CHAPTER 12

IRAN, ARMENIA AND GEORGIA

POLITICAL CONTACTS

I

The geographical, historical and cultural links between Iran and the Caucasian area extend into remote antiquity. The Caucasus range has been from time immemorial the barrier separating the Eurasian steppe lands from more advanced civilizations centred on Mesopotamia and Anatolia. The Armenian plateau, with its mighty volcanic peaks, later imposed a formidable barrier to the westward drive of the Iranian people, once they were firmly established in their historical habitat. There is little doubt that some of the ancestors of the Iranians, like the Hittites and other Indo-European warrior aristocracies, entered Armenia from the north along the Caspian littoral, which was to be for centuries the classic invasion route for northern nomads attracted by the wealth and economic opportunities of the ancient Near East.

During the Early Bronze Age, extending through the 3rd millennium B.C., north-western Iran formed a single cultural zone with Armenia and southern Georgia,[1] which all entered into the orbit of what is generally known as the Kuro-Araxes culture. This in turn links up with the Khirbet-Kerak pottery culture of Palestine and Syria. The connections between the Armenian and Iranian Middle and Late Bronze Ages are well known,[2] while the Luristān bronzes are sometimes now attributed to Cimmerians who had entered Iran by way of the Caucasus (pl. 36(*a*)).

During recent decades, archaeologists have devoted increasing interest to the civilization of Urartu, the mighty rival of Assyria. The kingdom of Urartu flourished in a vast region centred on Lake Vān in Armenia, and incorporated at one time the advanced culture of the

[1] C. A. Burney, "Excavations at Yanik Tepe, north-west Iran", *Iraq* XXIII (1961), pp. 138–53; XXIV (1962), pp. 138–52; XXVI (1964), pp. 54–61; T. Burton Brown, *Excavations in Azarbaijan, 1948* (London, 1951).

[2] "Anatolia and Armenia was the original centre from which metallurgy spread over the lands of the Ancient East as well as over Europe and eastern Asia." – E. Herzfeld, *Iran and the Ancient East* (Oxford, 1941), p. 160.

Mannians, around Lake Urmīya. The influence of Urartian art and architecture on that of the Medes and Persians has long been suspected. The latest in a series of scholars who have studied this question is David Stronach, who has published a suggestive study linking the lofty Urartian tower temples with Persian Achaemenian structures known from examples at Pasargadae and Naqsh-i Rustam.[1] The Urartians, incidentally, live on in the pages of Greek authors under the name "Alarodians"; both these ethnic terms correspond to the name Ararat, traditionally given to Armenia's highest mountain, which the Armenians themselves know as Masis.

During the heyday of the Achaemenian dynasty, the Armenians and the ancestors of the Georgians came under the aegis of the Great Kings of Iran.[2] Herodotus informs us of the tribute which the various tribes paid to their Persian overlord, while Xenophon's *Anabasis* provides the classic account of the life of the Armenians and south-western Georgian tribes whom he encountered on his toilsome march from Mesopotamia to Trebizond.

The transition from tribal-patriarchal organization to independent monarchies in both Armenia and Georgia is traditionally linked with the campaigns of Alexander the Great, and the eventual replacement of the Achaemenian empire by the much weaker Seleucid state.

In Armenia, the initiative in building up a unified state was taken by the dynasty of the Orontids, who were descended from the satrap Orontes who is mentioned by Xenophon.[3] This Orontes was married about 401 B.C. to the Princess Rhodogune, daughter of the Persian Great King Artaxerxes II. During the fraternal strife between Artaxerxes II and his brother Cyrus the Younger, in which Xenophon and his Ten Thousand played a role, Orontes took the side of his father-in-law Artaxerxes, thus contributing to his victory.

Artaxerxes II turned out to be a feeble ruler, under whom the Persian empire fell into decay. Profiting by this, Orontes set himself up in Armenia as a virtually independent dynast, and became extremely wealthy, having a personal fortune of three thousand talents of silver.

[1] D. Stronach, "Urartian and Achaemenian Tower Temples", *JNES* XXVI (1967), pp. 278–88.

[2] Armenia and the Armenians feature prominently in the Behistun inscriptions of Darius, in which we hear of an Armenian named Dadarshi, sent by the Persians to crush an insurrection in his homeland. See Roland Kent, *Old Persian* (New Haven, Conn., 1950), pp. 117–24, Mention of Armenia also occurs in Persepolis E (Kent, p. 136) and Naqsh-i Rustam (Kent, p. 138); also in the inscription of Xerxes, Persepolis H (Kent, p. 151) and the inscription of Xerxes at Vān itself (Kent, pp. 152–3). See further a Persepolis inscription of Artaxerxes II or III: "This is the Armenian" (Kent, p. 156).

[3] *Anabasis* II. iv. 8, 9, v. 40; III. iv. 13, v. 17; IV. iii. 4.

In later years, Orontes turned against his father-in-law and overlord, Artaxerxes, and led the revolt of the satraps which broke out in 366 B.C. Eventually Orontes submitted and was pardoned; he obtained the satrapy of Mysia and died in 344 B.C.

The name Orontes is itself of Iranian origin, deriving from Avestan *aurand* ("mighty, hero"), and being related closely to Pahlavī *arvand*, with the same meaning. The local, Armenian forms of the name are Erwand, Arawan, and also Hrant. The Orontid dynasty spans the gap between the old Urartian kings (the First Monarchy in Armenia), and the Third Armenian Monarchy of the Artaxiads, in Classical times. Until recently, little was known about the offspring and successors of Orontes I, but their existence as a regular dynasty over three centuries is attested by the inscriptions on the funeral monument of King Antiochus I of Commagene (69–34 B.C.) at Nimrūd Dāgh in eastern Turkey (pls. 37, 38). Antiochus was himself a scion of the Orontid line, and evidently proud of his Armenian royal ancestors, many of whom he enumerates, making it possible to compile a provisional list of this most interesting dynasty:[1]

A. *Satraps of Armenia*

Orontes I, 401–344 B.C.
Orontes II, 344–331 B.C.

B. *Kings of Armenia*

Orontes II (*continued*), 331 B.C.
Mithranes, 331–317 B.C.
(Neoptolemus, satrap, 323–321 B.C.)
Orontes III, 317–260 B.C.
Samus, 260 B.C.
Arsames, 260–228 B.C.
Xerxes, 228–212 B.C.
Abdissares, *c.* 212 B.C.
Orontes IV, 212–200 B.C.

C. *Kings of Sophene*

Zariadris (Zareh), Strategos, 200 B.C.; King, 190 B.C. and after
Mithrobuzanes I, a contemporary of Artaxias I of Greater Armenia, around 170 B.C.
Orontes V, about 95 B.C.; annexation of Sophene by Tigranes II of Greater Armenia

[1] Toumanoff, "The Orontids of Armenia", in *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*, pp. 277–354.

Under the last Persian king of the Achaemenian dynasty, Armenia enjoyed peace and prosperity. The rulers of Iran now interfered little in Armenian internal affairs, and trade and agriculture flourished. This state of things was abruptly shattered by the invasion of Alexander the Great of Macedon. The battle of Arbela (Gaugamela) on 1 October 331 resulted in decisive victory for the Macedonians and Greeks over the last of the Achaemenians, Darius III Codomannus. Loyal to the last, the Armenians furnished 40,000 infantry and 7,000 horsemen to the Persian Great King, under the personal command of their own sovereign, King Orontes II. The Armenian cavalry made up the right flank of the Persian line of battle at Arbela.

During this catastrophic defeat, Orontes II apparently lost his life. At any rate, Alexander the Great celebrated his victory by sending Mithranes, a son of Orontes II, to be satrap of Armenia in his father's stead. It is interesting to note that this Mithranes was a former Iranian governor of Sardis in western Asia Minor, who had defected to the side of the Macedonians, and thus found himself ranged at the battle of Arbela on the opposite side to his own father.

Alexander the Great died at the zenith of his power, at the age of thirty-three; but his cultural and imperial heritage lived on (pl. 36(*b*)). Far to the east, in Bactria, Parthia, and at many sites in modern Afghanistan, India and Pakistan, Greek or rather Hellenistic cities grew up almost overnight. Stagnant, sleepy backwaters were revitalized, and decayed trade routes brought swiftly back into operation. Greek taste in building, sculpture and the arts, and knowledge of Greek literature and philosophy spread to out of the way corners of Anatolia and Central Asia. Greek science and technology produced rapid improvements in living standards, hygiene and sanitation, and in domestic amenities, at least for the select few. Greek ingenuity in engineering and construction left its mark over many regions of the old Persian empire.[1]

Armenia, which lay close to Alexander's expansion route towards India, could not escape the impact of the new Greco-Oriental world civilization which he helped to create. At the same time, in this new world of Hellenism, the vestiges of the earlier world of "Iranianism" were not effaced, nor were the elements of local advanced culture inherited from Urartu. Armenia now found herself in close touch with a number of Hellenistic countries, and thus open to new economic and social influences. The exclusively agricultural economy and rural exis-

[1] J. M. Cook, *The Greeks in Ionia and the East* (London, 1962), pp. 154–72.

tence of Achaemenian Armenia, where the use of coined money was scarcely known, were suddenly altered. The important overland route of transit trade, connecting China, India and Central Asia with the Mediterranean world, passed through Armenia, while there was a parallel northern route through Caucasian Albania (Āzarbāījān), Iberia and Colchis debouching on the Black Sea.

Great cities arose along these routes, which became homes of foreign merchants and centres of diffusion for Greek culture. The growth of a money economy and of urban life generally made for the decay of Armenia's traditional tribal-patriarchal society, and for the emergence of new patterns of urban stratification, including the growth of a town bourgeoisie and artisan class, and the commercial exploitation of slaves, though this latter institution never reached the massive proportions which it did in Greece and Rome. From the 3rd century B.C., Armenian royal authority grew more absolute, and the administrative machinery more complex, especially in regard to the royal court and the taxation and fiscal systems. The clan chiefs and rustic headmen began to turn into a more sophisticated courtier and squire class, enjoying greater luxury and ease, and accustomed to a higher standard of living.

To appreciate Armenia's international position within the Hellenistic world, we must take stock briefly of the general situation in the Near East and Asia Minor. After Alexander's sudden death in 323 B.C., his generals quarrelled over the partition of his dominions. Ptolemy created a Greek kingdom in Egypt; Seleucus did the same in Syria and Mesopotamia, with his capital first at Seleucia, replacing ancient Babylon, and then at Antioch on the Orontes. Antipater conserved the old kingdom of Macedon, with its European dependencies as far as the Black Sea and also the Adriatic, with sovereignty over the city states in Greece. The attempts of Lysimachus to create a kingdom of the Bosphorus, with a capital on the Gallipoli peninsula, united his rivals against him, and failed at his death in 281 B.C.

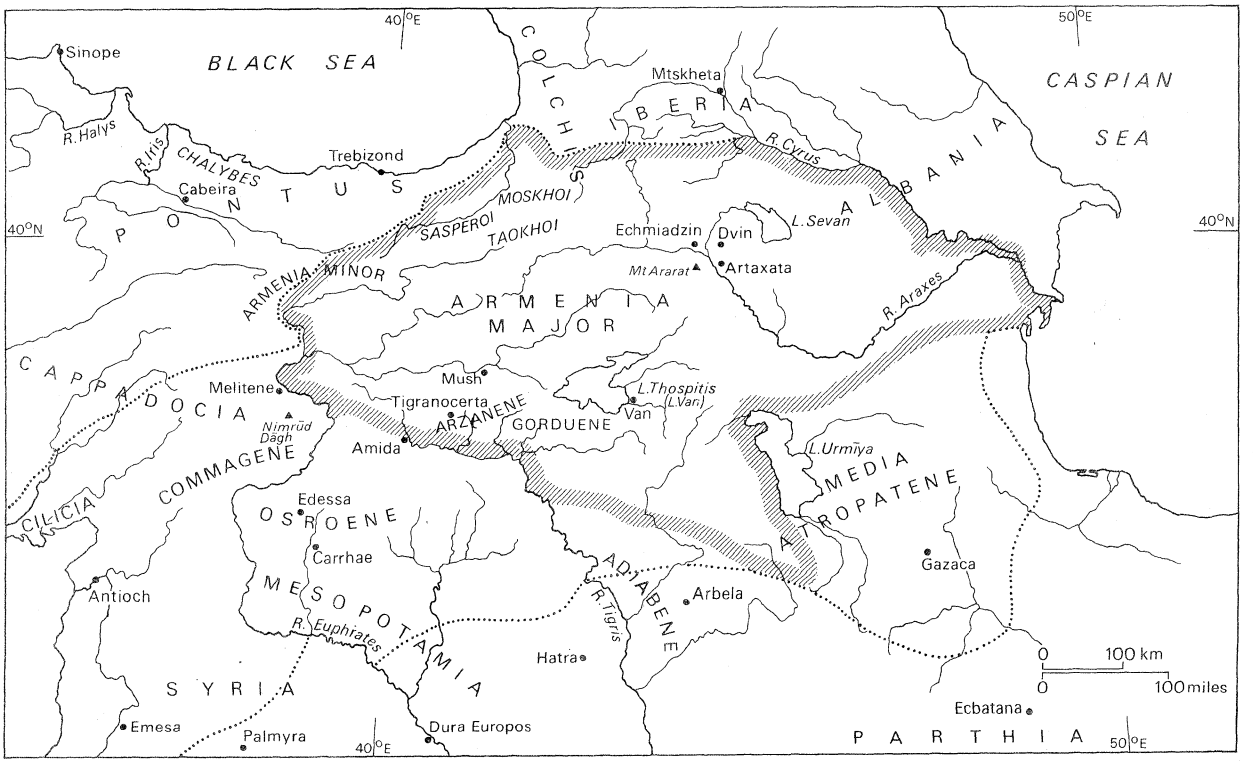
Hardly had Alexander's successors established an uneasy balance of power in the Near East and Aegean region, when new disturbances burst upon the civilized world from outside. Celtic tribes from the middle Danube shattered Macedon, devastated Thrace and Phrygia, and established themselves on the Asia Minor plateau to the west of Armenia, under the name of Galatians. Here they remained until Roman and Christian times, being the recipients of one of St Paul's epistles. Soon afterwards the Iranian-speaking people of Parthia overran the

Persian plateau and deprived the Seleucids of their possessions east of the Euphrates. The Parthians effectively separated the Seleucids of Syria, as well as the Armenians, from those eastern provinces of Alexander's realm which developed into the Greek kingdom of Bactria and also took in large regions of the Indus valley. These eastern losses led the Greco-Syrian kings of the Seleucid dynasty to seek compensation at the expense of Egypt to the south, and of Armenia and other independent states of Asia Minor to the north.

During the Seleucid period, Armenia became divided into several virtually independent kingdoms and principalities. The classification adopted at this epoch persisted, with certain changes, well into the Byzantine era.[1] The most important region, of course, was Greater Armenia, situated east of the upper Euphrates, and including vast areas all round Lake Vān, along the Araxes valley, and northwards to take in Lake Sevan, the Karabagh, and even the southern marches of Georgia. Lesser Armenia, on the other hand, was a smaller and less fertile kingdom, to the west of the upper Euphrates; it included the present-day districts of Sīvās and Erzinjān, and bordered on ancient Cappadocia. To the south-west lay the two little kingdoms of Sophene and Commagene, separated from one another by the middle Euphrates, and having the fertile and desirable Melitene (Malatya) plain running between them. Sophene and Commagene often featured as buffer states between Parthia and Armenia on the one hand, and Syria and Rome on the other. Their royal houses had strong dynastic links with the Armenian Orontid house. Through their proximity to such great cities as Antioch and Palmyra, the kingdoms of Sophene and Commagene early became great centres of Hellenistic and then of Roman art and civilization, which they in turn helped to transmit eastwards into Greater Armenia and Transcaucasia.

The Seleucid kings never succeeded in asserting direct rule over Armenia proper. They collected tribute from local Armenian princes, whom they used to confirm in office by granting them the title of "strategos", corresponding to the old Persian viceregal title of satrap. This situation changed somewhat under the Seleucid King Antiochus III, known as the Great (223–187 B.C.), an ambitious monarch who cherished dreams of restoring the empire of Alexander the Great. The Armenian King Xerxes rashly declined to pay tribute to Antiochus, who besieged him in his capital of Arsamosata and forced him to sub-

[1] The best guide to this classification is given by Adontz, pp. 7–182.



Map 9. Armenia at the time of the Parthian empire.

mit. Xerxes then received the sister of Antiochus in marriage. This lady, Antiochis by name, soon had the unfortunate Xerxes, her spouse, murdered, and united the Armenian kingdom of Sophene to the dominions of Antiochus III, her brother. The ill-fated King Xerxes has left some small coins bearing his portrait. We see on them a dignified, bearded, somewhat donnish-looking figure, wearing a pointed hat or tiara of unusual shape, with a peak in front and a streamer or tassels floating down the back. He has a thoughtful expression on his face, as if wondering how to cope with the political and marital troubles which eventually proved too much for him.

Antiochus III appointed a scion of the Armenian Orontids, Zariadris (Zareh) to be strategos of Sophene in 200 B.C. At this time, in Greater Armenia, the power of the main Orontid dynasty was drawing to a close. The last ruler of this line was Orontes IV (212–200 B.C.). Both he and his brother Mithras, High Priest of the Temple of the Sun and Moon at the city of Armavir, are mentioned in Greek inscriptions discovered there in 1927. One inscription contains an address of High Priest Mithras to his brother King Orontes; another evidently alludes to the king's tragic death.[1] This event was the result of the uprising headed by a local dynast called Artaxias, and evidently instigated from Syria by King Antiochus III. Following this coup, Antiochus appointed Artaxias to be the strategos of Greater Armenia in place of the dead Orontes.

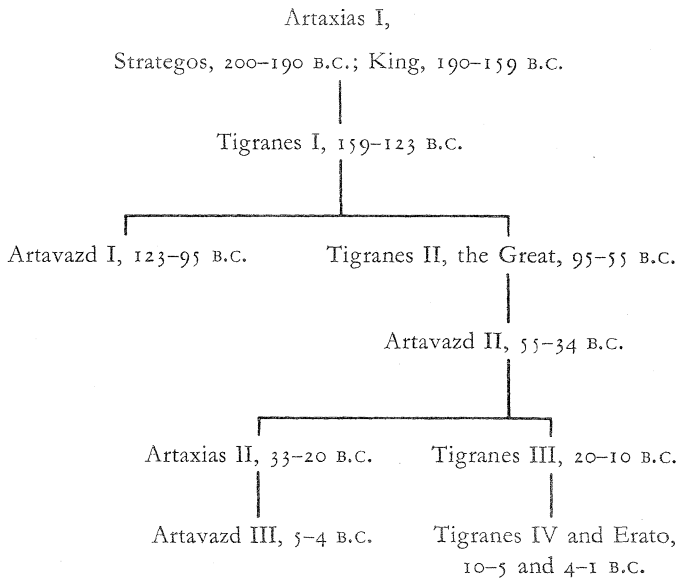
Artaxias was the founder of the Third and greatest Armenian monarchy, counting the Urartian kingdom founded by Aramé as the first, as does Moses of Khorene, and the Orontids as the second. The name Artaxias is the equivalent of the Persian Artaxerxes, and the Armenian Artashes. The table opposite showing the basic sequence of the Artaxiad line is based on the researches of the French numismatist Henri Seyrig.[2]

For a decade after being installed by Antiochus III, from 200 to 190 B.C., Artaxias and his junior partner, Zariadris of Sophene, bided their time. Ultimately, Antiochus overreached himself by challenging the mighty Roman Republic to a trial of strength. No sooner had Antiochus sustained at Magnesia his great defeat at the hands of the Romans (190 B.C.) than Artaxias and Zariadris seceded from the Seleucid state.

[1] These inscriptions, with other essential epigraphic material, are collected and discussed by Trever, *Ocherki po istorii kul'tury drevnei Armenii.*

[2] See particularly H. Seyrig, "Trésor monétaire de Nisibe", *RN* 1955, pp. 85–128; more recently, Bedoukian, "A Classification".

THE ARTAXIAD DYNASTY



In the Peace of Apamea (188 B.C.), which sealed the Roman victory, the Senate in Rome granted them the status of independent rulers. This was Armenia's first juridical contact with the Roman Senate, which was glad to acquire two grateful allies in that strategic part of the world – pending completion of the usual preliminaries to swallow them up and annex their lands to the Roman Republic itself.

Under this new-found Roman patronage, the two Armenian kingdoms of Greater Armenia and Sophene pursued a lively expansionist policy. From the Medes and Persians, Artaxias took Media Atropatena, the modern Āzarbāījān, extending virtually to the banks of the Caspian Sea. From the Georgians he seized a broad slice of territory to the north-west of Lake Sevan. From the Chalybes, Mossynoeci and Taokhoi, the Armenians took much of the upland plateau round Erzerum, and some of the wild mountain country of the Pontic Alps. The province of Taron, round about the town of Mush, was cleared of remaining Seleucid garrisons.

One important result of this territorial growth was the cultural and linguistic consolidation of the Armenian people. Except for the Georgian marches, and for a few remote tribal districts, such as Sassoun, Armenian became the dominant spoken language of the peasant masses, the hunters and tribesmen, and the townspeople, except for those of Jewish and Greek birth. The Greek geographer Strabo (58 B.C.–A.D. 25) lays special stress on this result of the conquests of Artaxias and Zariadris: "Thanks to their work of unification", he says, "all the inhabitants of these various districts to-day speak the same language."[1] It must be remembered, however, that prior to the invention of the Armenian national alphabet after A.D. 400, all works of literature, religious texts, and government decrees, were written down and transmitted in Iranian written in Aramaic characters, or else in Greek. The Armenian royal family and aristocracy were bilingual, speaking Greek or Iranian as well as Armenian – rather like the Russian Court prior to the 1917 Revolution, where English and French were spoken in preference to Russian.

Like the Orontid monarchy in Armenia, the kingdom of Iberia or eastern Georgia has its origins in the era of Alexander the Great. Although Alexander never invaded Georgia or the Caucasus, he is credited throughout the region with all manner of buildings and mighty feats. According to the Georgian Annals *Kartlis tskhovreba* ("The Life of Georgia"), Alexander entrusted the administration of Georgia to a relative of his by the name of Azon (very likely a confusion with the name Jason, of Argonaut fame), who proved such a tyrant as to alienate not only the Georgians, but even the Greeks whom he had brought with him.

The oppressed Georgians then revolted under the lead of Parnavaz, a descendant of Kartlos, eponymous ancestor of the Kartvelian or Georgian nation, after whom Sakartvelo, land of the Georgians, is named. This Parnavaz was a nephew of Samara, patriarch or tribal leader of the Iberians of Mtskheta; with the help of King Kuji of Colchis, Parnavaz drove out Azon and his Greek mercenaries, and was recognized by the Kings of Syria and Armenia as legitimate ruler of Iberia.

Parnavaz reorganized the army of the Kartlosids and appointed seven or eight *eristavi*s or "heads of the people", to one of whom he accorded the Iranian title of *spaspet* or commander-in-chief. These

[1] *Geography* XI. 14. 5.

officers were each assigned one province of Georgia to govern, the spaspet being responsible for the central area of Inner Kartli, around Mtskheta and Uplistsikhe. It seems that this office of spaspet was in fact occupied by the member of the Iberian royal family next in seniority to the king: Strabo states that in the royal hierarchy of Iberia "the second in line administers justice and commands the army".[1] It is also possible to equate these high dignitaries with the viceroys of Iberia, whose hereditary necropolis was uncovered in Mtskheta-Armazi, together with engraved gems bearing portraits of two of them, Zevakh and Asparukh.[2] The difficulty is that these viceroys of Mtskheta bore the Iranian title of *pitiakhsh* or *vitaxa*, roughly approximating to that of satrap, and suggesting that they were officials appointed by the Persians to supervise the Iberian kings.[3] No doubt the Persian Great Kings appointed such officials whenever they were strong enough to impose their will on the Georgians, but at other times, we must conclude that the vitaxae were in fact deputy monarchs, with the duties of a High Constable. This latter interpretation is supported by the bilingual epitaph of a Georgian princess named Serapita, inscribed in Greek and an unusual form of Aramaic which has been called the Armazi script. Deciphered and published by Professor Giorgi Tsereteli, the epitaph runs:

I am Serapita, daughter of Zevakh the younger, pitiakhsh of Farsman the king, and wife of Iodmangan the victorious, winner of many conquests, master of the court of Ksefarnug, the great king of the Iberians, and son of Agrippa, master of the court of King Farsman. Woe, woe, for the sake of her who was not of full age, whose years were not completed, and so good and beautiful that no one was like her in excellence; and she died at the age of twenty-one.[4]

This inscription makes it abundantly clear that, during the 2nd century A.D. at least, the vitaxa of Iberia was no foreign official, but a high dignitary of the royal court, allied by marriage with the highest aristocrats in the Georgian land.

The political history of Iran during the Parthian and Sasanian periods is scarcely intelligible without reference to Armenia and Georgia. The last great opponent of Rome in the Black Sea region, King Mithradates

[1] *Geography* XI. 3. 6.
[2] Lang, *The Georgians*, pp. 84–5, fig. 18, plate 26.
[3] See the discussion in Toumanoff, *Studies*, pp. 156–64.
[4] G. V. Tsereteli, "Armazskaya bilingva" (The bilingual inscription from Armazi), *Izvestiya Instituta Yazyka i Material'noi Kul'tury* (Bulletin of the Institute of Language and Material Culture) XIII (Tbilisi, 1942).

Eupator of Pontus (113–63 B.C.), was to a great extent a Caucasian dynast, being ruler of Colchis or Western Georgia, and the land of the Laz, around Trebizond. His son-in-law, King Tigranes the Great of Armenia (95–55 B.C.) spent some years as a hostage at the court of King Mithradates II of Parthia. When at the summit of his power, Tigranes had four vassal kings, including the ruler of Atropatene (Āzarbāījān) attending him like slaves wherever he went.[1]

At one time, the domains of Tigranes the Great stretched from the shores of the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean, from Mesopotamia up to the Pontic Alps. The vast empire, formed of a varied mixture of diverse tribes, with their own dialects and cultures, could hardly be turned overnight into a cohesive and durable political structure. Inner disunity aided the designs of the Romans, who launched a series of onslaughts on the Armenian dynast, beginning with the invasion by Lucullus in 69–68 B.C., and culminating in the campaigns of Pompey in Armenia, Iberia and Colchis in 66–65 B.C. The downfall of Tigranes the Great was precipitated by the flight of his son, Tigranes the Younger, to the court of the Parthian king Phraates III, who supplied him with an army with which to invade Armenia, and join forces with the victorious Romans.

This débâcle was typical of the situation of Armenia, and to a lesser extent, Georgia, in the succeeding centuries, when Transcaucasia was a bone of contention between the two warring empires of Rome and Iran. Rome's interests were best served when Armenia was courted and reinforced as a buffer state. Spasmodic Roman attempts to annex and assimilate Armenia and Georgia led in the long run to disastrous confrontations with the mobile and warlike Parthians and Sasanians, whom the Romans were seldom able to beat in open combat.

There is no space here to chronicle the vicissitudes of the wars between Rome and Parthia, and later between Byzantium and Sasanian Iran, over Armenia's largely defenceless territory. Lucullus and Pompey, Crassus and Mark Anthony, Corbulo and Trajan, are but a few of the Roman leaders who campaigned in this region with varying degrees of success or disastrous failure. One unforgettable moment in these bloodthirsty, and in the long run, fruitless wars occurred after the battle of Carrhae in 53 B.C., in which Crassus and his legions were completely wiped out. The Armenian king Artavazd had urged Crassus to attack Parthia by way of the Armenian highlands, but Crassus had ignored his advice. Artavazd, thus rebuffed, allied himself with the Parthian king

[1] Plutarch, *Lives*, "Lucullus", xxi. 5.

Orodes II, and was entertaining him at the Armenian capital, Artaxata, when a messenger arrived carrying the head of the unhappy Roman general. Artavazd, though in close personal and political touch with the Parthians, was so well versed in Greek literature that he composed plays in Greek, which were acted at the Armenian court. When the head of Crassus was brought in, a performance of the *Bacchae* by Euripides was taking place, in honour of the king of Parthia. The head of Crassus was thrown down into the midst of the assembled company, and the leading actor picked it up and danced round in a bacchanalian frenzy, crying:

> "We've hunted down a mighty chase today,
> And from the mountain bring the noble prey!"[1]

Such were the hybrid manners and culture of an Armenia divided between the sophisticated Western influences of Greek and Rome, and the virile eastern world of Parthia.

A new chapter opened in Armenian history when the Parthian Arsacid prince Tiridates was crowned king of Armenia by the Emperor Nero in A.D. 66. From then on, the destinies of Armenia were closely linked with those of the Parthian royal house of the Arsacids. Indeed, during the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D., the Armenian throne was regularly reserved for the Parthian Great King's nearest kin, who was known as "Great King of Armenia" – rather as the heir apparent to the British throne is called the Prince of Wales. This custom, political conditions allowing, continued into early Sasanian times: thus prior to 293, the future Great King Narseh was viceroy of Armenia with the title of *Vazurg Armenān Shāh* ("Great King of Armenia").[2]

The following are the principal rulers of the Arsacid line, to whom Armenia owed the preservation of so much of her ancient glory: dates are approximate only.

Armenian Arsacids

Tiridates I (53–75). Officially crowned by Nero, A.D. 66
Sanatruk (75–110)
Axidares (110–13)
Parthamasiris (113–14). Deposed and murdered by the Emperor Trajan
Parthamaspates (116–17)

[1] Plutarch, *Lives*, "Crassus", xxxiii.

[2] Not "King of Great Armenia", as proposed by Henning, "A Farewell to the Khagan", p. 517. See on this point Honigmann and Maricq, *Recherches*, p. 172, n. 1.

Valarsh I (117–40). Founder of the city of Vagharshapat
Aurelius Pacorus (161–3)
Valarsh II (180–91)
Khusrau I (191–217)
Tiridates II (217–52)
Tiridates III (298–330). First Christian king of Armenia
Khusrau II, called Kotak (330–8). Founder of the city of Dvin
Tigranes V or Tiran (338–51)
Arshak (Arsaces) II (351–67)
Pap (369–74)
Varazdat (374–80)
Arshak III (380–9). Died as the last king of Roman Armenia
Originally co-king with:
Valarshak (380–6). King of Persarmenia
Khusrau III (386–92)
Vramshapuh (392–414). Encouraged invention of the Armenian alphabet
Artaxias IV (423–8)

When the Parthians were overthrown by the Sasanians in A.D. 226, the old Armenian royal house became redoubtable foes of the new Great Kings of Iran. The Armenian Arsacids remained, as they claimed, the champions of Iranian legitimacy. This helps to explain the singular bitterness of the relations between Arsacid Armenia and Sasanian Iran, extending right up to and even after the abolition of the Armenian Arsacid dynasty in 428. We are further confronted with the singular spectacle of a Parthian king, Tiridates III, whose forbear, Tiridates I, was a Magian who was forbidden to defile the sea by sailing to Rome in a boat, being the first ruler of a substantial kingdom to embrace Christianity as the state religion (traditionally, in A.D. 301). We even have a dynasty of Patriarchs of the Armenian Church, descending from the Parthian nobleman who became St Gregory the Illuminator, being proudly remembered by the Armenian Church to this day by the surname Partev, the Parthian.[1]

To be fair to the Sasanians, it must be borne in mind that weakness of Iranian control over Armenia directly contributed to the ignominious defeats which the declining Parthian realm had suffered at the hands of Rome at the end of the 2nd century. The Romans had exploited their dominance in Syria and Armenia to stage a series of aggressive raids against the nerve centres of Parthian royal power. To seal off this

[1] Ormanian, pp. 8, 196.

Roman military corridor was one of the prime and fully justified aims of Great King Ardashīr Pāpakān, who spent the year 230 in a whole series of campaigns against Roman Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Media and Armenia. The Armenians, however, put up a spirited resistance, and succeeded in beating off the Persian offensive.

The resurgence of Iranian power gathered momentum under Ardashir's son Shāpūr I (241–72). In 244, the Roman army of Emperor Gordian III was decisively beaten at Meshik, near Ctesiphon, where Gordian lost his life. The new emperor, Philip the Arab, was forced to cede suzerain rights over Armenia to the Persian Great King. Eight years later, in 252, Shāpūr invaded Armenia, forcing King Tiridates II of the Arsacid line to flee to the Roman Empire, while his sons went over to the Persians.[1] Shāpūr's culminating triumph, in the defeat and capture of the Emperor Valerian in 260, was full of import for the future destinies of Armenia and also of the Georgian lands.

Many controversial points remain to be cleared up in the political history of Armenia during the 3rd and early 4th centuries. For this important period, the Armenian national sources are inextricably mingled with semi-legendary elements, while Roman authors tend to be extremely laconic in regard to Armenian affairs. All the more interest attaches to the well-known inscriptions of Shāpūr I and his high priest, the Magus Kartir, on the Ka'ba-yi Zardusht at Naqsh-i Rustam. From Kartir's inscription, we learn of the efforts of the Zoroastrian hierarchy to stamp out idolatry and other heresies throughout the Persian empire, and to impose orthodox beliefs and the pure Avestan ritual.[2] With its sophisticated syncretistic religious traditions, Armenia must have been a prime target for the zeal of Kartir and his acolytes. This religious offensive was itself made possible by the military successes of Shāpūr, commemorated in his own inscription on the Ka'ba-yi Zardusht, where he asserts his suzerainty over Armenia. The inscription of Kartir alludes to an Iranian invasion of Caucasian Iberia and Albania some time after 260. The inscription of Shāpūr numbers Iberia and Albania among his vassal states, and reveals the existence of a puppet ruler, Hamazasp, installed by him in Iberia.[3]

Likewise of prime importance for the history of Armenia is the inscription of Paikuli. Published by Herzfeld in 1924, this document has

[1] Toumanoff, "The Third-Century Armenian Arsacids", p. 253.

[2] Chaumont, *Recherches*, pp. 74–6.

[3] For the text of the inscriptions, see M. Sprengling, *Third Century Iran* (Chicago, 1953); a commentary is provided by Toumanoff, "The Third-Century Armenian Arsacids", pp. 252–6. For developments in Caucasian Albania, see Movses Daskhurantsi, *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*.

been all too seldom utilized in Armenian historical scholarship.[1] The value of the Paikuli inscription for Armenian history lies in the reliable chronological framework which it affords for events leading up to the accession of Narses as Great King of Iran (293), as also in its mention of a certain "Tīrdāt the King" among the monarchs who offered Narses, the former Viceroy of Armenia, their congratulations on his triumph.[2] Whether this Tīrdāt is to be identified with the first Christian king of Armenia, or whether he is an earlier king with the same name, remains a moot point.[3]

II

The situation in Georgia at this period was somewhat different from that prevailing in Armenia. The Romans, and later, the Byzantines, exploited their naval supremacy in the Black Sea to maintain garrisons and trading points at strategic localities in Abkhazia, Colchis and Lazistan. The local western Georgian population was ruled by petty princes and clan leaders, until the emergence of a strong dynasty in Lazica in the 6th century. In eastern Georgia (Iberia), our knowledge of the dynastic history of the powerful kings of Mtskheta-Armazi is incomplete, in spite of the noteworthy researches of Professor Cyril Toumanoff.[4] It seems that at some time in the eighties of the 2nd century A.D., the last Iberian king of the Third Parnabazid dynasty, Amazaspes or Hamazasp II, was replaced by his sister's son, Rev, son of the king of Armenia. There then existed for over a century an Arsacid or Parthian dynasty in eastern Georgia, allied by blood to the Armenian Arsacids. These Iberian Arsacids became extinct in the 4th century, when the Iberian throne passed to King Mirian III, subsequently St Mirian, the first Christian king of Iberia. The dynasty which he founded is called that of the Chosroids: they were a branch of the Iranian Mihranids, one of the Seven Great Houses of the Sasanian Empire.

The adoption of Christianity by the Armenians and Georgians was to some extent a political move, designed to place the country within the orbit of Greco-Syrian civilization, and to resist cultural and religious assimilation by the Persians. For three centuries, up to the destruction of Sasanian Iran by the forces of Islam, the history of Armenia and Georgia

[1] There is, for instance, no reference to the Paikuli inscription in Grousset's *Histoire de l'Arménie* (Paris, 1947).

[2] E. Herzfeld, *Paikuli: Monument and inscription of the early History of the Sasanian Empire* I (Berlin, 1924), p. 119.

[3] Toumanoff, "The Third Century Armenian Arsacids", pp. 261–75, makes a good case for regarding the two Tīrdāts as separate and distinct historical figures.

[4] *Studies*, pp. 81–4.

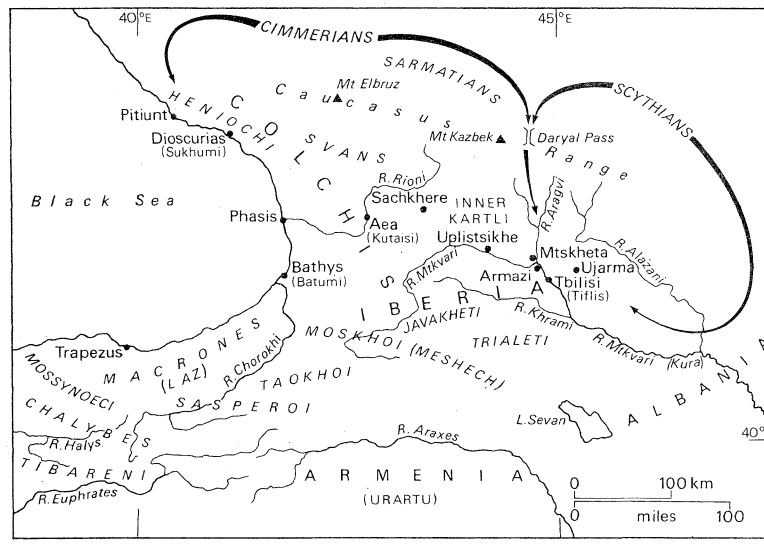
is a sad chronicle of deportations, forced conversions and cruel martyrdoms. In 365 Shāpūr II systematically sacked and destroyed every major town in Armenia, deporting the inhabitants, who included a large number of Jews. By his edict of 449, Yazdgard II sought to impose Zoroastrianism upon Armenia and Georgia. This provoked vigorous resistance. At the battle of Avarair on 2 June 451, sixty-six thousand Armenians under the national hero, Prince Vardan Mamikonian, encountered an army of two hundred and twenty thousand Persians. Vardan and many thousands of his followers perished on the battlefield, and the death of these martyrs is commemorated to this day in the Armenian calendar on Shrove Thursday.[1] Resistance to the Persians continued in Georgia under the semi-legendary King Vakhtang Gorgaslan (*c.* 446–510), whose name means "the wolf-lion". After Vakhtang Gorgaslan's death, Georgia too was reduced to becoming a province of the Persian state.

The extinction of royal power in Iberia left a vacuum in the local power structure of the Georgian lands. This gap was filled now by a resurgent monarchy in western Georgia, where royal power had been in abeyance since the days of Mithradates Eupator of Pontus, the foe of Pompey and the Romans. The new kingdom included that of ancient Colchis, land of the Golden Fleece, and much of Pontus itself; it was called Lazica, being under the leadership of the Laz tribes of the Black Sea coast. In 523 King Tsate of Lazica was baptized and installed a Byzantine garrison in the mighty fortress of Petra (Tsikhis-dziri) overlooking the Black Sea north of Batumi; the site has been excavated by the Batumi Research Institute, under its director, Aslan Inaishvili.

Throughout the reign of Justinian (527–65) and that of his adversary, Khusrau I Anūshirvān (531–79), the Persians and the Byzantines fought for control of Lazica, as well as of upland Svaneti. The Lazic kings did their best to play off the Persians and Byzantines against one another. They had little reason to prefer the Christian Greeks to the Persians, since agents of Justinian even assassinated the Lazic king Gubaz II in 553. These wars are chronicled in detail by Procopius and his continuator Agathias of Myrina, who provide valuable data on Persian operations in the Caucasus, as well as almost verbatim reports of speeches and dialogues, which bring the period vividly to life.[2]

[1] On the ideological front, the struggle was carried on by the remarkable 5th-century Armenian polemist Eznik of Kolb, with his eloquent *Refutation of the Sects* (Russian trans. by V. K. Chaloyan, Erevan, 1959; French version by L. Mariès and Ch. Mercier, in *Patrologia Orientalis* XXVIII. 4 (1959), pp. 549–776.

[2] For Agathias see bibliography.



Map 10. Colchis and Iberia (Georgia).

Byzantine expansion was resumed by the Emperor Maurice (582–602). Maurice is supposed to have been a simple Armenian peasant, who made his way to Constantinople on foot, and there worked his way up to the supreme dignity. A stone obelisk marking his home is shown to visitors in the Armenian village of Oshakan, close to the memorial chapel of St Mesrop Mashtotz, who invented the Armenian alphabet. However, the treatment meted out by Maurice to the Armenians generally was not very liberal. In 591, he signed a peace treaty with Persia, which advanced the Byzantine frontier roughly to the line between lakes Vān and Sevan, with Dvin (pl. 41(*b*)) in the reduced Iranian part.[1] Finding the Armenians troublesome in their homeland, Maurice conceived a plan to co-operate with the Great King of Iran in removing all the main Armenian nobles and their followers from their homes.

According to the Armenian chronicler Sebēos, Maurice wrote to the Persian Great King.

The Armenians are a knavish and indocile nation. They are situated between us and are a source of trouble. I am going to gather mine and send them to

[1] See A. A. Kalantarian, *Material culture of Dvin, 4th–8th centuries* (Armenian, Russian and English texts) (Erevan, 1970).

Thrace; you send yours to the East. If they die there, it will be so many enemies that will die. If, on the contrary, they kill, it will be so many enemies that they will kill. As for us, we shall live in peace. But if they remain in their country, there will never be any quiet for us.[1]

The two rulers apparently agreed to carry out this plan, but the Persians failed to collaborate fully. When the Byzantines began to carry out the deportation order, many Armenians fled to Persia, which they now found less tyrannical than Christian Byzantium.

The successes of the Emperor Maurice emboldened the Georgians to reassert their independence under Byzantine protection. The Iberian princes Guaram and Stephen I and II took the unusual step of issuing coins modelled on the silver drachms of Hormizd IV of Iran (579–90), but embodying various independent elements in the design, beginning with the addition of the initials of the respective Georgian princes, and culminating in the substitution of the Christian Cross for the sacred flame normally portrayed on the Zoroastrian fire-altar on the coin's reverse.[2] This was, of course, a political act of the first magnitude, and points to the efforts of Duke Stephen I of Iberia between 590 and 607 to re-establish the political autonomy of eastern Georgia, and strengthen the Christian faith. This Duke Stephen I, who received the Byzantine title of Patrikios (Patrician) is portrayed on one of the sculptures on the eastern facade of the church of Jvari ("the Cross") on a high hill overlooking the Kura valley near Mtskheta (pl. 40). It was in Duke Stephen's time also that the Georgian Church finally broke with the Gregorian Church of Armenia, and was reunited with that of orthodox Byzantium.

The reign of Khusrau II Parvēz (590–628) was marked by violent fluctuations in the balance of power in the Near East. The assassination of Emperor Maurice in 602 enabled the Persians to ravage Syria, capture Antioch and Damascus, and in 614, to raid Jerusalem and carry off the relic of the Holy Cross. The Emperor Heraclius (610–41) staged a counter-attack and invaded Armenia, Georgia and Āzarbāijān. With the aid of a Khazar khan named Jibghu, Heraclius captured Tiflis. A contingent of Armenian troops led by Mjej Gnuni was also largely instrumental in the success of these campaigns, which culminated in 628 in the overthrow and murder of Khusrau himself.

The triumph of Heraclius and his Armenian and Khazar auxiliaries proved irrelevant to the long-term evolution of Christian Caucasia. Under the Prophet Muḥammad, the Arabs were already on the move to

[1] P. Charanis, *The Armenians in the Byzantine Empire*, (Lisbon, 1963), pp. 14–15.
[2] D. M. Lang, "Notes on Caucasian Numismatics", *NC* XVII (1957), pp. 139–40, pl. XVII.

world dominance. Weakened by two centuries of religious schism, Byzantium was in no state to resist their advance, while the Sasanian empire was also in a decayed and precarious state. The caliphate of 'Umar (634–44) saw Islam's transformation from a religious sect to an imperial power, and the subjugation of both Iran and Armenia to the heirs of Muḥammad. At the decisive battle on the River Yarmuk, a tributary of the Jordan, in August 636, the Byzantine commander-in-chief was an Armenian named Vahan or Baanes. Shortly before the battle, Vahan was actually proclaimed emperor by his troops. The catastrophic defeat of his forces put an end to Vahan's imperial dreams, and he later retired to Sinai and became a monk.

Within a decade, the Arabs had overthrown the Sasanians and subjugated Armenia and Georgia also. Arab amīrs sat in Dvin and Tiflis, and a new era had opened for the Caucasian peoples.

SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTACTS

So far, we have concentrated on providing a concise, perhaps over-simplified historical outline, without which it would be difficult to grasp the pattern of political and dynastic cross-currents between Iran and the Armenian and Georgian peoples. However, this is only part of the story. Even more interesting, and certainly more durable, were the social, cultural and religious influences which connected the Iranian nation with its smaller north-western neighbours during the millennium under review. Indeed, there is good reason to assert that the Armenians, equally with the Parsees, rank as the true spiritual heirs of Parthian and Sasanian civilization. But for the records of the Armenian chroniclers of the 6th and subsequent centuries, such as Faustus of Buzanda and Sebēos, we should be hard put to it to reconstruct the chronological outline of events in Iran and neighbouring lands of the Near East.[1]

There are many references among the writers of antiquity to similarities of dress and manners between the Armenians and the Medes, Persians and Parthians. That excellent authority Strabo, while adhering to his unlikely story that the ancestor of the Armenians was a certain Thessalian called Armenus, who accompanied Jason and the Argonauts to Colchis, also lays stress on the points of outward resemblance

[1] Similarly, it would be hard to overestimate the value of the Paikuli inscription of Great King Narses for the chronology of late 3rd-century Armenia. In addition to Herzfeld's original publication, see Henning, "A Farewell to the Khagan", pp. 517–22, and Toumanoff, "The Third-Century Armenian Arsacids", pp. 261–75.

between the Armenians and the Medes. Speaking of the Medes, Strabo remarks:

> As for customs, most of theirs and of those of the Armenians are the same, because their countries are similar. The Medes, however, are said to have been the originators of customs for the Armenians, and also, still earlier, for the Persians, who were their masters and their successors in the supreme authority over Asia. For example, their "Persian" *stola* (robe), as it is now called, and their zeal for archery and horsemanship, and the court they pay to their kings, and their ornaments, and the divine reverence paid by subjects to kings, came to the Persians from the Medes. And that this is true is particularly clear from their dress; for tiara, *citaris* (head-dress), *pilus* (skull-cap), tunics with sleeves reaching to the hands, and trousers, are indeed suitable things to wear in cold and northerly regions, such as the Medes wear, but by no means in southerly regions.[1]

The similarity of costume remarked on by Strabo is confirmed by evidence of ancient Armenian and Parthian sculpture, and especially by coins, showing Armenian rulers wearing the famous Armenian pointed tiara, which is also paralleled in Median models (cf. pls. 37(*a*), 39(*b*)). Reference to the divine reverence paid to kings is interesting, since both Tigranes the Great of Armenia and his son Artavazd laid claim to the title "theos", which is occasionally inscribed on their silver coinage.

Strabo also remarks on parallels between the way of life of the Armenians and Medes, and that of the Iberians of the less mountainous regions of Eastern Georgia:

> Now the plain of the Iberians is inhabited by people who are rather inclined to farming and to peace, and they dress after both the Armenian and the Median fashion; but the major, or warlike, portion occupy the mountainous territory, living like the Scythians and Sarmatians, of whom they are both neighbours and kinsmen; however, they engage also in farming.[2]

Nowhere is this Iranian influence seen more clearly than in the many linguistic borrowings from Median, Old Persian and Parthian, which exist in the Armenian language, and to a much less extent, in Georgian, even today. Many numerals and names of basic necessities of life in Armenian are Middle Iranian, showing conclusively that the linguistic influences were not confined to a narrow aristocratic section of society.[3]

[1] *Geography* XI. 13. 9. [2] *Geography* XI. 3. 3.

[3] A. Meillet, "De l'influence parthe dans la langue arménienne", *Revue des Études Arméniennes*, I (Paris, 1920), p. 9. Other sources cited by Grousset, *Histoire*, pp. 116–17. See further R. N. Frye, "Continuing Iranian influences on Armenian", in *Yād-Nāme-ye Irāni-ye Minorsky*, ed., Minovi and Afshar, Publications of Tehran University, No. 1241, 1969, pp. 80–9.

Armenian personal names are very largely Iranian in origin, and predominantly Parthian. This will have become clear from the many names of kings and prominent personages cited earlier in this chapter. Frequently the names are compounds of names of Iranian gods – the most common being of course Mithradates and Tiridates. (Tir was the Armenian counterpart of Mercury and Hermes.) The Armenian mother goddess, Anahit, also revered in Parthia, lives on today in the popular Armenian Christian name Anahit. Common Armenian names of Parthian origin include Tigran, Vahram, Suren, Babken, Khoren and Arshak. The Supreme Catholicos of All the Armenians since 1955, Vazken I, bears a name which goes back to Parthian times. It is also interesting to note that in 8th- and 9th-century Constantinople, when groups of ambitious Armenians were in the habit of seizing the throne for shorter or longer periods, they nearly always bore ancient Armenian names of the Parthian era: a Bardanes or Vardan was actually Emperor from 711 to 713, while other leading Byzantine generals and politicians included a Tiridates, several more Vardans, three individuals named Artavasdos, and even one Ardashīr.[1]

With regard to proper names, the situation in Georgia is more complicated, partly as a result of the Greek and Roman settlements around the Black Sea coastline. As a result, Georgian personal names both in ancient and in modern times are a fascinating amalgam of local, indigenous ones, mingled with Classical, Biblical, Byzantine, Persian, and more recently, Russian, French and even English ones. During the period under review, a number of Parthian and Sasanian names feature in the annals of Georgia, such as Varaz-Bakur, Parnavaz, Mihran and Farsman (Farasmanes), also Mihrandukht and Bakurdukht. Alongside these we encounter other Iranian names like Artag, Ksefarnug and Asparukh, which have more in common with the Iranian steppe world of the Scythians and Alans, which extended down into North Caucasia. Asparukh was one of the prominent viceroys (pitiakhsh) of Iberia about A.D. 200: it is interesting to find this name cropping up later as that of a famous Sublime Khan of the Bulgars, who migrated from the North Caucasus in the 7th century and invaded the Balkans in the reign of the Emperor Constantine IV (A.D. 680–81).[2]

Unlike the Armenians, the Georgians later became very fond of Iranian romance and epic literature; translations of Firdausī's *Shāh-*

[1] Charanis, *The Armenians in the Byzantine Empire*, p. 22; *Cambridge Medieval History* IV, pt. 1, pp. 21, 62, 73.

[2] *Cambridge Medieval History* IV, pt. 1, p. 484.

Fig. 1. Intaglio sardonyx ring bezel of the pitakhsh (governor) Asparukh of Iberia, *c.* 200 A.D., 2 × 2 × 1·8 cm. From Armazi.

nāma and of Gurgānī's *Vīs and Rāmīn* make their appearance in later medieval times, while the Georgians were close neighbours of Niẓāmī Ganjavī (1140–1209). As a result, another wave of linguistic borrowings, including proper names, occurs during the Georgian Golden Age associated with the reign of Queen Tamar (1184–1213). The glories of the Sasanian era, and of Persian romantic literature, are conjured up in such popular Georgian names as Rostom, Kaikhosro and Vakhtang, also Leila and Nestan-Darejan.

The political systems of Armenia and Georgia had much in common with the great monarchies of Iran. Considering that the Arsacids of

Armenia were Parthian princes, and the Mihranids, Chosroids and Guaramids of Iberia all closely connected with one or other of the Seven Great Houses of Iran, this was only to be expected. The connection with Parthia does much to explain the early transition in Armenia from a partly tribal and patriarchal, partly slave-owning social and economic system, to one of full-fledged feudal relations. If the system of Tigranes the Great was one of Oriental despotism on the Seleucid model, the Arsacids are already recognizable as forerunners of feudal monarchs of medieval times. The same can be said of the Mihranid (Chosroid) kings of Iberia, about whose political and social arrangements, a number of early hagiographical works give useful data.[1]

Virtually all the attributes of medieval European feudalism can be found in Parthia, Armenia and Iberia. Allodium and fiefs, investiture and homage, immunity and vassalage, all these familiar concepts have their Parthian and Caucasian counterparts. Feudalism in its most flourishing age was, of course, anything but systematic, and it is an institution very difficult to define. However, certain fundamental principles have been distinguished by medieval historians, and these apply quite well to both Parthia and to Armenia and Georgia. These include: the relation of vassal and lord; the principle that every holder of land is a tenant and not an owner, until the highest rank is reached – sometimes the concept even rules in that rank also; that the tenure by which a thing or estate of value is held is one of honourable service, not primarily economic, but moral and political in character; the principle of mutual obligations of loyalty, protection and service binding together all the ranks of this society from the highest to the lowest; and the principle of contract between lord and tenant, as determining all rights, controlling their modification, and forming the foundation of law.

Naturally, there are other, conflicting trends at work even in the most typical feudal societies. The king would tend to group around himself a personal corps of retainers, bodyguards and officials, with the aid of whom he would try to control, and even remove, unsatisfactory vassals. Then again, holders of great feudal estates and offices invariably aimed to hand down their possessions and dignities to their offspring, so that a network of dynastic aristocracy would grow up. In Armenia and Iran, great noble houses would tend to monopolize offices of state, so that the Bagratids, for instance, were the hereditary coronants of the Arsacid kings.

[1] Lang, *Lives and Legends*, pp. 55–6, 58–60.

Feudalism would often come to an end, permanently or temporarily, when kings such as Henry VII, Louis XI, or Ivan the Terrible, built up a burgher and bureaucratic class, and a royal standing army, and were in a position to impose their dictates on a cowed aristocracy. A comparable situation seems to have existed in Iran at some phases of the Sasanian monarchy, whenever the Great Kings felt strong enough to override the local princes and vassal tribal leaders. In Armenia and Georgia, the opposite trend predominated. First in Armenia, in A.D. 428, and later in Iberia, around A.D. 530, the feudal princes took the initiative in petitioning the Great King of Iran to abolish the monarchy, in the mistaken hope that this would leave the local aristocracy free to manage their own affairs undisturbed. In effect, as we know, the abolition of these monarchies simply led to the appointment of Iranian *marzpāns* or governors-general, so that the latter state was worse than the first.

We owe to Professor Cyril Toumanoff a singularly full description of the various grades of Armenian and Georgian feudal aristocracy – princes, dukes, margraves, knights, gentry, and so forth – also of the high offices of state which were usually assigned exclusively to members of the great houses.[1] Soviet historians, notably Professor S. T. Eremian, have been active in analysing the social status and economic condition of the Armenian peasantry (*shinakank*), and of the trading, artisan and working class generally (*ramikk*). For what it is worth, Moses of Khorene gives a sketch of the Armenian state, as organized on Parthian lines by the first Arsacid ruler Tiridates I, shortly after A.D. 60. Posts about the royal person, and the important positions of master of the royal hunts, chamberlain, head of sacrifices, grand falconer, guardian of the summer residences, and so forth, were distributed among the members of the great families. Fiefs were granted to Tiridates' vassals, and four territorial Wardens of the Marches were appointed, one to the region at each cardinal point of the compass. (These Wardens bore the title of *bdeashkh*, and are no doubt successors of the four client kings who attended on Tigranes the Great.) The army was divided into the standing frontier garrisons, and the feudal levies summoned only in time of war. Local justices were appointed for town and country, and times for royal audiences, and also public entertainments, were fixed.[2]

The Sasanians destroyed most of the official records of the Parthians; the Arabs destroyed most of the archives of the Sasanian kings. In view of the close connection between Armenia and Iran, and the

[1] Toumanoff, *Studies*, pp. 33–144. [2] Colledge, p. 64.

early date – 5th century A.D. onwards – of the beginnings of Armenian historiography, the accounts of the classical Armenian historians of political events and social relations in Iran generally, and in Armenia specifically, acquire enhanced value and interest. In his monograph on Iranian feudalism, Professor Widengren had the happy idea of grouping together a selection of extracts from the classical Armenian historians bearing on feudal relationships, alongside passages from Iranian sources such as the *Kārnāmak ī Artakhshēr ī Pāpakān*.[1] Without going into technicalities, it may be worth citing verbatim a few key passages from the early Armenian historians relating to feudal relations in Armenia, which also have bearing on political and social relationships in contemporary Iran. Widengren also makes the interesting point that the Iranian word *pasānīk*, which stems from Sasanian times, and signifies an armed guard or retainer, also occurs in Georgian, in the form *pasaniki*, or more commonly, *pasenaki*.[2]

Among the many texts illustrating feudal relations and institutions in ancient Armenia and Parthia, the following present special interest:

1. King Pap (369–74) suspects the *sparapet* or generalissimo Mushegh Mamikonian of disloyalty: "Then placing his hand in that of King Pap, Mushegh swore fealty to him, saying: 'I shall live and die for you, as my ancestors have done for your ancestors, as my father has done for your father King Arshak, thus will I do for you also, only do not lend ear to my slanderers.'"[3]

2. King Tiridates orders Mamgon, ancestor of the Mamikonian Princes, to exterminate the rebellious family of Selkuni: "Mamgon hastened to inform the king of the success of his mission. Tiridates, filled with joy, immediately wrote for him a royal charter [*hrovartak*, from Parthian *fravartak*], granting him suzerainty over all the lands which he had promised him; and the king appointed him prince [*nakharar*] in place of the rebel, calling the fief after his name: Mamgonian."[4]

3. King Arshak II (351–67) tries to weaken the feudal nobility: "And he slew many *nakharars*. From several he removed their hereditary fiefs, and he confiscated several princely domains for the crown. But the

[1] G. Widengren, "Recherches sur le féodalisme iranien" in *Orientalia Suecana* v (Uppsala, 1956), pp. 79–182.

[2] Widengren, *op. cit.*, p. 89; D. Chubinov, *Gruzino-Russky slovar'* (Georgian–Russian dictionary) (St. Petersburg, 1887), col. 1006.

[3] Faustus of Buzanda, *History of Armenia* v. 4 (Venice, 1933), p. 199.

[4] Moses of Khorene, *History of Armenia* II. 84 (Tbilisi, 1913), p. 229.

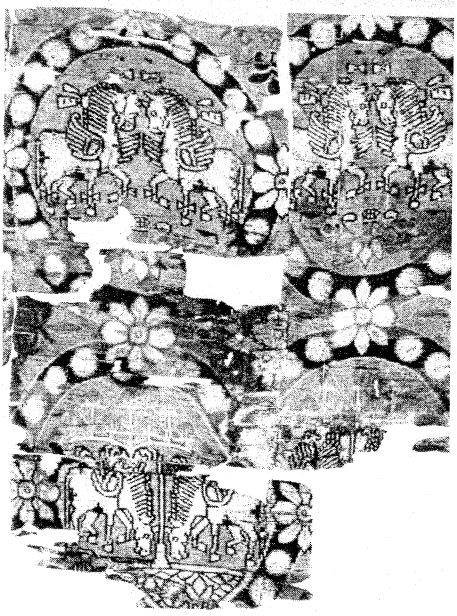
(a)

(b)

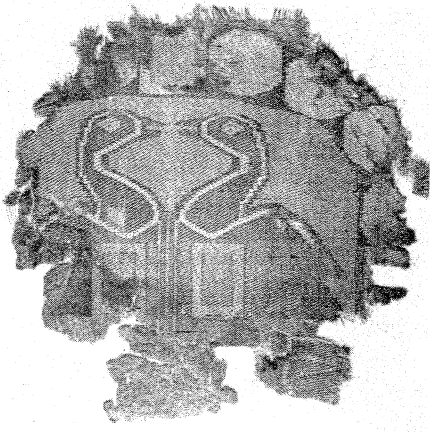
(c)

33 Hatra, (*a*) marble tomb-statuette, 2nd century A.D.
(*b*) Vault-stone with relief of a moon-goddess. Sandstone, 2nd century A.D.
(*c*) Part of a door-lintel from the so-called fire-temple. Sandstone, 2nd century A.D.

(a)



(b)



(c)

48 Fragments of textile excavated at Turfan in eastern Central Asia (*a*) from a tomb dated to 551 A.D., with ornament of traditional Chinese type. (*b*) and (*c*) From tombs of about 700 A.D., with confronted animal motifs set in a beaded oval, in the Iranian style.

Kamsarakan family, who were the lords of Shirak and Arsharunik, were utterly destroyed, and their districts annexed to the crown lands [*ostan*]."[1]

4. While the Armenian kings could sometimes confiscate the domains and fiefs of the leading princes, they were often powerless to deprive them of hereditary feudal offices. The following incident relates to the reign of King Varazdat (374–80) when Manuel Mamikonian comes back from long captivity in Iran: "But when Manuel had returned to the glory of his princely estate, without any prior authorization from King Varazdat, he took over the position of sparapet or generalissimo, because this was something which had come down to him from his ancestors in direct succession. However, King Varazdat had granted the title to his own foster-father Bat as a mark of favour."[2]

As we have seen, the history of Armenia and ancient Georgia is one of ceaseless tensions between the monarchy and the feudal nobility, though the sentiment of aristocratic pride was often combined with one of touching loyalty to the king. The prowess of the princes and of the nobles was inherent in a knightly society, spending much of its time heavily armoured upon horseback, in warfare or in hunting. The Iberian crown of Eastern Georgia appears to have been stronger than the Armenian in relation to the dynastic aristocracy. In Georgia, the feudal office of duke (*eristavi*, or "head of the people") was not extended to all of the princes, only a few more powerful ones becoming dukes of the provinces of Iberia. However, neither the Iberian nor the Armenian monarchy could survive the dual strain of feudal disobedience, and Sasanian imperial centralism, so that monarchy was eventually abolished in both countries, for a period of close on four centuries.[3]

Finally, it is necessary to stress the many close links between Iran, Armenia and Georgia in religion, architecture and the arts, which continued even after the two latter countries had officially adopted Christianity. These links were closest under the Parthians, when Armenia was ruled by the Parthian Arsacids, the first monarch of this line being himself a Magian. However, community of cult and religious beliefs between Iran and Armenia were in evidence as long ago as Urartian times, then during the Achaemenian monarchy, and again much later

[1] Faustus of Buzanda, *History of Armenia* IV. 19, p. 137.

[2] Faustus of Buzanda, *History of Armenia* V. 37, p. 243.

[3] Toumanoff, *Studies*, pp. 140–2. See Widengren, "Recherches", p. 178, for a list of 39 Armenian terms relating to feudal institutions and economic conditions, together with their parallels in Middle Iranian.

under the Sasanians, though here this community was more the result of alien imposition from outside than of spontaneous sharing of common traditions and experience.

In Georgia, however, contacts were particularly strong during the Sasanian period. Beautiful silver dishes and other splendid examples of Sasanian metal ware, with cult representations and Pahlavī inscriptions, have been recovered from ducal and viceregal burials and other excavation sites in a number of places in Georgia. Both in Armenia and in Georgia, Sasanian influence is evident in many details of church and secular architecture (pls 40(*a*), 41(*a*)). In fact, there have even been quite convincing attempts to link the design of the characteristic Armenian and Georgian cruciform domed church with the Zoroastrian fire temple. Besides the cruciform pattern, circular domed churches are also found. Certainly the lion and wild beast motifs so common in friezes and capital decorations of early Georgian and Armenian churches and palaces owe much to Sasanian models.[1]

Georgia and Armenia by their geographical situation were particularly well suited to be a bridge between the religious world of the Gathas and the Avesta, and that of the Greek and Asianic pantheons. In Iran generally, the arrival of Hellenism in the wake of Alexander the Great sparked off an immense new religious movement – the syncretism of Greek and Oriental deities. Henceforth, Semitic (including Babylonian), Iranian and Greek deities began to be considered interchangeable. Thus Ahuramazda became the Iranian equivalent of Bel, Mithra of Shamash, and Anahita of Ishtar or Nanai. Apollo in the Susan hymn is addressed as Mara, a Syrian title denoting "Lord". Heracles was usually the Hellenic aspect of the Semitic Nergal or the Iranian Verethraghna, and Athena of the Arab goddess Allat.[2]

This eclectic, syncretizing tendency is very apparent when we come to study the religious cults of ancient Iberia and Colchis.[3] As direct descendants of ancient peoples of Anatolia, some of the tribes who helped to form the nucleus of the Iberian nation inherited cults and

[1] Apart from the interesting pioneer work of J. Strzygowski (e.g. *Die Baukunst der Armenier und Europa*, 2 vols., Vienna, 1918), we refer to Sh. Amiranashvili, *Istoriya gruzinskogo iskusstva*, (Moscow, 1963), pp. 74–81 and 92–6, Plates 18–21, 24–7; also S. Der Nersessian, *Aght'amar, Church of the Holy Cross* (Harvard University Press, 1965), pp. 25–6.

[2] Colledge, pp. 107–8.

[3] Charachidzé, *Le Système religieux de la Géorgie païenne*; M. G. Tseretheli, "The Asianic elements in national Georgian paganism", *Georgica* I (London, 1935), pp. 28–66; O. G. von Wesendonk, "Über georgisches Heidentum", *Caucasica* I (1924), pp. 1–102; "Nachträge zum georgischen Heidentum", *Caucasica* II (1925), pp. 121–30.

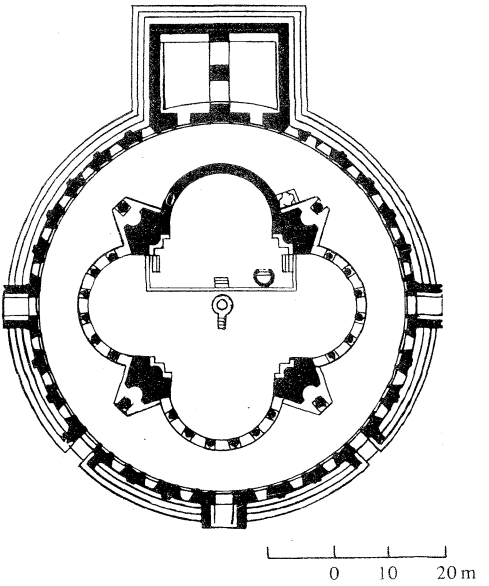


Fig. 2. Ground plan of Zvarnotz Cathedral, Armenia, the circular form recalling the outline of a Zoroastrian fire temple.

beliefs closely akin to those of the Hittites, Phrygians, perhaps even the Sumerians, Assyrians and Babylonians. Testifying to this is the Trialeti goblet (dating from about 1500 B.C.), with its scenes from a fertility rite connected with the Tree of Life and the potion of immortality. The colonization of the Black Sea coast by Milesian settlers from the 7th century B.C. onwards led to the spread of Hellenistic cults which were to become popular in Parthia at a later period. A temple of Apollo existed at Phasis (Poti) at the mouth of the Rioni as early as the 5th century B.C., as witness the discovery in north Caucasia in 1901 of a silver drinking bowl of that period with the inscription: "I belong to Apollo the Supreme of Phasis". Later a huge statue of the goddess Rhea also stood in a conspicuous site on the Phasis estuary. Strabo speaks of a temple of the sun-goddess Leucothea and an oracle of Phrixus in the land of the Moskhoi – the Georgian province of Samtskhe; this temple was formerly rich but was later desecrated and robbed of its treasures.[1] Tree worship is attested in Georgia through the cult of the wood goddess Dali, corresponding to Artemis; a moon

[1] *Geography* XI. 2. 17.

cult lives on in Georgia to this day, having become merged with that of Saint George, also known as *Tetri Giorgi*, or "White George".[1]

The prevalence of Mazdaism in Georgia is confirmed by the archaeological evidence, which includes bowls showing the sacrificial figure of a horse standing before the ritual fire-altar. According to the "Life of Saint Nino", who converted eastern Georgia about A.D. 330, the Georgian national gods were named Armazi (to be identified with Ahuramazda of the Zoroastrian pantheon), Zaden, Gatsi and Gaim. When Saint Nino offered up prayers to God, the Almighty sent down hail "in lumps as big as two fists" on to the abode of the heathen idols and smashed them into little pieces. Simple folk whom Saint Nino encountered at the town of Urbnisi worshipped the sacred fire of the Zoroastrians, and also images of stone and wood.[2]

The pantheon of ancient Armenia was likewise an international, syncretic one. The complex edifice of Armenian paganism began to take shape during the ascendancy of the Orontids and the early Artaxiads. In addition to the famous temple of the Sun and Moon at Armavir, the Armenians maintained a whole group of sanctuaries in the holy forest at Ashtishat (Acesilene), in the province of Taron, not far from Mush. Here stood a mighty golden statue of Anahita, patron and protectress of Armenia, and famed all over the Iranian world as goddess of waters and fertility. A bronze head of Aphrodite/Anahit from Satala is in the British Museum (pl. 39(*a*)). Anahit's father was Aramazd, the mighty Ahuramazda of the Iranians, the Olympian Zeus of the Greek pantheon. Mithra, god of covenants and of light, was also widely popular; a high priest of that name officiated at the temple of Armavir around 200 B.C. In the form "Meherr", Mithra features later in the Armenian national epic "David of Sassoun" as the Great Meherr, Lion of Sassoun, who planted a splendid garden in Dzovasar and filled it with every kind of animal and fowl which God had created.[3]

The popular goddess Astghik, whose statue was often found alongside that of Anahit, corresponded on the one hand to the Assyrian Ishtar, on the other to the Roman goddess Venus. Astghik's lover was the Iranian deity Verethragna, god of war and victory, known in Armenian as Vahagn. Venerated in the guise of Heracles the dragon slayer, Vahagn was the son of Aramazd (Ahuramazda), as well as being identified with Ares, the Greek god of battle.

[1] Lang, *Georgians*, pp. 88–90. [2] Lang, *Lives and Legends*, pp. 23–5.
[3] Surmelian, p. 93; S. K. Chatterji, "Armenian hero-legends, and the Epic of David of Sasun", *JASB*, 4th ser. 1 (1959), pp. 199–220.

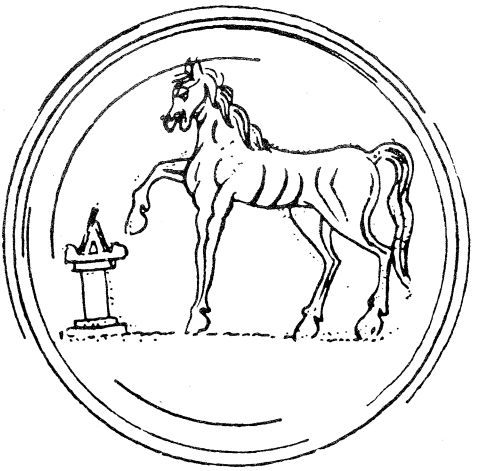


Fig. 3. Horse standing before Mithraic fire altar, engraved on the inside of a silver bowl from Armazi, 2nd century A.D.

The most striking example of the syncretism of gods in ancient Parthia actually occurs in a former Armenian satellite kingdom, namely Commagene, the modern Malatya district. Here a scion of the Armenian Orontid house, King Antiochus I (69–34 B.C.) built himself a funeral hill at Nimrūd Dāgh (pls 37, 38). The sanctuary is grandiose, being surrounded on three sides by terraces and dominated by an artificial mound nearly five hundred feet high. On the east and west terraces stood a row of five colossal seated figures, many times life-size, which represented four deities and King Antiochus himself. The chief statue represents the compound deity Zeus–Oromasdes, or Ahuramazda. A second depicts Apollo–Mithra–Helios–Hermes. And a third presents to us Verethragna–Heracles–Ares. Into the terrace walls were sunk some ninety stone reliefs, depicting in most cases a pair of figures, one of whom is usually Antiochus. We see the king's paternal ancestors, traced back to the Achaemenian monarch Darius, son of Hystaspes, while Greek inscriptions record the dead ruler's connections with the Armenian dynasty of the Orontids.

Armenian and Georgian demonology has many Iranian counterparts. Thus, the *daeva* or demon spirit of the Avesta was feared in Armenia as in Georgia. The Armenian word is *dev*, Georgian *devi*. These devs preferred stony places and ruins; they appeared as serpents and other

monstrous forms, some physical and others incorporeal. The *druzh*es, like their Avestan counterpart, were lying, perjuring, harmful spirits, believed to be of female sex. The *yatu*s or sorcerers of the Avesta also have their Armenian equivalents, who were even able to slay men. There existed destructive female demons called *parik*, whose husbands were known as *kaj*. The *kaji*s also feature prominently in medieval Georgian demonology.[1]

Manichaeism, one of the most original of Iranian religious movements, had many adepts in Armenia and Georgia. Armenia was the stronghold of the Paulicians, a later sect of Manichees, who then gave rise to the insurgent sect of the Thondrakites.[2] One of the vehicles for Manichaean teachings in Georgia and Armenia was the legend of Barlaam and Josaphat, which began as an edifying Buddhist tract, but acquired many Manichaean features. As Professor Henning discovered, a metrical version of the legend of Barlaam and Josaphat was contained in the oldest poetic manuscript written in Classical Persian so far known to us.[3]

In other cultural spheres also, there was much mutual enrichment arising from contacts between Iran and the Caucasian nations during the Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian eras. One has only to think of the perpetuation of the ancient Iranian *gōsān* or minstrel in the Armenian *gusans* (Georgian, *mgosani*), who have continued to delight popular audiences right up to modern times, composing both music and poetic text as they went along. As early as the 5th century, the Armenian Catholicos St John (Hovhannes) Mandakuni composed a treatise, "On the Theatre and the Gusans", a copy of which may be seen in the Matenadaran or National Manuscript Library in Erevan. Political relations between Iran and her Caucasian neighbours may not always have been cordial, but there is no doubt of the depth and extent of reciprocal influences in many spheres of art, literature and religion, as well as in social and political organization.

[1] M. H. Ananikian, *Armenian Mythology* (Boston, 1925); Shota Rustaveli, *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, tr. Marjory S. Wardrop (London, 1912).

[2] Professor Nina Garsoïan, in *The Paulician Heresy* (The Hague, 1967), ably defends the view that the Paulicians were not Manichaeans, but Adoptionists; however this opinion has not yet been accepted as definitive by all scholars in this field.

[3] W. B. Henning "Persian poetical manuscripts from the time of Rūdaki", in W. B. Henning and E. Yarshater (eds), *A Locust's Leg: Studies in honour of S. H. Taqizadeh* (London, 1962), pp. 89–104; Lang, *The Balavariani*.