԱԹՈՂԻԿՈՍՈՒԹԵԱՆ ԱՌԱՋԻՆ ՇՐՋԱՆԸ

### ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

Յօդուածը Հայ Եկեղեցու Ե. դարի պատմութեան մի հատուածին վերաբերող ուսումնասիրութիւն է: Գիտական սոյն հետազօտութեամբ ներկայացնում ենք Յովհան Ա. Մանդակունու կաթողիկոսութեան առաջին շրջանը: Հայոց Եկեղեցու պատմութեան մէջ նշանակալի դերակատարում ունի Յովհան Ա. Մանդակունի հայրապետը (478–490 թթ.):

Կաթողիկոսութեան առաջին շրջանում՝ 481–484 թթ., Յովհան Ա. Մանդակունին մշտապէս մասնակցել է հայ ազգային-ազատագրական պայքարին, հայրենիքի պաշտպանութեանը՝ ըստ էութեան չկարողանալով հոգևոր-եկեղեցական ակներև գործունէութիւն ծաւալել: Սակայն կարող ենք վստահաբար ասել, որ նրա հայրապետութեան երկրորդ շրջանն առաւել քան բեղուն է եղել՝ եկեղեցական, ծիսապաշտամունքային բարեկարգութիւններով, եւ Հայոց Եկեղեցու հետագայ ընթացքի համար ունեցել է վճռորոշ նշանակութիւն: Ներկայ տեսակէտը հիմնաւորում է մեր յաջորդ յօդուածներում, իսկ այստեղ առանձնակի անդրադարձել ենք Յովհան Ա. Մանդակունու կաթողիկոսութեան տարիներին ու տևողութեանը վերաբերող խնդրին, ներկայացրել հայ պատմիչների վկայութիւններն այս առընչութեամբ: Այս վիճելի հարցին վերաբերող տեսակէտները քննարկուել են առանձին եւ որոշակիօրէն հիմնաւորուել: Յօդուածի գլխաւոր նպատակը հեղինակային-ինքնուրոյն վերլուծութիւն ներկայացնելն է, ուստի որոշ վիճելի խնդիրների, չուսաբանուած հարցերի, մեզ հասած պատմական տեղեկութիւններին աղերսող անճշտութիւնների վերաբերեալ առաջադրել ենք մեր տեսակէտն ու դիրքորոշումը:

ARPINE CHANTIKYAN

## THE FIRST PERIOD OF THE PONTIFICATE OF HOVHAN I MANDAKUNI<sup>1</sup>

Catholicos Hovhan I Mandakuni (478–490) has a significant role in the Armenian Church history.

According to historical sources, Hovhan Mandakuni was born in the village of Tsakhnot<sup>2</sup> around 420<sup>3</sup>. It is assumed that he was one of junior translators and a disciple of Sahak the Parthian (387–439) and Mesrop Mashtots (361/362–440). The inscription of the “Canonical Term” inserted in the second volume of the “Armenian Book of Canons” also testifies to this: “Armenian Catholicos and translator Hovhan Mandakuni was the disciple of Patriarch Saint Sahak the Great...”<sup>4</sup>. Perhaps we should not confuse Hovhan Mandakuni with Hovhan Yekeghetsatsi, who was among the senior disciples of Sahak the Parthian and Mesrop Mashtots<sup>5</sup>.

It is noteworthy that in the works of none of the Armenian historians have we found information that Hovhan Mandakuni went to Greece and studied in Greek schools. According to Archimandrite Barsegh Sarkissian, among junior translators Hovhan Mandakuni is perhaps the only one free from “hellenistic defects”<sup>6</sup>.

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1\* *Ստացուել է՝ 4.12.2022, գրախօսուել է՝ 18.02.2023: էլ. հասցե՝ arpine.chantikyan@gmail.com: հմբազիր՝ Գեւորգ Սարեան:*

2 Tsakhnot village is located in Arsharunik (Arshamunik) region of Turuberan province of Greater Armenia. See “Dictionary of Toponyms of Armenia and Adjacent Regions” (in Armenian), compiled by T. Hakobyan, S. Melik-Bakhshyan, H. Barseghyan, vol. 2, Yerevan, 1988, column 1, p. 829.

3 See STEPANOS TARONETSI ASOGHIK, *Universal History* (in Armenian), critical text by G. Manukyan, “Armenian Classical Authors”, 10<sup>th</sup> century, vol. 15, book 2, Antelias-Lebanon, 2010, ch. 2, p. 688.

4 “Armenian Book of Canons” (in Armenian) by Vazgen Hakobyan, vol. 2, Yerevan, 1971, p. 239. Cf. “Book of Canons and Judgement” (in Armenian), Constantinople, 1831, p. 123. See also ARCHIMANDRITE HUSIK MOVSISYAN, *History of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church*, “Ararat”, 1884, No 11, p. 476; ARCHIMANDRITE MELCHIZEDEK MOURATIANTS, *History of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church* (in Armenian), Jerusalem, 1872, p. 100.

5 See BALASANIAN S., *History of Armenia: from the Beginning to the Present Day* (in Armenian), Tiflis, 1890, pp. 250–251.

6 See ARCHIMANDRITE BARSEGH SARKISSIAN, *Literary Criticism of Hovhan Mandakuni and His Works* (in Armenian), Venice, 1895, p. 7.

Hovhan I was most likely born into a ministerial family, as evidenced by the name *Mandakuni*. So, brothers Sahak and Parsman Mandakuni are also mentioned among brave warriors of Vardan, among senior ministers<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, it is quite supposable that Hovhan I Mandakuni was a descendant of this prominent ministerial family.

Like in the case of other junior translators, the extant evidences about Hovhan Mandakuni carry very little and vague information. Unfortunately, Ghazar Parpetsi, the historian who witnessed the events, does not mention any biographical details either. So, many facts about Hovhan<sup>8</sup> Mandakuni are still unknown.

According to accurate evidences, after staying in the Persian court for some time, Gyut I Arahezatsi (461–478) returned to his homeland and secluded himself in Votms, continuing his activities only in the spiritual circle<sup>9</sup>. During this period, the Persian ruler Adhur Gushnasp and chiliarch Vehvehnam persecuted Christians. The Persian king Peroz, oppressing and weakening the Armenians, thwarted any attempt at a liberation movement. After the death of Catholicos Gyut I Arahezatsi, Armenia found itself in an abandoned and chaotic state.

Under such political conditions, it was almost impossible to hold Catholicossal elections. According to Archbishop Malachia Ormanian: “*Thanks to his foreseeing and watchful soul, Gyut was able to keep a worthy assistant by his side, who had taken charge of the works during his lifetime, and who would succeed him on the throne...*”<sup>10</sup>. In other words, after the death of Catholicos Gyut I in 478, his nephew Hovhan Mandakuni became the Armenian Catholicos. Ghazar Parpetsi, the historian who witnessed the events of this historical period, does not provide details about the election of the Catholicos.

7 According to historical evidences, in 452 AD, after the battle of Avarayr, Armenian senior ministers and noblemen, including the brothers Parsman and Sahak Mandakuni, were summoned to Ctesiphon to appear before the Persian court. They were arrested in Persia by the order of king Yazdegerd II and remained in captivity for almost 12 years. For more details, see Eghishe, *History of Vardan and the Armenian War (in Armenian)*, “Armenian Classical Authors”, 5<sup>th</sup> century, vol. 1, Antelias-Lebanon, 2003, part 7, pp. 752–753; GHAZAR PARPETSİ, *History of Armenia*, Yerevan, 1982, 47, p. 204; “*Dictionary of Armenian Personal Names*”, compiled by H. Acharyan, vol. 5, Yerevan, 1962, column 1, p. 196.

8 Hovhan, assistant to Catholicos Hovsep I Hoghotsmetsi (440–452) should not be identified with Hovhan Mandakuni, because the latter was a youngster in 439 and could not be a suitable candidate for the assistant to the Catholicos.

9 See GHAZAR PARPETSİ, *History of Armenia (in Armenian)*, 64, pp. 278 — 280. Gyut I Arahezatsi was taken to the Persian court by the order of King Peroz and was kept there.

10 See ARCHBISHOP MALACHIA ORMANIAN, *National History (in Armenian)*, vol. 1, Holy Etchmiadzin, 2001, p. 523.

The newly elected Armenian Catholicos was very concerned about the defense of the hapless nation and the torn up homeland. In 478–484, during the first years of his Pontificate, he did not undertake any new work, as the internal and external situation of the country did not make it possible.

The bloody battles of Akori (481), Arest (March 482), Nersehapat (April 482), Charmana (August 482), Bagavan (September 482), Gerana field (483) and Dvin (484) took place in the reign of Catholicos Hovhan I Mandakuni. According to the testimony of a contemporary historian, the Catholicos was always by the side of the Armenian army, with his prayers and blessing, exhortations and encouragement<sup>11</sup>. The first period of his Pontificate passed in the turmoil of an unyielding national struggle<sup>12</sup>.

Thus, the Catholicos, along with the Armenian army, participated in the battle of Dvin and was seriously injured: “...and the holy Armenian Catholicos fell from his horse and was left half-dead...”<sup>13</sup>.

By a peace treaty made in Nvarsak in 484, the Persian court gave up its intention of forcibly converting the Armenians, allowed them to openly profess Christianity and promised not to give thrones and honours to the converted ministers. The Armenian Catholicos did not participate in the Armenian-Persian negotiations in Nvarsak, but presumably, the conditions and demands put forward in these negotiations had previously been discussed, worked out and substantiated by the joint efforts of the Armenian general and the Catholicos<sup>14</sup>. The Armenian people enjoyed the fruits of their bloody struggle, i.e. peace during the reign of Vahan Mamikonian.

Ghazar Parpetsi does not mention when Vahan Mamikonian became the governor of Armenia. Samuel Anetsi dates the dispatch of the decree on the appointment

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11 See GHAZAR PARPETSİ, *History of Armenia*, Yerevan, 1982, 70, p. 306, 71, p. 312, 316. Thus, in the battle of Akori in 481, the Armenians had a brilliant victory, and in the church of Dvin, the Armenian Catholicos sang Psalm 29 and recited a thanksgiving prayer with great solemnity (ibid., 70, p. 306).

12 For example, the battle of Charmana took place in August of 482, where the Armenians, who were treacherously deceived by the Georgians, suffered great losses, and most of the captured were martyred. One of the martyrs was Yazd Syuni, who did not give in to threats and torture, did not convert and was martyred as a Christian by being beheaded near St. Hovhannes Church in Bagrevand on September 12, 482. See GHAZAR PARPETSİ, *History of Armenia*, 74, p. 328. Historian Asoghik also mentioned Yazd, a nobleman from Syunik in his history (see STEPANOS TARONETSİ ASOGHIK, *Universal History (in Armenian), “Armenian Classical Authors”, 10<sup>th</sup> century*, vol. 15, book 2, ch. 2, p. 688), but did not add anything else that would make the information we have more complete.

13 GHAZAR PARPETSİ, *History of Armenia*, 78, p. 350.

14 See ARCHBISHOP MALACHIA ORMANIAN, *National History*, vol. 1, pp. 538–539.

of Vahan as a governor to 507<sup>15</sup>, which is clearly incorrect and unacceptable. In his work, the indicated date of the Council of Chalcedon should be corrected by changing 472/3<sup>16</sup> to 451; hence, twenty-two years should be subtracted from the mentioned year 507, and we will get 485. In other words, after the death of Persian king Peroz in 484, peace was established in the Armenian world. At the beginning of 485, Vahan Mamikonian was appointed commander-in-chief of the Armenian army, and at the end of the same year - also the governor. In this period, Catholicos Hovhan I Mandakuni carried out peaceful spiritual and administrative activities, paying special attention to church reforms.

Speaking of Catholicos Hovhan I Mandakuni, we should also refer to the years and length of his Pontificate. In this matter, historians and chroniclers are divided into two groups according to the information and views they report. According to one group, Hovhan Mandakuni reigned as Catholicos for six years, and according to the other group - for twelve years. These numbers are completely different. It is clear that we cannot attribute this difference to the similarity of letters Չ and ԺԲ, which had numeric values. So, in our opinion, it should be recognized that the above approaches have their justification. Thus, Hovhannes V Draskhanakertsi (898–929) writes in his “History”: “*The Great Hovhan Mandakuni officiated as Catholicos for six years and then went to Christ...*”<sup>17</sup> Whereas Samuel Anetsi, in his work entitled “Collection of Historians’ Works”, counts the period of Mandakuni’s Catholicosate for twelve years, starting from 484: “*...His Holiness Hovhan Mandakuni (was catholicos) for 12 years*”<sup>18</sup>.

Archimandrite Barsegh Sarkissian, a member of Mechitarist Congregation, believes that Hovhan Mandakuni was born around 400, was ordained a priest in 448–450; after being released from prison in 484, he returned to his homeland from Ctesiphon and was ordained a bishop by his uncle Gyut I Arahezatsi; in 484–485, he was elected Catholicos of Armenia and died in 498 or 499 at the age of 93–98<sup>19</sup>.

15 See SAMUEL ANETSI AND HIS SUCCESSORS, Chronology from Adam to 1776 (in Armenian) by Karen Matevosyan, Yerevan, 2014, p. 139.

16 See SAMUEL ANETSI AND HIS SUCCESSORS, Chronology from Adam to 1776, p. 137.

17 “History of Armenia by Catholicos Hovhannes Draskhanakertsi” (in Armenian), critical text by G. Ter-Vardanyan, “Armenian Classical Authors”, 10<sup>th</sup> century, vol. 11, book 1, Antelias-Lebanon, 2010, p. 394.

18 See SAMUEL ANETSI AND HIS SUCCESSORS, Chronology from Adam to 1776, p. 138.

19 See ARCHIMANDRITE BARSEGH SARKISSIAN, Literary Criticism of Hovhan Mandakuni and His Works, pp. 10–21.

However, this point of view is not justified at all; moreover, it is unacceptable for us, because it contradicts the information provided by historians, in particular, by Ghazar Parpetsi. According to the historian who witnessed the events, Hovhan Mandakuni was elected Catholicos of Armenia immediately after the death of Gyut I Arahezatsi, i.e. prior to the outbreak of the rebellion by Vahan and his companions from 481 to 484.

Another remarkable testimony is mentioned by Hovhannes Draskhanakertsi in his “History”: “...and while Peroz was organizing the devastation of the Armenian land, thanks to the prayers of Hovhan, a holy man of God, suddenly he himself and his army in general were killed by the Kushans”<sup>20</sup>. In other words, before the death of the Persian king Peroz in 484, Hovhan Mandakuni was already the officially elected Armenian Catholicos.

According to Vardan Areveltsi, Hovhan I Mandakuni officiated as Catholicos for six years: “...and His Holiness Hovhan was on the throne for six years, and his successor Babken – for five years...”<sup>21</sup>. However, it is obvious that there is a great inaccuracy in Vardan Areveltsi’s work, because the historian writes: “...and it seems that at the Council of Chalcedon, Gyut was already dead, and Hovhan Mandakuni was not yet enthroned...”<sup>22</sup>. Whereas, we know from historical sources that by the time of the Council of Chalcedon in 451, Gyut Arahezati had not yet ascended the throne of the Catholicos. In addition, according to the lists of the Catholicos, Gyut I Arahezatsi died in 478.

Kirakos Gandzaketsi states: “Gyut succeeded St. Hovsep as Catholicos for 15 years. It was he, who asked David the Philosopher for the “Bardzratsoutsek”. Then Hovhan Mandakuni succeeded him for 12 years. He introduced many reforms in the Church...”<sup>23</sup>. Accordingly, Hovhan Mandakuni officiated as Catholicos for 12 years.

We think that by comparing, contrasting and analyzing the above-mentioned references, we can come to a certain conclusion. Thus, according to bibliographic data, Hovhan Mandakuni was elected Catholicos immediately after the death of his uncle Gyut I Arahezatsi in 478, and officiated as the Catholicos of the Armenian Church until 490; therefore, he was Catholicos for twelve years. It is another issue

20 HOVHANNES DRASKHANAKERTSI, *History of Armenia*, critical text by G. Ter-Vardanyan, “Armenian Classical Authors”, 10<sup>th</sup> century, vol. 11, book 1, Antelias-Lebanon, 2010, pp. 393–394.

21 “Historical Compilation of Vardan Areveltsi” (in Armenian), Venice, 1862, 30, p. 57.

22 “Historical Compilation of Vardan Areveltsi”, Venice, 1862, 28, pp. 54–55.

23 KIRAKOS GANDZKETSİ, *History of Armenia* (in Armenian) by K. Melik-Ohanjanyan, Yerevan, 1961, p. 35.

that from 481 to 484, Hovhan Mandakuni was always involved in the Armenian national liberation struggle, defending the homeland, and was actually not able to engage in spiritual and ecclesiastical activities. But we can say with certainty that the second period of his Pontificate was extremely efficient, full of ecclesiastical, ritual reforms and was of crucial importance for the future course of the Armenian Church. We will substantiate this view in the following articles.

The above evidences have a certain explanation: some historians and authors counted the period of Hovhan Mandakuni's Pontificate from 484, i.e. from the establishment of peace in Armenia, getting six years, and others - from 478, i.e. from his election as the Armenian Catholicos, mentioning twelve years of succession to the throne.

Thus, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the Armenian Church also went through difficult and conflicting political events, the national liberation struggle, managing to fulfill her mission of preserving the national identity. In the furnace of long-term struggle, the doctrines and dogmatic principles of the Armenian Church were also shaped and crystallized, conditioning and setting the Armenian Christian system of values inherent in our spiritual life and culture, our psyche and perception.

## РЕЗЮМЕ

Данная статья – это исследование части истории Армянской церкви V века с целью проведения независимого анализа. Здесь представлен первый период понтификата Ована I Мандакуни. Католикос Ован I Мандакуни (478–490) сыграл значительную роль в истории Армянской Церкви. В первый период правления: с 481 по 484 год Ован I-й Мандакуни всегда был вовлечен в армянскую национально-освободительную борьбу, защищая родину, и фактически не имел возможности заниматься духовной и церковной деятельностью. Но можно с уверенностью сказать, что второй период его понтификата был чрезвычайно продуктивным, полным церковных, обрядовых реформ и имел решающее значение для будущего курса Армянской Церкви. Мы обосновываем эту точку зрения в следующих статьях. В данной статье особое внимание уделено вопросу о годах и продолжительности правления Ована I Мандакуни, и в связи с этим представлены свидетельства армянских историков. Основной целью статьи является проведение независимого от анализа.

## SUMMARY

This article is a study of a part of the history of the Armenian Church of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. This scientific research presents the first period of the pontificate of Catholicos Hovhan I Mandakuni (478–490), who had a significant role in the Armenian Church history.

In the first period of his pontificate from 481 to 484, Hovhan I Mandakuni was always involved in the Armenian national liberation struggle, defending the homeland, and was actually not able to engage in spiritual and ecclesiastical activities. But we can say with certainty that the second period of his pontificate was extremely efficient, full of ecclesiastical, ritual reforms and was of crucial importance to the future course of the Armenian Church. We will substantiate this view in the following articles.

In this article, a special reference is made to the issue related to the years and duration of the pontificate of Hovhan I Mandakuni, and the testimonies of Armenian historians are presented in this regard. The points of view related to this issue are discussed separately and somewhat substantiated.

The main goal of the article is to make an independent analysis; therefore, we have presented our point of view and position regarding some controversial and unexplained issues and inaccuracies related to the historical information that has reached us.