

Robert W. Thomson, *THE TEACHING OF SAINT GREGORY : AN EARLY ARMENIAN CATECHISM, translation and commentary by Robert W. Thomson. Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies, 3 (Cambridge, Mass., 1970) [xiii], 207 page. \$8.00.*

The collection of texts which goes under the name of Agat' angeghos or pseudo-Agat' angeghos has become in the post-World War II period one of the most studied of early Armenian works. Dr. Robert Thomson, recently appointed as the first incumbent professor to the Chair of Armenian Studies at Harvard University, provides the academic world with the first and much need translation of the long central section of the *History*. The book contains an introduction (pp. 1-38), the translation (pp. 39-182) of the Teaching of St. Gregory which comprises paragraphs 259-715 of the definitive critical edition of the text prepared by G. Ter Mkrtch'ean and S. Kanayean' (Tiflis, 1909), and a bibliography and indices (pp. 183-207).

The author who called himself Agat' angeghos claimed to be an eyewitness to the events surrounding the conversion of King Trdat and the Armenian nation to Christianity in the early fourth century.<sup>1</sup> The Teaching is a catechism which St. Gregory the Illuminator used to instruct Trdat and his court in Christian dogma and beliefs before curing the king of a sickness which gave him the aspect of a wild boar. St. Gregory had been thrown into a deep pit some fifteen years earlier at the order of King

---

1) The date of Armenia's conversion to Christianity is still being debated. The most recent and provocative article, which summarizes earlier arguments while providing current bibliography, is by Brian MacDermot, «The Conversion of Armenia in 294 A.D. A Review of the Evidence in the Light of the Sassanian Inscriptions,» *Revue des Etudes Arméniennes*, N.S., VII (1970), pp. 281-359.

Trdat, because not only was he a Christian, but his father (Anak the Parthian) had murdered the king's father Xosrov. He was brought out of the pit after a dream of the king's sister who suggested that the saint might be able to cure Trdat. This strange illness inflicted the king after he had martyred Hrip'simê, Gayianê and their companions. These Christian women had sought shelter in Armenia after fleeing the Roman Emperor Diocletian. Trdat was overwhelmed by Hrip'simê's beauty, but was refused by her ; thus, angered, he committed his evil deed.

Following St. Gregory's Teaching the king was cured and converted to Christianity along with the royal court, after which St. Gregory was sent to Caesarea, made a bishop, and then evangelized the rest of the Armenian nation. In the pageant of these events as related by Agat'angeghos the Teaching takes up more than half the entire text.

In Prof. Thomson's very readable translation each paragraph of the text is immediately followed by explicative notes, for the most part philological and theological. The long and interesting introduction is mostly occupied with a closely reasoned discussion of the religious (theological) implications of the Teaching within the context of fifth century Christological arguments centered around such questions as the nature of Christ. For though it was under the name of St. Gregory (fourth century) that the Teaching as such was spoken, Thomson underlines that just as «Agat'angeghos» was a fifth century author (a fact long known and universally accepted), so too the underlying content of the sermon was also fifth century. The recent and fundamental studies by G. Garitte, *Documents pour l'étude du livre d'Agathange* (Vatican, 1946), and P. Peeters, « S. Grégoire l'Illuminateur dans le calendrier lapidaire de Naples, » *Analecta Bollandiana* (1942), have demonstrated that the work was originally written in Armenian, therefore, precluding an authorship before the fifth century, and that the Greek translation was already made in the early 460's A.D. Clearly then «Agat'angeghos» could not have been an eyewitness of the events described, but rather some Armenian very familiar with the religious controversies and general theological atmosphere of the mid-fifth century. The personage was a spokesman for the orthodoxy of the house of St. Gregory against the Arianizing tendencies of the later Arsacid kings. As to

the actual author of the «enigmatic **History**», Thomson surmises (p. 38), that «he was probably a member of the circle of pupils trained by [the Catholicos] Sahak and [Mesrop] Mashtoc', certainly familiar with the work of Koriun and Eznik, yet of very different cast. He was widely read and original, though hardly rigorous in thought, but in his attitude to history the complete reverse of his predecessor. He did not describe but recreated the past, and in so doing left an indelible stamp on the whole development of his country and his church.»

This book will remain indispensable for the study of Agat'angeghos not just because it affords the only translation in any language of the major part of a work, the very critical edition of which has become a bibliographical rarity, but because the author brings to his commentary and interpretation not only a sensitive command of classical Armenian, but a profound understanding of Syriac and Greek texts of the early church fathers which are so important for a proper appreciation of this most difficult work. With the publications by Aram Ter-Gevondyan of a new Arabic version, *Agat'angeghosi arabakan nor xmbagrutyune* (Erevan, 1968), and the Karshuni (Syriac written with Arabic script) redaction just published with a brilliant assessment of the present state of Agat'angeghos studies by M. van Esbroeck, *Revue des Etudes Arméniennes*, VIII (1971), Prof. Thomson's publication of the *Teaching of St. Gregory* has greatly advanced our understanding of this work and of the Golden Age of Armenian letters. We now wait anxiously for the publication of the new Arabic versions of Agat'angeghos, one a full length manuscript at St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai and the other a fragment of a manuscript in the collection of the Université St. Joseph, Beirut, discovered by Ter-Ghevondyan in the summer of 1972.

**Dickran K. Kouymjian**

American University of Beirut