

The Life and Times of Catholicos Nerses III Tayetsi

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Sebeos, contemporary of the events of the Arab occupation of Armenia, records that the Arabs came from Asorestan (al-Jazirah) via Jor into Taron, passed through Bznunik' and Aghiovit, and taking the road through Berkri valley over Ordisp and Gogovit, into Ayrarat and occupied Dvin «on Friday, 20th day of the month of Tré... in the years of catholicos Ezzr»¹. After the occupation, the Arabs returned to Syria laden with much booty and innumerable slaves². A brief chronological calculation shows that Friday Tré 20 falls on October 6, 640³.

The capture of Dvin was closely linked with and instru-

1. Bishop Sebeos, *History of Heraclius [Patmutiun Sebeosi Episcoposi i Herakln]* ed. K. Patkanian, St. Petersburg, 1879, p. 109.
2. Sebeos, p. 109; Ghevond, *History of the Armenians [Patmutiun Ghevondea Medzi Vardapeti Hayots]*, St. Petersburg, 1887, p. 9; Step'anos Asoghik of Taron, *Universal History [Step'anosi Taronetsvo Asoghkan, Patmutiun Tize-rakan]*, St. Petersburg, 1885, pp. 98, 120; Hovhannes Draskhanakertsi, *History of the Armenians [Patmutiun Hayots]*, Tiflis, 1912, p. 82; Vardan Vardapet, *The Collection of History [Havak'umn Patmutedan]*, Venice, 1868, p. 67. All report that 35,000 people were taken captive. Kirakos of Gandsak, *History of the Armenians [Patmutiun Hayots]*, ed. K.A. Melik-Ohandjanian, Erevan, 1961, pp. 60 sq; Samuel of Ani, *Compilations from the Books of Historians [Havak'munk' i Grots Patmagrats]*, ed. A. Ter-Mikaelian, Vagharshapat, 1893, p. 80; Dionysius of Tell-Mahre : *Chronique de Denys de Tell-Mahre*, trans. J.-B. Chabot, « Bibliothèque de L'Ecole des Hautes Etudes », fsc. 112, Paris, 1895, p. 6. All say that more, than 12,000 people were massacred.
3. H. Manandian, *Les Invasions Arabes en Armenie : Notes Chronologiques*, trans. by H. Berberian, « Byzantion », vol. XVIII. (1948), pp. 167-177.

mental in the death of catholicos Eyr. The capture of Dvin and the death of catholicos Eyr set the stage for the two great personalities, catholicos Nerses III Tayetsi (641-661/2), surnamed Shihogh (the Builder) and Théodoros the Lord of Rshtounik', both of whom played the leading roles in the affairs of church and state during the forties and fifties of the seventh century — the former heading the pro-Byzantine party while the latter the nationalist party in Armenia.

«Théodoros the lord of Rshtounik' and the other feudal lords of Armenia prepared to set upon the patriarchal throne, in place of Eyr, Nerses the bishop of Tayk'. But he was stupefied because of the excessive number of those massacred, who were among the captives of the city. He thought of fleeing secretly, as being incapable of holding such a great degree of political responsibility. Then however, upon the insistence of the feudal lords, he submitted and was confirmed. And having set upon the patriarchal throne, he gathered and interred the multitude of the fallen and on the same spot he rebuilt the burned martyrion of the great martyr Sargis»⁴.

Catholicos Nerses III was from the village of Ishkhan in Tayk'. He grew up and was educated in Byzantine territory; he was a man of great learning and was well acquainted with Greek language and literature. He had even served for a while as an officer in the Byzantine army; but later settled in his native province and became its bishop, from where he was called to the catholicosal office⁵. With his preparation and military background he was the right person to occupy the supreme office in the church. Nerses was aware of the gravity of the situation. The Armenian feudal princes were disunited and jealous of one another; the political atmosphere was charged with tensions and rivalries, he had to mediate between the feuding parties. The Arabs were devastating the land and plundering the country. The Byzantine emperor was in no position to stretch a helping hand. No wonder he was very reluctant to occupy the patriarchal throne.

4. Draskhanakerttsi, p. 83.

5. Sebeos, pp. 140 sq; Draskhanagerttsi, pp. 83 sq; Asoghik, pp. 98 sq.

Upon taking office, he gathered all the slaughtered by the invaders and buried them in the burned martyrion of saint Sergius (Sargis) which he also rebuilt. He then supported Théodoros both morally and politically in the struggle against the Arabs. It was through his intercession that emperor Constans II officially appointed Théodoros commander of the feudal Armenian forces with the rank of a Patrician⁶. Soon, however, Théodoros was the victim of an intrigue: the emperor sent to Armenia a certain prince called T'uma who treacherously put Théodoros in fetters and dispatched him to Constantinople for trial⁷. During the absence of Théodoros, Nerses III was in command of the situation in Armenia⁸. Théodoros was acquitted and returned to Armenia.

Nerses faced a challenge from within the ranks of the clergy. His background and service to the Byzantine emperor were not pleasing to a faction of the Armenian clergy. One such was Hovhan Mayragometsi⁹. There are two groups of witnesses on the case: the first group is composed of three Chalcedonian authors — the *Diegesis*, the work of catholicos Arsén of Georgia, and the letter of Photius. Opposed to these are the Armenian historians who are mostly anti-Chalcedonian and have little on Mayragometsi — Sebeos, Hovhannes Draskhanakerttsi and Asoghik. The two have independent sources. The Chalcedonian authors present Mayragometsi as a conceited and ambitious priest, aspiring to become catholicos and having failed three times — after Komitas I (615-28), Ezr I (630-41) and Nerses III (641), he carried out an

6. Sebeos, p. 109; Draskhanakerttsi, p. 84.

7. Sebeos, pp. 114 sq.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 115 sq. He interceded on behalf of Aspet Varaztirots Bagratouni with the Byzantine government.

9. On Hovhan Mayragometsi see K. Ter-Mkrtchian, *The Seal of Faith [Knik Havato]* Edjmiadzín, 1914, pp. lxxxix-xcv; on his doctrinal writings, *ibid.*, pp. 52-55, 142-146, 253-256, 287, 327-330, 363 sq.; Arsen Catholicos (of Georgia). *On the Schism Between the Georgian and Armenian Churches [Vrats yev Hayots Bazhanman Masin]* in *Georgian Sources on Armenia and Armenians [Vrats Aghbiurner Hayastani yev Hayeri Masin]*, trans. L. Melik'set Bek, vol. I, Erevan, 1934, pp. 45 sq.; Draskhanakerttsi, pp. 77-79; Asoghik, pp. 87 sq.; G. Garitte, *La Narratio de Rebus Armeniae*; ed. critique et comm., in « *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* », vol. CXXXII, sb. IV (Louvain, 1952) pp. 319-350; G. Hovsepian, *The Colophones of Manuscripts [Hishatakarakank' Dseragrats]*, Vol. I, Antelias, 1951, pp. 35 sq. has the colophon of a 13th century manuscript (Ms. Jerusalem, 1272), written by a scribe called Basil (Barsegh), which records that Hovhan and his disciples were thrown in goal and were persecuted by Catholicos Nerses III.

anti-Chalcedonian campaign against Nerses and the other high clergy. The catholicos with the help of Théodoros Rshtouni branded Hovhan's forehead and two of his followers with the fox-sign because of their heresy, and exiled them to the Caucasian mountains¹⁰.

Opposed to the above statement is the testimony of the Armenian historians, who present Mayragometsi as an erudite theologian and philosopher, the guardian of the Church of Saint Grigor in Dvin, responsible for the day to day running of the patriarchate and the champion of orthodoxy at a time when many high ranking clergymen were willing to compromise their faith for material gain. He opposed strongly the confessional union during the reign of emperor Heraclius and catholicos Ezn on account of which he suffered great persecution.

Hovhannes Draskhanakerttsi seems to be aware of the two traditions for he reports that Mayragometsi was regarded by some as a schismatic and by others as a holy man¹¹. While Vardan alludes to the letter of patriarch Photius. In the light of the total silence of Sebeos — the contemporary historian—, the neutral attitude of Draskhanakerttsi and the allusion of Vardan it would be reasonable to conclude that the testimony of the Chalcedonian historians contains more of the truth than hitherto accepted. Catholicos Nerses III may have entertained Chalcedonian views at the beginning of his pontificate.

After the second major Arab incursion into Armenia in A. D. 643 and despite a number of insignificant *razzias* during the following years, Armenia had a relatively peaceful period of ten years, till the end of the three year's truce between Byzantium and the Arabs in A. D. 653. Draskhanakerttsi reports:

«Trusting in the Lord and disregarding the instructive incursions of the marauding bands of the enemy, with a fitting zeal, he laid the foundation of the great and wonderfully splendid house of God bearing the name of Saint Gregory... and our land was sheltered for a short while from the evil Hagarite marauders»¹².

10. The infamous punishment of branding the forehead of heretics with the fox-sign is found in the 19th canon of the council of Shahapivan (A.D. 444/5) see V. Hakopian, *The Book of Canons of the Armenian Church* [Kanonakirk' Hayots], vol. I, Erevan, 1964 pp. 461 sq.

11. Draskhanakerttsi, p. 79.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-85.

Nerses built a number of other churches and chapels but what immortalized his name as «Builder» (Shinogh) is the Zwart'nots complex¹³. All the Armenian historians use superlatives to describe the cathedral. Sebeos says,

«At that time catholicos Nerses of Armenia made plans to build for himself a dwelling place near the holy churches that were in the city of Vagharshapat on the road where, it is said, king Tiridates went to meet saint Gregory. He built there a church dedicated to the heavenly angels, the multitude of the heavenly hosts that appeared to Saint Gregory in a dream. And he built the church with high superstructures and an admirable excellence, worthy of the divine honor to which he dedicated it. He brought water from the river and made use of all the stony grounds planted vineyards and groves and enclosed the residence with a well-constructed high wall for the glory of God»¹⁴.

The tenth century Arab geographer al-Muqaddasi gives the following information:

«Three farsakhs from Dabil is a white monastery built of carved stone in the likeness of a tall hat (**qalan-suwa**), in which is the picture of Mary. It stood on eight pillars with doors between them, and from whichever door you enter, you see the picture of Mary»¹⁵.

The complex included the Zwart'nots cathedral, the patriarchal palace with two big reception halls and living quarters, baths, wine presses, a well and a number of smaller structures enclosed by a wall.

Benefitting from the relative quiet, catholicos Nerses not only built physical churches but he also planned to reform and reorganize the churches internally and re-establish her legal status *vis-à-vis* the feudal lords. He tried to emancipate the church

13. On Zwart'nots, see Sebeos, pp. 118 sq.; Draskhanakerttsi, p. 88; J. Strzygowski, *Die Baukunst der Armenien und Europa*, Wien, 1918, Vol. I, pp. 108-118, 421, 427; vol. II, pp. 682-687; T'. T'oramian, *Discussions on the History of Armenian Architecture* [Niu't'er Haykakan Tjartarabetut'ian Patmut'ian], Erevan, 1948, pp. 77-92; S. Mnatsakanian, *Concerning the Plans of the Reconstruction of Zwart'nots* [Zwart'notsi Verakazmut'ian Nakhakdz'i Harts'i Shurdj] «*Teghekgagir*», 1959, no. 4, pp. 69-86.

14. Sebeos, pp. 118 sq.

15. Muqqadasi, *Ahsan al-Ta'asim fi Ma'rifa' al-Aqalim*, ed. M.J. De Coeje, in «*Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*», vol. III, Leiden, 1906, p. 381.

from lay domination. To this end he called an ecclesiastical council in A. D. 645. The date is recorded in the Book of Armenian Canon Law as being «in the fourth year of Emperor Kostandianos (Constans II)». The fourth year of Constans II was summer 644 summer 645¹⁶. The Book of Canon Law has preserved the names of the seventeen participating bishops and the twelve canons that they promulgated at the council.

Looking at the names of the bishops it is very difficult to tell whether they are toponyms or patronyms — except where the name of the dynasty is used with no connection to the principality such as the bishop of Bagratounis'. Also by examining these names we see that the ecclesiastical administrative unit was coterminous with the principality of the feudal prince. In other words, we do not see in Armenia the metropolitan system prevalent in the Byzantine church. Here are the names:

Hovhannes bishop of Ostan and Mardpetakan
 Nerses bishop of Hark' (Hark'ay)
 K'ristosatour bishop of Basean (Basenoy)
 Israyél bishop of Tayk' (Tayots)
 Hovhannes bishop of Mardaghik (Mardaghoy)
 Hovhan bishop of Bznounik' (Bznouneats)
 Grigor bishop of Arsharounik' (Arsharouneats)
 Sebeos bishop of Bagratounis (Bagratouneats)
 Grigor bishop of Khorkhorounik' (Khorkhorouneats)
 Simèon bishop of Rshtounik' (Rshouneats)
 Israyél bishop of Vanand (Vananday)
 Théop'ilos bishop of Ashmounik' (Ashmouneats)
 Asayél bishop of Amatounik' (Amatouneats)
 Grigor bishop of Andsewats'ik (Andsewats'eats)
 Théodoros bishop of Gnounik' (Gnouneats)
 Hakovbos bishop of Palounik' (Palouneats)
 Samuél bishop of Mehnounik' (Mehnouneats)¹⁷

The canons can be divided into three parts: the first four

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16. V. Hakopian, *The Book of Canons of the Armenian Church*, vol. II, Erevan, 1971, p. 200; M. Ormanian, *Azgapatoum*, Vol. I, Constantinople, 1912, p. 480; N. Adontz, *Armenia in the Period of Justinian*, trans. N. G. Garsoian, Lisbon, 1970, p. 261, dates it in A.D. 644.
17. On the list of the names of the bishops see Hakopian, *The Book of Canons*, Vol. II, p. 214.; Adontz, *Armenia*, pp. 261, *100; Ormanian, vol. I, col. 480 gives Thadeos instead of Theodoros as bishop of Gnunik'; Grigor as bishop of Ashmunik', and Theop'ilos as bishop of Arsharunik'.

are addressed to bishops, the second four deal mainly with practical matters and the last four are directed against the princes and the minor nobles. The first canon commands the bishops to lead a holy and righteous lives:

«It is befitting for prelates of the holy church, that is to say the bishops, to conduct themselves according to the canon of the holy fathers, in holiness and uprightness, in all the ways of righteousness: so that all might be salted and seasoned by them, lest those who have lost their savour be cast out and trampled underfoot by men¹⁸ [It is fitting] that they should be an example to the whole flock by their order, so that at the appearance of the great shepherd they may receive the unfading crown of glory»¹⁹.

The second and third canons forbid bishops from using their ecclesiastical authority in the diocese of another bishop or try to seize control over it:

«A bishop should not dare to establish an altar or ordain a priest in the diocese of another according to the rule of the holy fathers; but if there is no bishop, with the authorization of the chief bishop (i.e., the catholicos), the neighbouring bishops shall do so, but the income should belong to the church of the same diocese as it was ordained»²⁰.

«A bishop should not seize the diocese of another... and if there be any dispute among the brethren they should make a reckoning but should not dare to do it with violence or seizure»²¹.

The fourth canon exhorts the bishops to look after the ecclesiastical institutions of their diocese and not be avaricious:

«Bishops of each diocese shall exercise supervision and spiritual care over monasteries and hermitages, they should look for [their] enlightenment and the ministry and the schools; they should be fed with their servants and enjoy of the grace of the saints but let them not dare to do anything with violence and greed. Similarly

18. Matthew 5:13.

19. Hakopian, *The Book of Canons*, vol. II, p. 202.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

they should look after and supervise the hospitals, taking the fines from the fornicators and other transgressors and administering these unto their account. But let them not dare to take anything with greed and compulsion from the infirmaries... Then if any of the bishops or priests, disobeying, should disdain the established canons of the fathers, let him be subject to canonical punishment»²².

The following two canons and canon eight are strong evidence of the total feudalization of the Armenian church. Canon five deals with the problem of the income of the clergy:

«Concerning benefit and inheritance we have decreed that as it was from the beginning according to the command of saint Gregory so let it be: he who inherits much let him consume much, he who inherits little, let him have the little; and they should not divide the benefit according to parishes, for the clergy of the holy church is as the nobility, who are set aside by the blessed saint Gregory and King Tiridates. Now they should take the inheritance of their fathers and should be subject to the service of the holy church, and should obey the doctor (**vardapet**) with all gladness. Therefore, if anyone should be neglectful and obstruct the enlightenment and the service of the church and should not send the members of the clergy to school, the bishop shall have authority to admonish and to bring him to the correct order»²³.

The sixth canon condemns those clergy who abandon their spiritual duty and become soldiers. If they do not return within three years «the bishop should have authority to reject such people from the privilege of the church by writing and a seal and give the privilege to their relations»²⁴. The seventh canon deals with the problem of those taken captive by the invading armies:

«Now on account of our transgressions when our land was enslaved by enemies, many men and women

22. Ibid., p. 203 sq. cf. Mkhit'ar Gosh, *Book of Laws of Armenians*, [*Datastanagirk' Hayots*], ed. V. Bastamians, Vagharshapat, 1880, p. 233 sq.

23. Hakopian, *The Book of Canons*, vol. II, p. 204 sq.

24. Ibid., p. 205.

were taken captive; their spouses took wives and husbands without the authorization of the doctor (**vardapet**). Concerning such people we decree as follows: before seven years, while the spouse was in captivity and they in rashness took another spouse, the marriage of such persons is to be regarded as adultery; they should be beaten and chastized, and we have ordered the doctors (**vardapets**) to take of their property and acquisition and distribute it among the poor, and to separate them from one another and make them do penance for seven years...»²⁵.

The following canon deals with the question of the property of clergy who die without an heir. The canon says that the church is their heir, but they should adopt a son of some close relation. If the adopted son became a clergy he could be regarded as full heir, otherwise only part of the property could go to him and the rest went to the church²⁶.

Benefitting from the chaos ensuing the collapse of the Sassanian Empire and the absence of the restraining power of the Byzantine Emperor, some of the princes and minor nobles tried to enrich themselves and expand their territory at the expense of the church. They unduly oppressed the church and the clergy, trying to expropriate its property; hence the last four canons condemn the opportunism of the nobles. Canon nine reads:

«When nobles divide their households, many do so malevolently; having lost their senses and gone astray from Christian faith, they endeavour to cast the clergy of the church into servitude and bondage. For the blessed Gregory and saint Tiridates have ranked the clergy of the holy church with the noble families and the lands and water of the holy church were free of tribute. Now if anyone should look upon with greedy eyes and should subject the free children of the church into the lot and condition of servitude, let such persons be removed from the blessing of the holy Illuminator and from the blessing of this our council»²⁷.

25. Ibid., pp. 205 sq. cf. Mkhitar Gosh, *Book of Laws*, pp. 102, 209-211.

26. Ibid., pp. 206 sq. cf. Mkhitar Gosh, *Book of Laws*, pp. 211-214.

27. Ibid., pp. 209 sq. cf. Mkhitar Gosh, pp. 215 sq.

The tenth canon condemns the manner in which princes drove the monks out of monasteries and set up abbots that were acceptable to them, moreover they interfered in the internal affairs and day-to-day running of the church:

«Some of the nobles exercise authority over monasteries, dismiss whatever monk they please, which is not worthy and lawful; and certain ones lodge with families in the monasteries with shameless effrontery, contemptuous of the church of God. Now, if hearkening to this our command they should turn away from their errors and leave it to the prelates to arrange and organize the supervision of the church in a manner pleasing to God, may there be forgiveness unto the sins previously perpetrated and may they be blessed by this our council...»²⁸.

The eleventh canon is equally critical of the greed of some princes who oppress the benevolent institutions that took care of the infirm and the poor. These feudal barons even sent their agents to gather tribute from the sick and needy. The canon recommends that instead of exacting money from such people they should give them a part of their produce to comfort their hearts and heal their wounds²⁹. Finally, the last canon condemns in the strongest possible terms the way in which some feudal lords and plebeian cavalry desecrated monasteries by lodging there with their minstrels and dancing girls³⁰.

The canons end with a paragraph blessing the obedient and anathematizing all those who disregarded the above:

«Now, these twelve chapters we have established, not just something imaginary, but according to the command of the holy spirit and according to the ordinances of the holy fathers and of saint Gregory and the pious king Tiridates and of the apostolic descendants of the same saint Gregory. Those who hear, and are obedient to and executors of this canon, may they be blessed by the holy Spirit and by all the saints of God and may they find themselves heirs of the eternal life and the

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 210 sq. cf. *Mkhit'ar Gosh*, pp. 85-88, 217 sq.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 211. cf. *Mkhit'ar Gosh*, pp. 412 sq.

30. On minstrels see M. Boyce, *The Parthian Gosan and Iranian Minstrel Tradition*, « *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* » (1957), pp. 10-45.

Kingdom of Heaven for ever and ever. Amen»³¹.

It is clear from these canons that the punishment meted out against transgressors was spiritual only, because the church itself did not have the means to enforce the decisions of the council.

In A. D. 652 Théodoros Rshtouni signed a peace treaty with Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan³². This peace treaty brought about a break between catholicos Nerses III and Théodoros Rshtouni; but this was not necessarily due to the byzantinophile attitude of the catholicos. It could be true that the strong discontent among the Syrian and Coptic Monophysite churches against the Imperial policy of forcing the council of Chalcedon upon them was a contributing factor for the easy conquest of these territories, but this was only partially true in Armenia. Though the Armenian church had strong grounds to be discontented with the Imperial religious policy, catholicos Nerses III, most of the higher ecclesiastical dignitaries and some of the **nakharars** were vehemently opposed to the peace treaty with the Arabs, which they called «A treaty with death» and «an alliance with hell»³³. Nerses himself showed all the vigour and capacity of an ecclesiastical statesman, but his action has often been misinterpreted, even by his very contemporaries. Sebeos accuses the catholicos of being pro-Byzantine and a Chalcedonian at heart³⁴. If we let aside the bias of Sebeos the historian of the Bagratids, it is very doubtful if Nerses liked being under Byzantine ecclesiastical control. But I must hasten to add that he disliked Arab domination even more, however light and agreeable Mu'awiya tried to make it. It was greatly disturbing for the Catholicos to see that the feudal lords, interested in their own class privileges, willingly accommodated themselves to the new regime and submitted to the Arabs. Nerses III realized that the Mu'awiya's compliant attitude masked even greater political realism than the Byzantine emperor. The Arabs had displayed greater cruelty and disrespect towards the sacred places of worship during their first and subsequent invasions. Furthermore, if we keep in mind that the Arabs as a people and

31. Hakopian, *The Book of Canons*, Vol. II, p. 213.

32. M. Jinbashian, *The Arabo-Armenian Peace Treaty of A.D. 652*. «Haigazian Armenological Review», vol. VI, Beirut, 1977, pp. 169-174.

33. Sebeos, p. 138; Draskhanakertsi, pp. 85 sq.

34. Sebeos, p. 141.

government were very much unknown to the Armenians, while they knew well Byzantium and her politics, we can see why catholicos Nerses was opposed to the alliance. Nerses was at heart a conservative, he preferred the known «evil» — viz., Byzantium — for the unknown «good» — viz., the Arabs. But it has to be admitted that the Arabo-Armenian peace treaty, temporarily created much more favourable political, economic and religious conditions than Armenia enjoyed under Byzantine rule.

The news of the defaulting vassal reached Constantinople. The young emperor was both irritated and apprehensive. The combination of a number of factors led the emperor to decide upon invading Armenia. Constans II wanted to keep Armenia at all cost. He could hardly afford losing the strategic highlands. He first tried to use peaceful means to win back the Armenians³⁵. When these peaceful means did not produce any positive result the emperor resorted to force. At the head of a hundred thousand soldiers he marched on Armenia. The news of the march of the emperor with such an army was enough to sow discord among the Armenian feudal princes. Some of those who had joined the alliance half-heartedly or from fear of Théodoros Rshtouni, hurried to meet the emperor:

«There went to meet him the princes and hosts of the province called Fourth Armenia, the armies and princes who had gone there from the Rshtounakan region. There went to meet him the people of Sper, the Bagratouni princes, the people of Managhi, Daranaghi, and those of the canton of Ekegheats, and all the armies of those regions; also the people of the canton of Karin, Tayk' and Basean. There went to meet him the princes of Vanand along with their armed forces, the people of Shirak, Khorkhounik' and the men of the Dimak'sian house. There went to meet him Mushegh Mamikonian along with members of his family, with some other princes, and armies of the province of Ayrarat, Ara-wegheank', Araneank', Varajunik', Gnt'unik', Spandunik' and others with them. There went to meet him catholicos Nerses coming from Tayk'»³⁶.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

If the princes, the people and the armies of these regions went to meet the emperor in Karin, joined by catholicos Nerses, surely the bishops of these districts were also present. We know that Daranaghi and Ekegheats were church lands³⁷. Catholicos Nerses III and Mushegh Mamikonian tried to appease the emperor with their conciliatory words. However, the emperor was not deterred from his resolution to destroy the Arabo-Armenian peace treaty. Théodoros Rshtouni was dishonoured and dismissed, and Constans appointed in his place Mushegh Mamikonian. Army contingents were sent against Iberia, Albania and Siwnik' to separate them from the treaty, while the emperor himself marched on Dvin at the head of a 20,000 contingent and lodged at the catholicossal palace. When Iberia and most of Armenia were subjugated, to celebrate his victory, he «... ordered the Byzantine priests to officiate a liturgy in the holy church, and the council of Chalcedon was proclaimed therein; and they communed together in the holy sacrament, the king and our Patriarch Nerses»³⁸.

The victory was ephemeral, for the emperor was obliged to return to Constantinople in the spring of 653. When the emperor left Dvin, Nerses found himself in an untenable situation; he had taken an unilateral action and had communed with the emperor, coming openly on the Byzantine side, and now he had to face Théodoros Rshtouni and the anti-Byzantine party. Nerses withdrew to his native province, for according to Sebeos, «Théodoros the prince of Rshtounik' and the other princes who were with him, were filled with extreme indignation against him».

The catholicossal throne was left vacant until the death of Théodoros Rshtouni.

When Théodoros died Nerses III returned to his office after six years of self-imposed exile³⁹. He took upon himself to reorganize the state-machine. Draskhanakerttsi reports, «Then being of one accord with the feudal lords, they set Hamazasp Mamikonian as prince of Armenia». The catholicos opened negotiations with the imperial government in Byzantium for the defense of Armenia. Unfortunately, the emperor was busy leading a cam-

37. Daranaghi and Ekegheats are given as church lands, see P'avstos Buzand, *History of the Armenians* [Patmut'iun Hayots], Venice, 1832, Bk. IV, ch. 14, p. 114; Adontz, *Armenia*, p. 100.

38. Draskhanakerttsi, p. 86; cf. Sebeos, p. 141.

39. Sebeos, pp. 150-151; Draskhanakerttsi, p. 88; Vardan, p. 69.

paign against the Slavs⁴⁰. What Constans did was to give Hamazasb Mamikonian the honorific title of Kuropalate⁴¹. Thus, for a short while under Nerses III and Hamazasb Mamikonian the pro-Byzantine party had the upper hand in state affairs. It was during this brief period that Nerses III completed the building of the Zwart'nots complex which was left unfinished because of his exile. He brought water from the river K'asagh, planted vineyards and fortified the complex with a bulwork of ramparts, and according to Draskhanakerttsi, «He also established in it multitudes of families according to the status of urban people [Lit. of citizens]»⁴².

Scholars have understood the above quoted statement in two ways: Ormanian thinks that Nerses was constructing accommodation for pilgrims⁴³, while Avdalbegian suggests that the catholicos brought peasants from the surrounding country, allotted them lands and made them settle around the cathedral⁴⁴. Ormanian's view must be rejected completely because we have no historic evidence that the words **ambokhut'iwns erdumardats** means pilgrims. Avdalbegian has also misinterpreted the passage by taking **erd** separately as meaning a piece of land⁴⁵. But both of them have left out the key phrase **ast paymani k'aghak'akanats'** which literally means «according to the state or nature of belonging to a city». The Haykazian dictionary gives the following meanings to the word **k'aghak'akan**, «as a citizen» and «city dweller», and it quotes a passage from Draskhanakerttsi where **k'aghak'akanats** (of urban people) is contrasted with **geghjkats'** (of peasants)⁴⁶.

If the catholicos had intended to build accommodations

40. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1883-5) AM 6171 pp. 356 sq. G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, trans. I. Hussey, Oxford, 1968, p. 117, n. 2.

41. Draskhanakerttsi, pp. 88 sq. cf. Sebeos, pp. 151 sq.

42. Draskhanakerttsi, p. 88.

43. Ormanian, vol. I, col. 497.

44. T. Avdalbegian, *Armenological Researches [Hayagitakan Hetazotut'iunner]*, Erevan, 1969, pp. 156 sq.

45. He takes it as «erdoy hogh» while in the quoted passage there is nothing about land (hogh), it is «ertumard», which literally means household, people dwelling under a roof (ert), see *The New Dictionary of the Armenian Language [Nor Bargirk Haykazian Lezui]*, Venice, 1836, vol. I, p. 674.

46. *The New Dictionary of the Armenian Language*, vol. II, p. 969 gives its greek meaning as (Asteios) «of the town», «town bred», and its Latin as urbanus, «of or belonging to the city» (opp. rusticus).

for pilgrims or establish a village for the cultivators of the church lands why then did he need to give them «The status of urban people»? It seems to me that the catholicos was doing something totally different: he was establishing a new ecclesiastical urban center. This fact is confirmed by T'ovma Ardzrouni that after the earthquake of Dvin, in the third year of king Sumpat (A. D. 893), catholicos Géorg II Garnetsi (877-897):

«...having abandoned his dwelling in Dvin, went out and dwelt in the New City (**Nor K'aghak'**)⁴⁷, at the cathedral which the blessed lord Nerses III, catholicos of Armenia, had built in the name of saint Gregory»⁴⁸.

In his endeavours to free the church from secular control, Nerses not only utilized the church council of Dvin of A. D. 645, but he also wanted to be far from the capital, the seat of civil administration, and thus be less open to direct interference from the prince of Armenia, the commander of the feudal army (**spapet**) or any other secular authority. It was for that end that Nerses III built a new fortified city and made many peasants settle in it. Since Armenia was a feudal country, this meant a change of social status — the peasants were being transferred from the status of rural people (**shinakan**) to the status of urban people (**ramik**)⁴⁹.

Hamazasp Mamikonian died after four years rule in A. D. 661. The civil war among the Arabs subsided and Mu'awiya's position was secure⁵⁰. The central government in Damascus was able

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47. The town that Nerses III founded is called Nor Kaghak, « New City » or Srboyn Grigory, « Saint Gregory ». Draskhanakertsi, p. 111, Avdalbegian, *Armenological Researches*, pp. 158 sq.
48. T'ovma Ardzruni, *History of the Ardzruni Dynasty [Patmut'iun Tann Ardzruniats]*, Constantinople, 1852, p. 260. The text has Nerses II which probably is a scribal error between Բ and Դ. Samuel Anetsi, *Collections from Books of Historians*, p. 96, gives the date of the earthquake as A.D. 898.
49. King Arsaces II built in Gogovit a comopolis (dastakert) called Arshkavan, and to encourage people to settle there, he turned it into a city of refuge. The feudal lords and the church were opposed to the idea and finally destroyed the place. See Movses Khorenatsi, *History of the Armenians [Patmut'iun Hayots]*, Venice, 1865, iii, 27, pp. 213 sq.; P'avstos Biuzand, *History of the Armenians [Patmut'iun Hayots]*, Venice, 1832, iv, pp. 110 sq., 118 sq.
50. The battle of Siffin ended on 13 Safar 37/31 July 657 where the two parties agreed on arbitration. See Muhammad ibn Jarir el-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Rusul wa'l-Muluk*, ed. M.J. De Goeje, vol. I, Leiden, 1879, pp. 3340-60; Abu-Hanifah Ahmad ibn Dawud Dinawari, *Kitab al-Akhbar al-Tiwal*, ed. V. Guirgass, Leiden, 1888, pp. 202-210; Ahmed ibn Abu Ya'qub ibn Wadih Ya'qubi, *Tarikh*, ed. M.T. Houtsma, vol. II, Leiden 1883, pp. 219-222. The idea of arbitration was disastrous for 'Ali because it produced discord in his camp. He was

to devote more attention to re-establish its authority in those regions where it had been shaken. Catholicos Nerses III for the last time took upon himself the arduous task of guiding the destiny of Armenia during the critical times. Towards the end of his life he made a complete political **volte-face**, abandoning his earlier pro-Byzantine political stand and adopting the pro-Arab policy of Théodoros Rshtouni. According to Draskhanakerttsi,

«Then the great patriarch Nerses, together with the Armenian feudal lords (**nakharars**) asked Mawi (Mu'awiya) the **amirapet** (caliph)⁵¹ to set upon the sovereign government of Armenia Grigor Mamikonian who was living as a hostage near him... he conferred upon Grigor the princely honour and made him commander of Armenia»⁵².

Thus the chaos of the Arab invasions was finally resolved by the united submission of the ecclesiastical and temporal authorities to the Arabs, and in the person of Grigor Mamikonian the internal autonomy of the land was preserved. Soon after Grigor was appointed governor, Nerses III died after twenty-one years of pontificate in A. D. 662.

assasinated in Ramadan 40/Jan 661 and Mu'awiya's authority steadily increased. See J. Wellhausen, *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall*, trans. M.G. Weir (Calcutta, 1927) (reprint, Beirut, 1963), pp. 100 sq.; P.K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 8th ed., London, 1964, pp. 179 sq.

51. Amirapet — from Arabic Amir-al-Mu'minin — Commander of the Faithful. See H. Hubschmann, *Armenische Grammatik, I, Armenische Etymologie* (Leipzig, 1895), (reprinted Hildesheim, 1962), pp. 262, 267, 300.
52. Draskhanakerttsi, pp. 89 sq.; according to Ghevond, p. 14, this change was due to the threats of Mu'awiya.

ՆԵՐՍԷՍ Գ. ԿԱԹՈՂԻԿՈՍ ՏԱՅԵՑԻ

ՎԵՐ . ՄԱՆՈՒԷԼ ՃԻՆՊԱՇԵԱՆ

(Ամփոփում)

Ներսէս Գ. Կաթողիկոս Տայեցիի իշխանութեան ժամանակաշրջանը (641-662 թթ․) կը գուգադիպի հայ ժողովուրդի քաղաքական, եկեղեցական, ընկերային եւ հասարակական կեանքի ամենէն նգնաժամային պահերէն մէկուն: Տայեցի, որ իր կարելի միջոցներով կը պայքարի վերոյիշեալ բոլոր նակատներուն վրայ, ձեռնամուխ կ'ըլլայ նաեւ շինարարական աշխատանքներու: Զուարթնցի տաճարին կառուցումը կը հանդիսանայ անոր շինարարական նիգերուն փառքն ու պսակը: