

GENDER, SEX, AND THE BODY IN MEDIEVAL ARMENIA

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by

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **GENDER, SEX, AND THE BODY IN MEDIEVAL ARMENIA**

Ashley Bozian

This dissertation investigates textual representation of the body, gender, and sexuality in Armenian chronicles produced between the fifth and eleventh centuries CE. In so doing, it reconstructs the development of Armenian somatology between Zoroastrian and Islamic suzerainties. Specifically, the dissertation examines the modalities by which the body functioned to medieval Armenian cognition as the locus of identity and alterity through the deployment of such devices as the following, to each of which is devoted a chapter: masculinity, femininity, archetypes of sexual morality, legislation of sexual conduct, sexual experientiality (in both temporal and eschatological dimensions), anatomy, and violence. As such, the body operated visibly in medieval Armenian subjectivity as a definitionally ethnicized object whose value was mediated by its gender assignment (and conformity thereto), carnal continence, spiritual obedience, and corporal vulnerability. The dissertation asserts in conclusion that medieval Armenian traditors directly positioned native purity, articulated as the containment of carnal impulses and rejection of sensory excess, against foreign intemperance and incontinence. These inclinations to be contained included those not only sexual but dietetic, emotional, and even verbal. In this way, these auteurs operationalized the body to dissimilate Armenian ipseity from intrusive exogeneity. This research finds, secondarily, that the genre of medieval Armenian historical writing was characterized by a pervasive but tacit prohibition against direct acknowledgment of the female body,

discussion of which is instead conspicuously (and often awkwardly) displaced onto the more socially acceptable male body or else onto an insentient object of analogy. Finally, the dissertation situates medieval Armenian medical consciousness within a broader regional context, considering it alongside contemporaneous Greek, Persian, and Arabic somatological discourse.

## DEDICATION

Dedicated in loving memory of Harold Jones (1934-2015), who instilled in me the value of a disciplined mind, a gentle spirit, and an indomitable sense of humor.

Heaven has been made infinitely brighter with your light.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Buzandaran Patmut'iwkn' = BP

Movsēs Khorenats'i = MX

Movsēs Kaghankatuats'i/Daskhurants'i = MD

T'ovma Artsruni = TA

Ḥovhannēs Draskhanakertts'i = YD

Ḥovhannēs Mamikonean = Ps.Y.

Anonymous Story-Teller/Anonymous Chronicle = AST

Aristakēs Lastiverts'i = AL

Dawit' Gandzakets'i = DG

Matenagirk' Hayots' = MH

## Introduction

### Background

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine medieval Armenian somatology from the incipience of its written language to the collapse of its indigenous sovereignty. The cohort of chroniclers who produced the textual canon under consideration acutely operationalized the physical body to construct a virtuous Armenian nativity in moral opposition to an impious and exogenous aggressor. In engaging with this phenomenology, the dissertation confronts the body as an eschatological object whose incarnation is moralized in both temporal and extratemporal domains, and whose ethnicized value transcends dimensionality; it is, in fact, this mobility between temporal and celestial dimensions that characterizes Armenian abstractions of corporeality. Further, the dissertation identifies those constituents that composed temporal experience in medieval Armenian cognition: nation, gender, and morality – and the complex intersections thereof.<sup>1</sup> It will examine the body in abstraction as both a sensory and an aesthetic object – one that both actively experiences and is passively experienced in the expression and assertion of national, spiritual, and gendered identity. In the process, the body essentializes identity and alterity as somatic properties.

For medieval Armenian traditors, the body constituted the canvas onto which was externalized a developing Christian morality that, of necessity, vehemently labored to differentiate itself from its multifarious aggressors as they emerged across time – from its

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<sup>1</sup> This dissertation will employ the term “nation” as a direct translation of the Armenian *uqq* (*azg*), a term frequently used in the primary source texts to connote the synthesis of ethnicity and religion that distinguishes the Armenians from such historically significant alterities as Zoroastrian Persians and Muslim Arabs.

obstinate Zoroastrian suzerain, whose antagonism initiated this impulse, to the arrival of an Islamic hegemon around which Armenian physicalized morality would adjust, evolve, and adapt to maintain the distinct identity it had chiseled from a Zoroastrian orbit and ultimately wrested from Persian subjugation. This recently adopted morality incarnated somatically into the corporal essence of the newly Christianized bodies that comprised the Armenian nation. All recent inductees to and inheritors of this new Christian patrimony, throughout the volatile first centuries of Armenian Christianity, fell under constant suspicion of moral-somatic sedition as the texts confirm. It was through the physicalized expression of a nascent Armenian Christian identity—both actively through comportment and passively through aesthetic conformity—that initiates to the new faith would authenticate their investment in and commitment to preserving Armenian identity. Both the body as object and the ritualized customs that engaged it became subsumed under a radical somatic morality – one requiring dissimilation not only in doctrine but in physical modality. The new morality that now defined the Armenians as an exclusive ethnoreligious entity then manifested physically through anatomical, physiological, behavioral, aesthetic, and sensory processes.

The most visible of these qualities were carnal abstinence and resistance of sensorial impulses—most egregious among them those appetencies to consume, imbibe, copulate, and emote to excess—which were perceived to impede one’s course to salvation. Incontinence in any of these primary areas of corporality endangered the essence domiciled within the body’s fragile and fallible integument. The incarnate body was, in this way, the material object that impeded the ethereal soul as it struggled to transcend the burdensome confines of temporality to the blithe and blissful deliverance of

eternity. The language through which identity and alterity are communicated prioritize spiritual righteousness and moral conduct, the purpose of which being, invariably, successful navigation of temporality for passage to the Kingdom of God in reward.<sup>2</sup> Incumbent upon the righteous was not only to harbor this ambition internally but to then perform one's celestial ambition actively and publicly; this entailed obligatory observance, in the civic forum, of those qualities deemed sufficiently virtuous to procure admission to the Kingdom. Collectively these qualities support the corpus of orally transmitted ancestral laws and customs known to the Armenians as *awrēnk'*, which both before and after the arrival of Christianity suffused the consciousness of Armenians at every echelon of society.<sup>3</sup> To this end, the body functioned in medieval Armenian comprehension as the vehicle that conveyed one between the temporal and the eternal, and as the conduit through which were mediated the aspirations of the spirit with the conditions of the soma.

Medieval Armenian somatology therefore condemns carnal impulses to excess – most notably those for food, drink, sex, and emotivity. Incontinence of each is considered singularly and patently sinful, each constituting a unique category of moral

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<sup>2</sup> This dissertation will supply the English “Kingdom” in direct translation of the Armenian *Արքայություն / Թագաւորություն* (often followed by *Աստուծոյ*, “of God” or *Երկնից*, “of Heaven”) to denote the medieval Armenian conception of Heaven and to preserve as closely as possible the Armenian text as it appears in the sources under inquiry. “Kingdom” will be employed in contrast to exogenic eschatological models so as to distinguish native Armenian and alternative dimensions of extratemporality – a distinction that will become significant to the dissertation and its objectives. The dissertation will, then, employ such terms as the Islamic analogue *Jannah* when referring uniquely to the Islamic model of Heaven, and variously “Heaven” and “eternity” to mediate between the two. It will also utilize scholar Nerina Rustomji's term “afterworld” to highlight dimensional distinctions between Armenian and Islamic cognitions of the extratemporal. See Nerina Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), xvi-xviii.

<sup>3</sup> For a more comprehensive examination of the history, context, and gendered connotations of *awrēnk'*, see David Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed: The Portrayal of Women in Early Christian Armenian Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 55-57.



insufficiency to be narratively discouraged and, failing its prevention, punished. Restraint, then, emerges as the most solvent virtue to be corporeally expressed. To restrain one's corporal impulses (those that demand food, drink, sex, emotionality, and according to some texts even the inclination to loquacity) is to exercise the ultimate display of carnal fortitude and Christian rectitude. This, in turn, comes to iconify the definitionally righteous bodies of the Armenians, which are contrasted in Armenian narration with the incapacity of the ethnoreligious other to contain its carnal appetites. To embrace the carnal is the signature of alterity to a medieval Armenian somatological mentality; to repudiate it is presented, contrastingly, as intrinsic to the morally superior Armenian nation. This dichotomy reinforces a somatic consciousness of the body as the locus of Armenian national identity and its removal from the ethnoreligious other. Collectively, medieval Armenian textual sources—specifically, those historical documents endeavoring to situate an Armenian national identity within a somatic axiology and contrast it therein with its Zoroastrian, Islamic, and (later) Byzantine suzerains—position carnal frailty opposite spiritual fortitude, in the process exalting the Armenian tendency toward the latter while by default denigrating the tendency of religious extraneities toward the former. Revulsion with the physical body, its properties, its functions, its mechanics, and its byproducts then organically emerges as essential to Armenian somatologic selfhood, and celebration thereof becomes associated with debauchery, excess, and the alterity that it necessarily signifies. The texts under inspection vibrantly illustrate this dissertation's contention of the body as proxy for identity and alterity – the exogenous body bearing the impact of this polarization that

externalizes Armenian animosity toward the ethnoreligious other via a fundamentally corporealized culture of ipseity.

Secondarily, the dissertation demonstrates, through its attention to descriptions and characterizations of corporeality as a sexual, anatomical, and behavioral nexus, a number of latent and previously unaddressed qualities of the scribal apparatus under whose authority these texts were produced and the institution that cultivated, sponsored, and influenced its chief literary architects. This dissertation submits and substantiates that a tacit prohibition against explicit depiction of the female body pervaded medieval Armenian literary culture, the inclination to discuss female forms displaced by auteurs onto vivid descriptions of masculine (or, alternatively, totemic) forms. Another condition imposed upon these traditors by the dynastic machinery that sustained them (and the monastic institution that generated it) was an impulsion to sanitize their textual productions of any indication of sexual perversity. These dynasts were politically and materially invested in the propagation of this narrative—one of exceptionless purity and dogmatic obedience by its people, and extreme intolerance (followed by swift remediation) of any who defied these tenets—so as to maintain an active differentiation from the exogenous suzerains that sequentially and comprehensively subjugated the Armenian nation.

Tertiarily, the dissertation will illuminate an impressive degree of continuity in Armenian somatological attitudes—controverting the academically anticipated transformation—over time. This astonishing continuity reifies, over the seven centuries under scrutiny, Armenian sexual and somatic conventions, and intimates that despite their dynamism, they nevertheless remained remarkably static. This stability derives to a

significant extent from extensive intra-referentiality and intertextuality within the genre under investigation. The Armenian scribal tradition recirculated its earliest textual products to its inheritors of latter centuries as pedagogical materials or as replication projects for their preservation, resulting in fluent familiarity of latter traditors with the foundational texts—as well as with the stylistic and topological conventions—of the Armenian record. Predictably, then, many of these works recall, reference, or quote those in circulation before their production, consciously or not. For this reason, the continuity at issue feasibly results from this intra-referentiality—and appears only in textual artifacts, perhaps entirely absent from the sentient and animate culture that they purport to document—rather than from any organic continuity innate to the culture itself. Finally, the dissertation will deconstruct the development of Armenian cultures of corporality in transition between Zoroastrian, Islamic, and Byzantine suzerainties, establishing in conclusion a modest reactionary adaptation in response to each.

Armenian Christian identity often positioned its morality in opposition to one suzerain or another – whichever was most politically expedient at its invocation. The introduction of Christianity as the Armenians’ national religion in CE 301 inspired radical transformations in Armenian sexual-somatic values as a direct reaction against Zoroastrian subjection – alterations that centered the somatic experience and its extratemporal ramifications. The arrival of Islam to the Armenian Highland in CE 640 functioned reciprocally to the Armenian conception of national identity filtered through corporeality, and triggered similarly reactive adjustments in Armenian national somatology. In examining these phenomena, this dissertation will reconstruct the development of Armenian sexual cultures between Zoroastrian and Islamic suzerainties.

The eventual (though transient) resurgence and restoration of Byzantine authority in the region will similarly contrast another reactionary movement thereagainst, highlighting the reflexive pendulations of Armenian identity in its relentless pursuit of national heterogeneity.

The traditional Armenian orientation toward asceticism is well documented in the scholarly literature, germinating likely from the Syriac tradition with which Armenian Christianity was highly conversant and emulated as an ecclesial model. Leila Ahmed writes extensively of the conflict between the newly ascendant Christian morality, with its reverence for celibacy and ascetic practices, and the longer-established Zoroastrian cosmology that eschews these principles as aberrant violations of natural order.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, a novel Christian axiology incited the Armenians to contrast their newly adopted Christian abstentionism against a traditional Zoroastrian receptivity to the body and its dynamics—framed as excessive, pollutive, and erratic by the Armenians—and repackage it as distinctively virtuous. As Robert Thomson comments, “...Christianity was the only means of avoiding complete assimilation.”<sup>5</sup>

This dissertation will situate Armenian somatology in a broader historical context, analyzing by extension the development and epistemology of somatic culture across the medieval Mediterranean. Medieval Armenian cosmology thus exhibits a substantive and coherent comprehension of the body, much of it received through contact with surrounding traditions. This knowledge they apply in mobilizing a corporealized morality

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<sup>4</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 22.

<sup>5</sup> Robert W. Thomson, “*Vardapet* in the Early Armenian Church,” *Le Muséon: Revue d'Études Orientales* 75 (1962): 383.

upon the physical body. The Armenian literary tradition demonstrably absorbed prevailing medical paradigms that developed throughout the region, verifying medieval Armenian intellectual contact and conversancy with the ideas of their Mediterranean neighbors of diverse traditions (religious and otherwise). Upon these syncretic corpora Armenian somatic awareness relied for its assimilation of the body as a sexual object, a medical object, and an object of violence. For this reason, the dissertation will explore Armenian somatology vis-à-vis the prevailing medical scholarship that circulated throughout the region across the Early Middle Ages. It will elucidate connections between Armenian somatology and corresponding Classical and Islamic discourse which the Armenians may have accessed and with which they may have achieved fluency. The dissertation will in this way contextualize Armenian medical, anatomical, sexual, sensorial, and aesthetic ideas alongside emerging perspectives in those areas throughout the region. Finally, the dissertation will assess the mechanics by which Armenian Christianity conversed with adjacent traditions on the subject of the gendered body and its procreative functions, capacities, limitations, and axiologies.

The texts audited by this project have fallen under extensive academic scrutiny, analyzed exhaustively by its scholarly predecessors for their historicity, political rhetoric, linguistic properties, material attributes, theological content, and myriad avenues supplemental to these. Gingerly averted, however, by all existing academic discourse regarding these texts—attributable perhaps to scholarly discomfort or its demotion to these heretofore more exigent topics—is the conspicuous presence of the body. This invisibility to previous scholarship has reduced the body in priority to these less tangible and more tenuous concepts. This dissertation operates under the premise that information

of historical significance derives not only from those intangible ideas that comprise the bulk of academic analysis, but from the physical bodies—the incarnate, kinetic, sentient vessels—that engender them. The body functions as an icon of expression, a receptacle and sensor of the temporal, and the vehicle of performed morality. Until recently, much of academic history has neglected the body as a site of historical access. The ideas and cognitions of the actors and agents who engineer history, however, are inextricably situated within, around, and in reaction to bodies – those of themselves, their cognates, and their contraries in relief against whom an image of a self-body can be abstracted. Considerable academic value can be derived from the somatological insights that these avenues offer. For these reasons, medieval Armenian somatology merits acute scholarly attention.

Medieval Armenian somatological discourse clearly exposes its enmeshment within a larger Christian somatology—a tradition that liturgically ritualizes the consumption of its prophet in transfigured corporeality—across the medieval Mediterranean. The body is, thus, inexorably integrated into the earliest practice of Christianity, which the Armenians, as its earliest adopters, must inescapably confront. It is with extraordinary reluctance and resistance, as this dissertation will clarify, that they do so. The Armenians therefore reject the body as a profane obstacle to salvation while fervently striving to preserve its purity as the object that conveys the spirit from the squalid temporal to the pristine eternal. The body, then, mediates uncomfortably between an aspirational ethereality and the carnal integument that constrains it. The corporeal visibly incites consternation, a visceral experience which becomes pivotal to a medieval

Armenian somatic consciousness. It is this frenetic refusal to accept the body in their ethnonational experience that, paradoxically, emplots it so focally therein.

For the Armenians, this perception entailed minimizing their interaction with the body by dissembling a calculated disgust toward it, packaging this aversion as righteous purity. This tradition would then displace its own curiosities, fascinations, indulgences, and even appreciations of the body onto the exogenous other, fashioning of it a foreign quality to be excised from the Armenian self and summarily rejected. This artifice conceals palpable anxieties about corporeality, betraying an Armenian preoccupation with the body perhaps more potent, in its repression, than witnessed of their more inquisitive counterparts across the Mediterranean. Certainly, such receptivity to the body features prominently in, and enriches, Classical Greek and medieval Islamic intellectualisms. Recent publications (to be addressed in the literature review) have harnessed this vital material to beneficial effect, introducing into the scholarly record a valuable repository of somatological information from the classical and medieval Mediterranean. This dissertation seeks to replicate that scholarship in an Armenian context, rectifying a geographic lacuna and supplementing this profitable corpus with rich source material available in the Armenian medieval literary canon. Similarly, scholarship abounds on the subject of Armenian identity. The preponderance, however, centers more recent Armenian history, and of that literature thus far none—addressing neither the medieval nor the modern—has explored the body as crucial to that self-concept. This dissertation approaches Armenian identity from positions that previous scholarships have declined to observe, orienting its inquiry around the body as the axis of ethnonational experience.

This dissertation also deviates from standard scholarly conventions in its atypical periodization. Numerous studies of medieval Armenian history conclude at the sixth century (periodizing this era as “Classical Armenia”) or commence only after the ninth, bisecting Armenian historiography on either side of the initial Islamic incursions. This dichotomization has effected the unfortunate consequence of circumventing the early Caliphate era in Armenian history and historiography. Recent scholarly attention to this interval, however—notably that by such scholars as Alison Vacca and Seta Dadoyan—has begun to remediate this.<sup>6</sup> It is this liminal and (until recently) neglected area that the present study aspires to revitalize. This dissertation assumes the controversial position that Armenia’s pre- and post-Islamic Middle Ages are not two consummate periods meriting analytical division, but one contiguous duration worth investigating singularly. The historiography supports this position, as it was not until the early twelfth century that the Armenian Highland was evacuated and depopulated of its indigenous inhabitants, confirming robust continuity in the production of Armenian-language texts from the instantiation of Armenian literacy until the Battle of Manazkert and its immediate repercussions. Thus, the dissertation will uniquely attend to the period at issue as a cohesive chronological unit, integrating the Islamic invasions and analyzing their impact and influence on the developing literary tradition of the Armenians, particularly as arises in their somatic culture.

This dissertation contends that medieval Armenian culture collectively externalized its societally contrived morality to the body, mapping onto it through the

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<sup>6</sup> See Alison Vacca, *Non-Muslim Provinces under Early Islam: Islamic Rule and Iranian Legitimacy in Armenia and Caucasian Albania* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Seta B. Dadoyan, *Islam in Armenian Literary Culture: Texts, Contexts, Dynamics* (Leuven: Peeters, 2021).



aforementioned devices a somatic cartography of Christian righteousness and, in relief against it, a detour map to damnation – a parallel course of obstacles and hazards to be fervently avoided, rendered imagistically as the province of the foreigner, the heretic, the apostate, the invader, and the adversary to Armenian Christendom. This appears in the following eight mechanisms, to each of which is dedicated a chapter, each chapter supporting one of three overarching sections. The initial section will examine gender in abstraction, the mechanisms by which gender negotiates and mediates somatic experience of identity and alterity, and the disparate experiences of men and women in navigating these binary temporalities. These first three chapters examine the body as an aesthetic object, contrasted against the latter three which consider it as a site of sensory subjectivity. The intermediate section, consisting of chapters four and five, centers the political experience of the body as an object legislated by both church and state—often one and the same entity—and the implications of temporal incarnation for sensory and aesthetic dynamics in the eternal. Each of these two chapters, from its respective approach, explores the dimensionality of the body and its fracture along ontological axes: the local (as native and ethnic) and the extralocal (as temporal and eternal). The final section, consisting of chapters six through eight, examines the body as an anatomical site defined by its most salient characteristics both internal and external: its material constitution, gender anatomy, and physical vulnerabilities. Each of these sections addresses a facet of Armenian somatology emphasized in the texts and that figures substantially in the experience of the body that they communicate. This structure is designed to conform to these prominent experientialities and to accent their functionalities in generating and reflecting a medieval Armenian approach to the body.

Across the first seven hundred years of recorded history in the Armenian language, a composite emerges of national self-conception in Armenian subjectivity. In scaffolding this image, the Armenian literary tradition radiates miscellanies of temporal experience, all of them converging around the body. From Zoroastrian obtrusion they escape via adoption of Christianity, pivotal to the national identity they engineer in contrast to the enemies that surround them. From this they extract, refine, and perfect a unique ethnoreligious identity with an urgency that will persist well through the Middle Ages, with each subsequent conquest reconstituting their national selfhood—and, more importantly, their national otherhood in relief against encroaching rivals—to manufacture each new variation against each new permutation of usurper. Through the projection of corporal sensibilities, Armenian identity asserts and continually reasserts itself in the qualities it has acquired through its Abrahamic affiliation. More interesting, though, are the ways in which Armenian national awareness reflects itself not in what it is, but in what it is not. It is in the projected contrast of ethnic, religious, and cultural alterity that the Armenians reveal most profoundly the qualities they most ardently labor to deflect and those with which they most eagerly identify. All of these manifest in corporealized abstraction – the culturally assembled composite of the human body in its anatomy, physiology, and multitudinous other dimensions of somatic experientiality both temporal and eternal, each to be explored across the following pages. Medieval Armenian somatology conceived the body as the locus of identity and alterity, the sensory instrument of temporal experience, and the integument of a somaticized morality recompensed in death by liberation from its oppressive carnal encumbrance. It is through this assimilation of the incarnate body as a sensory and aesthetic object—one that

restrains, endures, and resists in support of the newly installed Christian institution that distinguishes the Armenians from their rivals—that the Armenians experience identity. It is this phenomenon with which the present dissertation is concerned.

### Review of the Literature

As of this dissertation's production, no exhaustive investigation of medieval Armenian sexual culture anchored in historical methodology has been executed. Though studies of medieval Armenian women have emerged as of the early twenty-first century, all have focused exclusively on women of the long fifth century – for which primary source material abounds. Further, these studies examine primarily the social conditions of women and womanhood, disregarding the broader construction of gender as a functional expression of somatology and sexuality. This dissertation aims to fill out these deficits. In so doing, it will supplement the extant literature concerning Armenian women of the fifth and sixth centuries and contribute to the scholarly conversation surrounding gender, sexuality, and the body in the medieval Middle East. To this end, the project will engage from its historical foundations not only with Middle Eastern and Armenian studies but, as well, with existing texts in sexuality, history of the body, and Mediterranean somatology (the latter already a well-established field among classicists and Islamicists).

This dissertation is particularly indebted to the work of Zaroui Pogossian, whose 2003 article *Women at the Beginning of Christianity in Armenia* explores fifth-century Armenian texts for their insight into the lived experiences of the earliest Armenian Christian women.<sup>7</sup> Pogossian attends especially to the social dynamics applied to women

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<sup>7</sup> Zaroui Pogossian, "Women at the Beginning of Christianity in Armenia," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 69 (2003): 355-380.

and womanhood, observing from her sources the transition of Armenian femininity between Zoroastrian and Christian influences. She further posits a number of occupational functions and opportunities available to women as well as their familial, political, and social obligations. For its fundamental contributions to the embryonic field of medieval Armenian women's studies, the second chapter of this dissertation leans substantially upon this work, as does—to a smaller though nonetheless appreciable degree—the third. Pogossian follows her initial venture into the field with a 2012 investigation of female asceticism in this historical setting, mining the same primary source materials to chart the landscape of female ascetic and monastic cultures at the nascence of Christianity in Armenia.<sup>8</sup> Though the present study does not engage substantively with theological or patristic matters, it propitiously benefits from the insight Pogossian provides into the structural conditions that characterized ascetic practices, requirements, and environments for both women and men.

Scaffolding upon the work of Zaroui Pogossian, David Zakarian has more recently taken up the mantle of articulating the experiences of medieval Armenian women. He too concentrates exclusively on women of the fifth and early sixth centuries. The most recent of contributions to this field Zakarian published in 2021 (shortly before the submission of this dissertation): an exhaustive monograph on the topic, which stands distinguished as the first book-length examination of medieval Armenian womanhood and its social conditions. In this work, Zakarian analyzes both the women of early Christian Armenia and the Zoroastrian culture-scape that preceded and informed it. He

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<sup>8</sup> Zaroui Pogossian, "Female Asceticism in Early Medieval Armenia," *Le Muséon: Revue d'Études Orientales* 125 (2012): 169-213.

introduces the impact of Zoroastrian culture and testifies, wielding primary source material that bridges the transition between Zoroastrian and early Christian Armenia, to its influence in shaping the gender dynamics that would persist and develop throughout the Armenian Highland.

The scholarly contributions of Pogossian and Zakarian chiefly comprise the literature upon which the present research scaffolds. Nevertheless, this dissertation has consulted various other academic works by scholars working across the broader scope of medieval Armenian and Middle Eastern history. For general background to the historical setting, this study consults exhaustively the works of such scholars as Nina G. Garsoïan, Robert W. Thomson, and Robert Bedrosian. In particular, their introductions to translated volumes and the precious insights that they offer in footnotes have proven invaluable. General histories of the region that have provided indispensable historical context include, most importantly, Nina G. Garsoïan's *Armenia between Byzantium and the Sasanians*, her 1970 translation of N. Adontz's *Armenia in the Period of Justinian: The Political Conditions Based on the Naxarar System*, her 1976 translation of Aram Ter-Ghevondyan's *The Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia*, and her contributions (as well as those of others) to the introductory volume of Richard G. Hovannisian's landmark anthology series *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*. This dissertation is deeply indebted to these foundational works which have collectively established the infrastructure for historical study of medieval Armenia.

The final class of scholarship consulted in the production of this dissertation concerns sex and the body in adjacent societies. Being the first substantial work to investigate Armenian sexual culture of the Middle Ages, it relies considerably upon

knowledge previously established in proximal cultures by scholars of tangential traditions. It is to this conversation that the dissertation aspires to contribute, its primary objective to establish the foundations for academic study of medieval Armenian somatology. Publications concerning cultures of medicine, sexuality, and violence in nearby Classical and Islamic societies have informed the bulk of this remainder; the context that they supply has provided a paradigm over which to translate these current lacunae in Armenological research. Particularly influential in this regard has been Basim Musallam's pivotal 1983 text *Sex and Society in Islam: Birth Control Before the Nineteenth Century*, which remains to date the most exhaustive investigation of sexual culture—particularly as it pertains to a medicalized and anatomized approach to sexuality—in the premodern Middle East. Other influential works to which this dissertation is academically indebted include Leila Ahmed's 1992 monograph *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, which forms the backbone of modern scholarship on gender in medieval Islam and has therefore provided firm ground over which to map the entangled culture of the Armenians, as well as, more recently, Nadia El Cheikh's 2015 study *Women, Islam, and 'Abbasid Identity*, which complements the former through its magnification of the 'Abbasid Caliphate as a political backdrop of medieval Islamic womanhood. Pernilla Myrne's 2019 *Female Sexuality in the Early Medieval Islamic World* has provided additional insight, her work focusing the female experience of sexuality in medieval Islamic discourse (much of which likely informed or, at minimum, contacted Armenian discourses of sexuality). This project also relies upon scholarly studies concerning medieval Islamic cultures of sexuality and sensoriality such as those by Jalal abd-Al Ghani and Nerina Rustomji, and analyses of contemporaneous

gender landscapes such as those by Kathryn Ringrose, Shaun Marmon, and Shaun Tougher. Additionally consulted and of great contributory value to this study are the works of Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, Sarah Pomeroy, Leslie Kurke, and Rebecca Langlands, whose works center the cultures of sex and sexuality in ancient Greece and Rome against which this study contextualizes those of medieval Islamic, Persian, and (more directly) Armenian ecumenes. These studies focus in particular the experiences of women—more specifically, those of aristocratic women, about whom sources are predictably more abundant—as their sexual identities dictated their social interactions and political functions. It is in this way that these studies of Classical sexuality align with the recent work of David Zakarian, whose study of fifth-century Armenian women similarly emphasizes the politicization of the female body as a central axis of social culture. Each of these highlights the seclusion—architectural, visual, and otherwise—of women for the fortification of structures both tangible and intangible that subjugate them to an agentive patriarchy. This dissertation has also benefitted considerably—particularly in its examination of Islamic influences upon Armenian somatic culture—from the work of Alison Vacca, which expands upon the project initiated by Aram Ter-Ghevondyan to historicize the period of the Islamic caliphates in Armenia. Vacca’s work in this area has provided to this dissertation much-needed enrichment of the Armenian Islamic past and offered refreshing vibrance to this otherwise abandoned corner of history.

As initially indicated, despite the confluence of the aforementioned sources in the present study, no such inquiry has been heretofore embarked upon by a scholar of the Armenian tradition. It is this deficit that the present study endeavors to correct. In consulting and synthesizing the above primary and secondary source material, it is the

objective of this dissertation to construct a portrait of medieval Armenian somatology—converging principally around its sexual atmosphere—that scaffolds upon, reinforces, and complements extant somatological histories of adjacent spheres.

### Methodology

This dissertation examines primarily historical literature composed in Classical Armenian (*Grabar*) between the fifth and eleventh centuries CE. Its chronological parameters are dictated by the advent of Armenian writing c. 405—the earliest Armenian historical narratives dated to approximately the eighth decade of this century—and the collapse of Armenian sovereignty in the South Caucasus by the time of the pivotal Seljuq conquest in 1071. This dissertation invents and employs the term “dynastic period” to refer to this era due to its characterization by the ascendance of prominent dynastic noble houses (*nakharars*) and their political influence on both governance in the Armenian Highland and the literary products that preserve it in time, commissioned almost exclusively under patronage by these houses. Historical narratives in particular have been exploited as the most productive textual genre for observation of somatological material in the medieval Armenian record, due largely to their intricate attention to detail and explicit narratological descriptions of events and individuals and to the florid language with which they attend to this material. Alternative medieval Armenian textual genres (the most prolific being exegesis, poetry, hagiography, and homily) do not apply a degree of detail approximating that of the historians vis-à-vis the physical body as a sexual, corporeal, and anatomized object. It is for this reason that the present examination sources its content preponderantly from historical narratives.



With few exceptions, virtually all of the primary source texts consulted by this study are the productions of Armenian clerics edified within a highly politicized monastic apparatus, much of whose purpose was itself the preservation and continuation of the Armenian state (or, more often, states).<sup>9</sup> Wielding political agendas to propagate, *nakharar* luminaries would commission members of this elite class of literate (and necessarily celibate) clerics—*vardapets*—to cast in narrative posterity the historical legacies they desired for their familial houses.<sup>10</sup> This dissertation centers those dynastic narratives produced between the inception of Armenian literacy in the fifth century and the collapse of the Bagratuni Dynasty, in the aftermath of which transpired a series of calamitous sequelae that presents a decisive cadence to the present study. Some later texts postdating this event also provide critical clarity. The historical text of Aristakēs Lastiverts‘i, though appendicular to the chronological gamut of sources under inquiry, is included so as to illustrate the continuity of these themes across time, their cultural and contextual development, and their emergence beyond the confines of Armenian sovereignty (however decentralized) in the region. Aristakēs’s text is informed, uniquely, by the experiences of an Armenian populace that contended for the first time with a disintegrated Armenian state governed not by a centralized (or even a decentralized) Armenian *nakharar* authority but by the exogenous force of the Seljuqs.

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<sup>9</sup> It is with conscious precision that the word “state” is employed frequently throughout this dissertation, as—anachronous though the term may appear in a study concerning the Middle Ages—statehood as a concept encapsulates quite neatly the medieval Armenian estimation of its geographic, cultural, and geopolitical experiences. Whether the concept of a medieval Armenian state applies more aptly to the Armenian nation itself as dispersed across several *nakharar* kingdom-states or to each of those kingdoms individually remains a worthwhile topic for debate.

<sup>10</sup> The celibacy of the *vardapet* class will figure prominently as a potent factor in its characterization of the body, and bears explicit mention.

Accessory genres have also proven productive for a study of this nature, particularly those of the latter centuries under present scrutiny. Eznik Koghbatš'i provides, in his fifth-century denunciation of sectarian factions he deems heretical, acute insight into the medieval Armenian cognition of the demonic, particularly regarding its interaction with the human body, conveying a profusion of information concerning the ways in which the Armenians interpret the body through its corporal anatomy, its carnal impulses, its sexual indecencies, its mundane vulnerabilities, and its mortal anxieties. It is often through the ambit of demonic interaction that the Armenians project their most significant anxieties of temporality – a representation that manifests and matures across the elapsed centuries under inquiry. The very earliest documentations of this concept—those by Eznik—reveal much about the evolution of this topology as it responded and adapted to the series of exogenous arrivals and the polyvalent influences exerted by the cultures they imported. Legal documents supplement the historical narratives, casting indispensable context onto the legislative exigencies with which the prescribed principles and practices were enforced. To this end, the most valuable of these is the collection of canons set down at Shahapivan in CE 444, translated and exhaustively analyzed in 1989 by Ramzy A. Hovhanessian and in 2016 by Vahan S. Hovhanessian.<sup>11</sup> The legal anthology compiled in the eighth century by Hovhan Ōdznetš'i further clarifies the terrain of medieval Armenian political culture and its regulation of corporal conduct. Moreover, the administration of corporal punishment, which divulges in its application those infractions considered by medieval Armenian society most egregious, uniquely

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<sup>11</sup> Ramzy A. Hovhanessian, "The Armenian Council of Shahabivan: Translation, Introduction & Commentary" (MA thesis, St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, 1989); Vahan S. Hovhanessian, "The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan," *Revue des Études Arméniennes* 37 (2016-2017): 73-95.

illuminates both contemporaneous sexual politics and the governing mechanisms entrusted to their operation.

To this end, the most utile of these non-historical texts has been the *Penitential of Dawit' Gandzakets'i*. Produced in the early twelfth century just after the sedimentation of Seljuq presence in the region, the text discloses the sexual attitudes of the common people and their most habitual infractions and deviancies. Chronologically the most recent of the source texts under inquiry, it provides precious context for the continuity and transformation of these themes as Armenian autonomy declined and, further, elucidates in retrospection the trajectory of somatic semiotics and the cultures that engendered them as they traversed between the incipience of Armenian Christian sovereignty and its ultimate demise. Dawit's text, designed as a manual for local clerics to consult in their ministrations to the atonement of sin, introduces to the reader the most popular (and the most scandalizing) sins—sexual and otherwise—that came to epitomize misconduct across the Armenian Highland both before and after the installation of Seljuq authority. The text likely exposes the sexual and corporal behaviors that most pervaded the region throughout the formative centuries of Armenian Christianity, too vulgar for testimony by the elite traditors under the commission of aristocratic Armenian houses wielding sociopolitical agendas to advance and reputations to preserve. Dawit's compendium, in this regard, reflects much about the sexual atmosphere that fermented in the Armenian villages inhabited not by dynasts or by freemen but by, predominantly, the common class and which characterized somatic dispositions among the laity. Unencumbered by aristocratic intervention and its impulsions to sanitize, Dawit' Gandzakets'i recorded his candid observations of exurban misconduct and his authentic

recommendations for its remediation, revealing not only the nature of popular misconduct but, of equal value, the gravity and redress of each violation. It is for this reason that, although external to the dissertation's established limitations of both chronology and genre, this text is perhaps the most historically valuable of the primary sources surveyed. The intimacy with which Dawit' attends to the subtleties of quotidian sin expose details hereto concealed (or perhaps merely dismissed) by an erudite establishment invested in propagating a dynastic metanarrative. His sensitivity to these errant parishioners in their individual and collective experience of sin—and the circumstances that qualify them—divulges the complex and prismatic culture of corporality that suffused the Armenian Highland across the Middle Ages. This dissertation has thus extensively mined Dawit's text as one that both illustrates the endurance of the phenomena exposed by its literary predecessors and corroborates their material realities—often supplying brilliant color and vivid dimensionality—across both courtly and common experiences.

Once identified, individual source passages were transcribed (in both Armenian and English as necessary), coded for content, and tagged by their depiction of such material as sexual activity, torture, disease, ingestion, anatomy, demonic influence, gendered violence, carnal impulse, aesthetic beauty, and gender conformity. Each of these further diversified into a miscellany of thematic constructs, which were ultimately arranged into the eight chapters that comprise this dissertation. Topoi were further analyzed for chronological development and continuity, disclosure of transcultural pollination, and distribution along the gender binary. Each chapter centers, dissects, and analyzes a particular theme for these aforementioned qualities, creating in cohesion a portrait of Armenian somatological culture as it diffused across chronology, gender

constructions, and paradigms of identity and alterity. The resulting dissertation illustrates through each of these filters the processes by which medieval Armenian subjectivity projected morality, temporality, and sensory experience onto the human body. This deconstruction, by extension, establishes the physicalized and incarnate body as the conduit through which morality was transmitted between the temporal and the eternal and, accordingly, performed in the mundane in aspiration toward the celestial.

Though the locations of these manuscripts' earliest extant copies pepper the globe, collected in repositories across such diverse locations as Venice, Jerusalem, Yerevan, and Paris (to name only a small sample), the present study has made exclusive use of modern editions both digital and print alongside translations produced thereof in English (and, occasionally, French). The earliest of these prepared editions date to the nineteenth century with the most recent, in English, published only in the preceding decade. Where textual ambiguities arise, emendations and clarifications are provided. To this purpose, the most extensively utilized of presently available resources have been the Digital Library of Classical Armenian Literature (DIGILIB), created and directed by the American University of Armenia, and the *Matenagirk 'Hayots'*, a multi-volume series containing scholarly editions of classical and medieval Armenian texts published by the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran) in Yerevan.

In order to facilitate engagement with the primary source texts at issue, study of Classical Armenian (*Grabar*) commenced in Fall 2017 at the Zohrab Information Center in New York City, and has continued to the present. Immersive language study was undertaken in 2021 under the auspices of the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library with the generous financial support of Dumbarton Oaks, which sponsored the program.

Research was also conducted in Armenia during the summer of 2019, travel for which was made possible by the Nickolas Davatzes Research Grant.

### Problems & Limitations

Several problems emerge over the course of a study of this nature, pertaining primarily to chronology, source material, and scale. Virtually none of the original manuscripts survive of these texts, many of the earliest available copies dating to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries if not later. The lapse between the production of a text and its earliest surviving copy introduces a frustrating degree of latitude for scribal errors, omissions, and embellishments to have occurred, rendering to some degree inconclusive the original contents of these documents to the modern scholar. Philologists and manuscript specialists have methodically labored to assemble cogent editions of these texts from their surviving fragments (sometimes scattered across disparate archives and scriptoria circling the globe) that represent, to the extent of modern knowledge to recreate, the original text in content and arrangement. A gnawing ambiguity, however, continues to pervade the field, as—so far as modern scholarship has discerned—the true originals of these texts have been lost to the historical record. Nevertheless, the present study relies upon these reproductions as the most complete and academically reliable renderings of these texts. Fortuitously, their contents are exhaustively corroborated by the remarkable degree of intra-referentiality within the genre as well as by references to and accounts of these texts in those of contemporaries, both in Armenian and in the vicinal languages that engaged with them.

For these reasons, the dating of several texts extensively cited across this dissertation remains inconclusive, even highly controversial. Perhaps the most

contentious of these is the *History* of Movsēs Khorenats‘i, a document whose production remains vigorously debated between the fifth and eighth centuries. The matter has escalated to one of acute scholarly sensitivity, and the present study is underqualified to submit for contention a suitably informed opinion on the matter. Therefore, absent the scholarly authority necessary to contribute meaningfully to this exchange, this study will cautiously (and with substantial reservations) accept the more commonly held dating of the fifth century. Where applicable, the dissertation has advanced estimations and projections concerning the chronological positionings of certain elements in the text that may assist the broader scholarly community in determining its true origin. The project in this way aspires to participate in the conversation by providing insight from its excavation of medieval Armenian sexual and somatological discourse.

The surviving historical text of Movsēs Khorenats‘i, however, enjoys fortune even despite its chronological contestations. That it survives to the present continues to gift historians and scholars of the Armenian tradition – a privilege regrettably denied to an unknown mass of Armenian textual sources. Even those that have providentially survived often experience such problems as material degeneration or fragmentation, indeterminate authorship, and inconclusive dating. Such complications consume the text known to scholars as the “Anonymous Chronicle” or “History of the Anonymous Story-Teller,” a document of fantastical content and ambiguous origins, its manifold constituent fragments variously dated from as early as the ninth century to as late as the fifteenth.<sup>12</sup> No known auteur or contributor can be discerned, nor can its content be considered

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<sup>12</sup> Robert W. Thomson, “The Anonymous Story-Teller (Also Known as ‘Pseudo-Šapuh’),” [Henceforth: AST] *Revue des Études Arméniennes* 21 (1988): 172-173.

purely historical despite its apparently historical subject matter. The text consists overwhelmingly of fantasy and romance aggressively peppered with historical confusions, fictionalized accounts, and extravagant dramatizations – its heterogeneous fragments and episodes collectively comprising perhaps one of the earliest extant specimens of historical fiction. It was this text erroneously identified by scholars as the elusive historical text of the nobleman Shapuh Bagratuni. Though oft cited by cotemporal peers and Armenian chroniclers to follow, the document remains regrettably lost to the historical record; despite the valiant efforts of numerous qualified scholars, none has been able to locate the manuscript. Several ostensibly historical texts engaged by the present study exhibit similarly fantastical content, often resembling as much fantasy as history and containing wildly embellished if not wholly fictitious accounts of historical events or their actors. The *History of Tarōn* (referenced frequently as the “Pseudo-Ḥovhannēs”) is such a text, purporting to be a fifth-century document discovered and updated by a seventh-century scribe invested in preserving its authentic record and supplementing its narrative with his own contemporary knowledge. The work is, indeed, perhaps the most famous of medieval Armenian forgeries, identified by translator Levon Avdoyan as a product of neither the fifth nor the seventh century but, in its entirety, a fabrication traceable to the tenth.<sup>13</sup> The absurdity of its contents often rivals that of its provenance, often presenting as ribald, vulgar, even obscene. This is demonstrated perhaps most saliently when the tale’s central protagonist, a fictionalized Vahan of the illustrious Mamikonean Dynasty (by this time diminished from its apex and essentially

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<sup>13</sup> Levon Avdoyan, preface to *Pseudo-Yovhannēs Mamikonean, The History of Tarōn: Historical Investigation, Critical Translation, and Historical and Textual Commentaries* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), x.



exterminated from the Armenian Highland) requites his adversaries with forced ingestion of their own excised tissue. Like the “Anonymous Chronicle,” the *History of Tarōn* contains numerous anachronisms and historical inaccuracies, engendering the scholarly consensus that the text cannot conceivably report or even intend to report with any degree of veracity real historical events, and is rather designed as a propagandistic treatment to glorify the district of Taron and assert its significance to Armenian dynastic history. A similar problem plagues the historical text of the historian identified as, variably, Movsēs Kaghankatuats‘i and Movsēs Daskhurants‘i—the confusion of which results from a linguistic conflation of his local origin—perhaps the first historian to compose in Armenian a historical survey of a foreign nation. Individual segments of his *History of the Aghuan* have been diversely dated across a range from the seventh century to the early twelfth, the first two books often attributed to the name Movsēs Kaghankatuats‘i and the third to Movsēs Daskhurants‘i by scholarly tradition. Translator Robert Bedrosian considers the volume a composite of historical accounts assembled by the lattermost of its contributors and compiled across a period of roughly four centuries.<sup>14</sup> Though the text deals in subject matter with a foreign nation, the values refracted from its assessment of the Aghuan radiate unmistakably Armenian values. Its application of identifiably Armenian cultural standards to an exogenous nation, thus, legitimates its inclusion in the present study as a text characteristic of the medieval Armenian sexual and somatic ethos.

Though chronologically peripheral to the scope of the present study, the project has considered the two anonymous continuations to the *History of the House of the*

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Bedrosian, preface to “Movses Dasxurants'i's *History of the Aghuans*,” (Long Branch, NJ: Robert Bedrosian, 2010), ii. <http://www.attalus.org/armenian/mdint.htm>.

*Artsrunik* – penned in the centuries following the tenth-century production of the original text. Despite their chronological extraneity, these continuations retain the tone, attention to chronology, and values reflected in the document to which they append. These addenda have therefore, though cautiously, been consulted so as to illustrate the trajectory of these themes as they evolved (and, more often than not, remained constant) across time and as extensions of the cultural sphere in which the original *History* was grounded. In continuously invoking these approaches to sexuality and corporality, these supplementary narratives reveal the progression of somatological cultures over the centuries that followed the decline of Artsruni eminence.

Among the most persistent of problems encountered during the course of the present project has been the extreme degree of intra-referentiality and intra-derivativity across the genre. Armenian historical writing is principally reconstituted upon prototypes of itself, the historical narratives composed in its formative period of the fifth and early sixth centuries resonating across the dynastic period. Those that followed established themselves upon the template of the Awarayr narratives—those of Ghazar and Eghishē—in conformance to a topology that glorified the resistance of the Armenians, and their celebrated champion Vardan Mamikonean, against Persian resorption.<sup>15</sup> Armenian literacy was largely cultivated in monastic academies and restricted to aspiring clerics and those of means to attend these institutions, their curricula sourced predominantly from a common textual corpus. Those edified in the Armenian monastic apparatus did so immersed in the texts of revered Armenian historians whose texts were, within these

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<sup>15</sup> For this phenomenon within the larger context of medieval Armenian historiography, see İlhami Tekin Cinemre, “The Rise of Armenian Historiography in the Late Antiquity: Mythology and History,” *Journal of History Culture and Art Research* 8, no. 2 (June 2019): 1-12.

environments, ubiquitously circulated, absorbed, and perhaps copied as pedagogical exercises.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, all who attained fluency with the stylistic conventions of Armenian historical writing—sufficiently so to come under the patronage of noble dynasts—were necessarily influenced by the works of their historical precursors whose individual predilections would be subconsciously impressed into their literary processes. Procedural recall for the construction of historical narrative, the textual population of detail, fantasy, epic, and imagery, as well as ingratiation of a dynastic patron would organically germinate from conversancy with the genre as a cohesive canon. This dissertation, then, inescapably regards an astounding degree of continuity across the genre throughout the seven centuries under analysis, across which a finitude of themes and values cyclically and reliably repopulate the Armenians' literary topography across generations. A substantive problem that materializes of this is, then, whether to attribute this remarkable continuity to the stability of these *topoi* across time amid the collective cultural consciousness of the Armenians or to the intergenerational circulation of a contained and finite set of texts among the scribal class, which resulted in an extraordinary degree of intra-derivativity endemic to the genre of historical composition.

A symbiosis of both may provide the most viable explanation. Each of these consequential influences mutually reinforced the other. Over time, these references and mythoi vulcanized into self-sustaining constructs. Considering the constancy of the textual fundamentals mobilized in the propagation of literacy and preparation for a monastic career, a consistent panoply of tropes would naturally and continuously regenerate as referential touchstones. Whether Armenian litterateurs had, after some

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<sup>16</sup> See Thomson, "*Vardapet*," 367-384.

centuries of Armenian writing had elapsed and a formidable corpus of literature amassed, acquired direct access to each other's texts does not render any more or less significant the persistence and survival of the tropes contained therein. That they were persistently copied and preserved in more novel derivations attests to their enduring application, else they would have been swiftly discarded as historical refuse and re-metabolized back into the genre in more productive (and, moreover, more temporally relevant) permutations. The recurrence of a primordial motif amid a more recent production, even if included only in reference to an antecedent document, nevertheless attests to its cultural endurance. Its relevance to the historical setting in which its duplication occurs is, then, immediately obvious from the scribal decision to expend valuable ink, paper, energy, and time on its reproduction. By virtue of its very presence in a new volume, it reasserts its significance to the sensibilities that replicate it. Just as ancient and medieval religious ideas set to text continue to guide the moral orientation of billions across the globe today, so too did the literary foundations of prior generations inform the cultural atmosphere for centuries of Armenian traditors.

### A Note on Transliteration

This dissertation employs the Library of Congress table for the Romanization of Armenian characters for all original text.<sup>17</sup> When quoting translations by modern scholars, the original transliteration of the published text will be preserved. On occasion, when a Romanization introduces ambiguity, the original Armenian text will be included alongside its Romanization and English translation.

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<sup>17</sup> Library of Congress, *Armenian*, last modified January 27, 2022, <https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsd/romanization/armenian.pdf>.

# I. Identity, Alterity, and the Optics of Armenian Masculinity

## Introduction

Medieval Armenian textual sources define masculinity by a fixed set of characteristics constructed in opposition not to femininity but to ethnic and religious alterity. For chroniclers of the dynastic period, to issue a characterization of physical beauty was to situate the Armenian masculine against infidels, foreigners, and a diversity of contenders to the conquest of Armenia. Masculinity was, then, a performance of nationalism more than of virility, and one designed to differentiate its subjects not from the effeminate but from the barbaric, the heretical, and the essentialized other.

Descriptions of beauty and the constituent features that indicate it are unique to men in these texts and never applied to women. In fact, prosaic construals of women's beauty or of features that identify them as aesthetically beautiful are wholly absent from medieval Armenian historical texts. Aesthetic beauty, then, is implicitly reserved for men. Women's beauty (to be discussed in greater detail in chapter II) is rather a generalized concept, associated more with virtuous behavior than with distinct physical traits as it is for men. Because it was considered improper for men—especially the learned men of the clerical class who produced the entire corpus of texts under investigation—to openly acknowledge attraction to women or admiration of their beauty, these writers then displaced these observations onto detailed descriptions of beauty in masculine (or else insentient) form. Demonstration of the Armenian male as an idealization of physical beauty, therefore, is paramount to these cleric-historians, who often deploy male beauty as a rhetorical device through which to evidence the superiority of the Armenians over their rivals, enemies, and foreign invaders. Though feminine

beauty remained unmentionable, considered inappropriate for written documentation (or even for the entertainment of mere cogitation) by a broader regional culture that concealed women—predominantly those of aristocratic station—from public consumption, male beauty was the primary channel through which this notion of Armenian aesthetic superiority was expressed. These traditors did so in the following ways: 1) Intricate detail in the depiction of male beauty (defined by facial attractiveness, fairness of complexion, tall and muscular build, lustrous and generally curly hair, and an absence of body hair); 2) Accounts of extreme physical potency of Armenian men and their resultant capacity to best both man and beast (primarily at foreign courts) and to perform extraordinary feats of athleticism; and 3) Reports of foreign invaders coveting the beauty of Armenian men (and, to a lesser extent, women). While the domain of the ideal feminine was nested within the behavioral and abstracted as civic obedience (to be explored in the following chapter), the ideal masculine inhabited the domain of physical beauty, strength, valor, piety, and aesthetic superiority. These the Armenian historians articulate through their oppositionality to the contrasting somatic inferiority of the essentialized ethnoreligious other.

### Aesthetics of Masculine Facial Beauty

Medieval Armenian somatic consciousness defines masculinity, to a considerable degree, by physical attractiveness. Writers of this tradition labored meticulously to illustrate the aesthetic beauty of their male subjects from the hairs of their heads to the appearance of their feet. Similarly, the historians of this period conspicuously exaggerated the ugliness of their enemies. The qualities assigned phenotypically pleasant or unpleasant by these narrators supply productive insight into the aesthetic preferences of medieval Armenians. The hierarchy of aesthetic value in which these physical features

were organized incite further questions: Why did the Armenians esteem certain features over others? Did these preferences change over time? If so, how? Which of these preferences remained static, and why? What external historical factors contributed to, hastened, or hindered these transformations in aesthetic preference?

Armenian chroniclers of the dynastic period described the physical appearance of their male subjects to such a detailed extent as to emphasize the attractiveness of one's face and even the pleasing shapes and colors of particular facial features. As early as the fifth century, Movsēs Khorenats'i attests the "sparkling eyes" of Armenia's mythical forefather Hayk.<sup>1</sup> He proceeds to describe the "exceedingly shining face and flaming eyes" of the mythological figure Hrach'eay.<sup>2</sup> The tenth-century cleric-historian Կովհաննէս Ծրակհանակերտտս'ի parallels this visual in introducing another figure of the same name: "...whose fame and physical appearance did justice to his name, since to the onlookers he always appeared to be handsome and with sparkles in his eyes."<sup>3</sup>

Movsēs additionally relates in ornate detail the visage of the Bagratuni nobleman Smbat, writing: "He had a small blood mark in his eyes, which shone like enamel on gold and [set] in pearl."<sup>4</sup> The blood mark evidently did not detract from Smbat's beauty – or, at minimum, from the motivation of the author to describe in flattering language the physical appearance of his patrons. Centuries later, Կովհաննէս Ծրակհանակերտտս'ի will pen a virtually identical depiction of Ashot I sourced possibly from Movsēs's, consciously

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<sup>1</sup> Moses Khorenats'i, *History of the Armenians*, trans. Robert W. Thomson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978) [Henceforth: MX] I.10, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> MX I.22, p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> Yovhannēs Drasxanakerte'i, *History of Armenia*, trans. Krikor H. Maksoudian (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987) [Henceforth: YD] III, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> MX II.52, p. 191.

noting the “speckle of blood in his eye, a red ruby glowing in the midst of pearls.” Hovhannēs, like Movsēs, describes the ocular blood mark in gemological terms, analogizing it to a radiant gemstone set in pearl. Movsēs compares the mark to the similarly luminous sheen of enamel, likening the white sclera of his subject’s eyes to pearly stone.<sup>5</sup>

Movsēs is not as generous in addressing the facial features of a Muratsean-appointed governor identified by the name Turk‘. He writes: “As governor of the west he appointed a man called Turk‘, who was deformed, tall, monstrous, with a squashed nose, deep-sunk sockets, and fearsome aspect, from the offspring of Pask‘am, grandson of Hayk; they called him Angl because of his great ugliness, a man of gigantic size and strength. Because of the deformity of his face, he called his family the house of Angl.”<sup>6</sup> A linguistic deconstruction of “Anggh” as *uŕ* (a negator) + *qln* (beautiful) renders the house’s title, as Movsēs suggests, “the house of the ugly;” Robert Thomson, however, finds that this derivation is, like many of Movsēs’s dynastic etymologies, fanciful.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Movsēs attributes the inscription of the Dimak‘sean House (extrapolating Armenian words for “face” and “half”) to the facial injury incurred by its progenitor, whose face had been famously bisected by a sword in battle.<sup>8</sup> Movsēs is not unique in his fallacious attributions of ennobled families’ titles to distinguishing physical features. In recounting the ennoblement of his eponymous house, the tenth-century historian T‘ovma Artsruni expounds of the dynasty’s originator: “Furthermore, by chance he had the

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<sup>5</sup> YD XXIX, p. 128.

<sup>6</sup> MX II.8, p. 139.

<sup>7</sup> MX II.8, p. 139 (see n. 80).

<sup>8</sup> MX II.47, p. 185 (see n. 318 for translator Robert Thomson’s commentary on the creative etymology employed by Movsēs).



distinguishing feature of possessing an aquiline nose. But I do not know whether he named them Artsrunik' from the name of the country or for their physique."<sup>9</sup> T'ovma here tinkers with the etymological connection between the Latin *aquila* ("eagle"), which designates the aforementioned rhinal phenotype, its Armenian analogue *արծրուկ*, and the semiotic significance of the eagle to the Artsruni dynasty, whose very name derives, according to Movsēs Khorenats'i, from the Armenian *արծիւ* (eagle).<sup>10</sup>

Centuries later, an anonymous continuator to T'ovma's text would ingratiate his patron, similarly to Movsēs Khorenats'i in the fifth century, with florid language of a similar tone and timbre. Of Gagik Artsruni, the continuator pronounces as follows:

He had two black arched eyebrows, pupils, and eyelids that shaded the eyes like a lily flowering in valleys, spreading in wonderful fashion. His nose was wide and elegant; his ears, quick to hear and believe good news, shone with a luminous colour. His lips were like a red line; his teeth were close to each other and free from stain. His fresh beard flowered like violets on beautiful cheeks, giving him the appearance to onlookers of angelic form. Truly such gifts of grace and glory [were given] him from on High.<sup>11</sup>

The level of detail to which the beauty of Gagik—and, moreover, that limited solely to his facial features—is exalted by the continuator provides copious material to consider in evaluating medieval Armenian conventions for aesthetic beauty. The continuator elaborates to the extent of praising even the color of Gagik's ears in addition to those of his lips, teeth, and eyebrows. While an admiration for neatly aligned teeth may seem a reasonably standard aesthetic asset, the continuator's emphasis on this feature reveals

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Artsruni, *History of the House of the Artsrunik'*, trans. Robert W. Thomson (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985) [Henceforth: TA] I.6, p. 107.

<sup>10</sup> James Russell, "The Formation of the Armenian Nation," in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times: Volume I: The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 30-31; MX II.7, p. 135.

<sup>11</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 2] IV.11, pp. 365-366.

much about the aesthetic culture that informed his perspective. In emphasizing that Gagik's teeth were "close to each other," the author exposes the implicit aversion by his contemporaries to teeth too widely spaced apart; rather than stating generally that his subject's teeth are simply straight, he specifies that they are "close to each other."

This could perhaps communicate euphemistically that Gagik, in fact, possessed all of his teeth, as a reference to teeth spread too far apart may gently indicate that some had dislodged or decayed. The reader may otherwise infer that orthodontic abnormalities were perceived, then just as now, as unsightly and unattractive, perhaps signifying poor nutrition, inadequate hygiene, and other indications of debility. Absent the technologies to correct such issues, it appears the medieval Armenian observer was inclined to praise the fortuity of naturally occurring dental uniformity. While the original author of the text admires the "aquiline" nose of the inaugural Artsruni noble, its continuator extols the "wide and elegant" nose of Gagik. Noses characterized as "aquiline" are frequently appreciated for their long, narrow bridges; an ascription of "wide" to the nose would not, then, satisfy the criteria for the aesthetically pleasing form. It is possible that such criteria broadened or transformed in the centuries between the original production of the text and the contributions of its continuators. More likely, however, is that the two differ on what constitutes an attractive nose (or even an "aquiline" nose, if a wide nose is considered the pinnacle of rhinal aesthetics). As a final detail of note, the continuator comments on the "two black arched eyebrows" of his subject – an element applied gender-neutrally in medieval Armenian textual sources for accounts of facial beauty. This attribute, however, is not once mentioned in reference to a specified woman in the entirety of the texts under examination (though the female brow is once vaguely referenced by Agat'angeghos in

the fifth century, to be examined in the chapter to follow). It is a matter of some intrigue that Armenian texts of the dynastic period explicitly cite the eyebrows of only one other figure – those of the Bagratuni prince Ashot, whom Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i describes as “...of great stature, tall, robust, with a cheerful countenance surmounted by dark eyebrows.”<sup>12</sup>

The shape of a named woman’s eyebrows is never attested in these sources—nor is any precise facial feature on an identified woman—and, thus, T‘ovma’s continuator has illuminated the homosocial nature of medieval Armenian attitudes toward physical beauty. It was perhaps perceived as scandalous that a man of the clerical class, who singularly comprised Armenia’s literate population, would comment upon or even take notice of a woman’s beauty. This proscription in mind, it is conceivable that the only acceptable approach for a man of the learned class, inextricably both literary and clerical, to express appreciation for the aesthetic beauty of a human face was to admire that of a man – or else to project his admiration onto that of an unfeminine object, be it masculine or inanimate. The Armenians’ well-documented orientation toward asceticism and general unconcern for homosexuality (to be explored below) would ensure that this technique would insulate the writer from a charge of lustful impropriety under only minuscule probability that he would be accused of sodomy or effeminacy for his poeticized observations of male facial beauty. There is evidenced only one other mention of the beauty of arched eyebrows, this instance likewise detached from the female face as

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<sup>12</sup> YD XXIX, p. 128.

is the reference of T'ovma's continuator. Speaking of the physical topography of the estate of Eruandakert, Movsēs Khorenats'i writes:

It is pleasant for me to speak also about the beautiful estate of Eruandakert, which the same Eruand embellished with beautiful and charming constructions. He filled the center of the great valley with inhabitants and splendid buildings, shining like the pupil of an eye. Around the inhabited area were arranged gardens of sweet-smelling flowers, as the circle of the eye surrounds the pupil. A multitude of vineyards resembled the beautiful crescent of thick lashes; on the northern side its curved form truly imitated the arching brows of charming maidens. To the south the level plain [recalled] the beauty of smooth cheeks. The river with its high banks resembled a mouth with matching lips. Such was the beauty of the site that looked with unblinking eye, you might say, up to the heights of the royal residence, a truly fertile and majestic estate.<sup>13</sup>

Though the historian alludes to the female brow in his comparison of the vineyards of Eruandakert to “the arching brows of charming maidens,” his account is ostensibly topographical and, thus, exonerates him of any narrative misconduct in its opacity.

It thus becomes plausible that depiction of female beauty was considered improper literary conduct indicative of uncontained lust – the most egregious of moral failings to a medieval Armenian sensibility. Rather, these authors would displace their admiration of female attractiveness onto the more socially acceptable appreciation of the male form and physique. This practice would enable traditors to deflect accusations of lust for women by coding their appreciation of feminine facial beauty into passages dedicated to the feminine beauty of non-female objects both anthropic and geologic. Movsēs himself approaches impropriety in merely comparing the curves of the rolling landscape to “the arching brows of charming maidens.” Equally informative is the ruminative ocular imagery common to both texts, each of which in careful and intricate

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<sup>13</sup> MX II.42, p. 180.

detail muses upon not only the oculus itself as an anatomical unit but even the visual particulars of its constituent parts: the pupil, the sclerae, and the lashes and brows that frame it. That such ophthalmic specificity is mapped onto the insensate indicates the author's reluctance to apply such descriptors to an extant woman while betraying his inclination to acknowledge the aesthetically feminine.

Of secondary value to facial perfection was lustrous hair. Considerably esteemed was curly hair, which the documentary sources several times exalt as a signifier of physical perfection. The mythic figure Hayk<sup>4</sup> is praised by both Movsēs Khorenats<sup>4</sup>i and Ukhtanēs of Sebastia (the latter likely sourcing his description directly from the former) for the beauty of his curly hair, Movsēs depicting him as “handsome and personable, with curly hair, sparkling eyes, and strong arms,” and Ukhtanēs similarly as “a handsome man with good appearance, due to his curly hair, pleasing eyes, and powerful arms.”<sup>14</sup> The *Buzandaran* contains an elaborate passage extolling the “splendid” hair of St. Nersēs, set during his investiture as bishop by King Arshak:

He ordered the crowning glory of his admirable curly hair, the like of which could not be found anywhere, cut off and his becoming official-robe stripped off. Then [the king] gave an order and ecclesiastical vestments were brought and put on [Nersēs], and he ordered the elderly Bishop P<sup>4</sup>awstos called in to ordain him as deacon. Now, when [Nersēs's] hair was shaved off, many wept when they heard and saw, regretting that beauty [destroyed] through his altered appearance. But, when they saw him adorned with the beauty of Christ, many rejoiced that he had been called to be the keeper of Christ's house through bountiful grace.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> MX I.10, p. 82; Bishop Ukhtanēs of Sebastia, *History of Armenia, Part I: History of the Patriarchs and Kings of Armenia*, trans. Zaven Arzoumanian (Ft. Lauderdale: Zaven Arzoumanian, 1988) [Henceforth: Ukhtanēs I] 15, p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> P<sup>4</sup>awstos Buzand, *The Epic Histories Attributed to P<sup>4</sup>awstos Buzand (Buzandaran Patmut<sup>4</sup>iwnk<sup>4</sup>)*, trans. Nina G. Garsoïan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989) [Henceforth: BP] IV.iii, p. 110.

The ritual shearing to which the compiler refers commenced with the penal tonsure of St. Peter.<sup>16</sup> The Armenians, like vicinal cultures, would retain the connotation of tonsure to persecution and punishment—and, by extension, to Christian confession—throughout the Early Middle Ages.

In like manner, the second of T‘ovma Artsruni’s anonymous continuators writes of King Gagik: “The hair of his head was dark, long, and curly, carefully arranged above a dazzling white forehead in very thick and dense waves.”<sup>17</sup> The same continuator comparably dotes upon the curls of Prince Abdlmseh of the Artsruni family: “He was handsome of person, distinguished and of tall stature, with curly hair and fine appearance, softly spoken and sweet-voiced like a turtledove.”<sup>18</sup>

### Size, Strength, and Stature

In addition to an evidenced appreciation for the physical beauty conveyed by certain facial features, an apparent admiration for imposing physical stature manifests in the texts. Ample stature often connotes piety and spiritual virtue in its subject, and emerges as a salient narrative marker for moral righteousness across all texts spanning the entirety of the dynastic period. Movsēs Khorenats‘i palliates his description of the pitifully deformed Anggh of the eponymous house with the qualifier of Anggh’s auspicious size and stature.<sup>19</sup> The fifth-century compiler of the *Buzandaran* writes that Grigoris, the grandson of St. Gregory the Illuminator, “...was of handsome stature, outstanding in spiritual merit, and filled with the knowledge of God.”<sup>20</sup> Shortly thereafter,

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Mills, “The Signification of the Tonsure,” in *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, eds. Katherine J. Lewis and P.H. Cullum (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004): 109–126.

<sup>17</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 2] IV.11, p. 365.

<sup>18</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 2] IV.12, p. 373.

<sup>19</sup> MX II.8, p. 139.

<sup>20</sup> BP III.v, p. 70.

the same text introduces St. Nersēs, another Gregorid descendant some four generations removed from the progenitor of the eponymous house. “He was a large man of tall and pleasing stature, with an agreeable appearance, so that no one equal to his beauty could be found on the face of the earth. He was attractive, admirable, and awe-inspiring to all beholders, and enviable for his prowess in military exercises.”<sup>21</sup> Movsēs Daskhurants‘i will apply similar descriptors to the Aghuan prince Vach‘agan, pronouncing him to be “brave, wise, and prudent, tall of stature and good looking.”<sup>22</sup> Writing in the early tenth century, T‘ovma Artsruni would similarly describe the “tall handsome stature” of the nobleman Apusahak Vahevuni—in the same breath emphasizing the “analogous beauty of his face”—and the admirable stature of the three sons of Derenik Artsruni, who “as they grew in body increased in vigour and stature.”<sup>23</sup> T‘ovma connects to their stature the attendant fortuity that “they were also endowed with no little intelligence in the concomitant growth of their minds.”<sup>24</sup>

Centuries later, his continuator writes of the “luminous visage and glorious stature” of Gagik Artsruni, likening him to a “tall tower built with strong stones bonded in lead, like a wall of bronze, firmly nailed, unbreachable by the enemy; likewise, similar to an iron pillar on secure bases set up with inconceivable strength and hope in God over the sublime principality of Armenia; a place of refuge to which one could flee from the face of the enemy.”<sup>25</sup> Only two decades following the initial production of T‘ovma’s text, Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i similarly describes the *sparapet* Abas Bagratuni as “a

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<sup>21</sup> BP IV.iii, p. 109.

<sup>22</sup> Movses Dasxurants‘i, *History of the Aghuans*, trans. Robert Bedrosian (Long Branch, NJ: Robert Bedrosian, 2010) [Henceforth: MD] I.17, p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> TA III.ii, p. 196; TA III.xxii, p. 295.

<sup>24</sup> TA III.xxii, p. 295.

<sup>25</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 2] IV.11, p. 365; TA [Anonymous Continuator 2] IV.2, p. 335.

brave man, sturdy, vigorous and handsome in stature, robust and skilled in warfare” and praises the “becoming, stately, and handsome stature” of his brother, Prince Ashot.<sup>26</sup> Roughly a century after T‘ovma, Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i would describe David Artsruni as “outstanding both in size and elegance; he grew wise in understanding, pleasing to God and man, emboldened through courage; he became very powerful in strength and victorious over all his opponents.”<sup>27</sup> Each of these reflects an association of athletic physique to myriad favorable qualities, most common among them valor, strength, intellectual acuity, and facial beauty, synthesizing a composite of masculine perfection to the medieval Armenian conception.

A venerated hero, however, need not necessarily possess colossal size in order to exhibit valor or earn praise. Such is the example of the acclaimed *sparapet* Vasak Mamikonean, whom the *Buzandaran* describes in lyrical panegyric as “small in stature.”<sup>28</sup> Infuriated by the destruction effected by Vasak to Persian military resources, the Persian king Shapuh orders the *sparapet* delivered to his court, whereupon Shapuh excoriates Vasak: ““You have been a destructive fox who caused us so much trouble, you are the one who slaughtered Aryans, for so many years. What will you do now? For I will kill you, with a fox’s death.””<sup>29</sup> The insertion of vulpine imagery into the king’s vituperation of Vasak evokes a familiar semiology with which a contemporaneous audience would have been conversant, as foxes carry ancient negative associations in the region both pagan and Abrahamic. In pronouncing Vasak vulpine, the compiler—by

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<sup>26</sup> YD XXVIII, p. 127.

<sup>27</sup> Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i, *The Universal History of Step'anos Tarōnec'i: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, trans. Tim Greenwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) [Henceforth: ST] III.30, p. 294.

<sup>28</sup> BP IV.liv, p. 173.

<sup>29</sup> BP IV.liv, p. 173.



proxy of a narrated and likely fictitious rendering of Shapuh—subtly discloses to the reader not only Vasak’s cunning wit and ruthless approach to combat, but also his diminutive size. The nineteenth canon of those issued at Shahapivan commands that clerics discovered in the commission of “a filthy act” be defrocked and “branded on the forehead with the sign of a fox.”<sup>30</sup> Later accounts will attest punitive branding with the icon accorded to heretics and apostates, to be addressed in subsequent chapters of the present study.

In his response to the Persian monarch, Vasak mocks both the king’s reversal in his evaluation and the insinuation that his size would dictate his fortitude. He replies to Shapuh as follows:

“Seeing now my small stature, you do not grasp the measures of my greatness, for until now I was a lion for you, and now [I have become] a fox. But while I was Vasak, I was a giant. One of my feet rested on one mountain and my other foot on another mountain. And whenever I leaned on the right foot, I drove the mountain on the right to the ground; whenever I leaned on the left foot, I drove the mountain on the left to the ground.”<sup>31</sup>

Vasak’s response to Shapuh illustrates that though impressive size may impart commensurate strength and valor, it is not requisite to the achievement of heroic feats, nor a substitute for an incisive wit. To the contrary, a muscular physique absent a refined intellect may act as an impediment to its bearer. To demonstrate this notion, the compiler recounts the punishment visited upon the treacherous *mardpet* Dghak by the Arshakuni king Pap. For his crime of collusion with the Persian king against his Armenian compatriots, Dghak is deceptively presented ceremonial raiment to display his grandeur.

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<sup>30</sup> Hovhannessian, “The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan,” 92. I am grateful to my colleague David Zakarian for providing this source to me.

<sup>31</sup> BP IV.liv, p. 173.

The gifted garments, however, are—unbeknownst to their recipient—tactically oversized and ill-fitted. The compiler narrates:

At feasting time, King Pap gave the order to garb the *mardpet* in robes [of honor], and so they clad him in a tunic and trousers. Now these garments were of disproportionately large size and hung down fold over fold, so that he could not adjust them on himself because the amplitude of the garment engulfed him. . . . But Głak did not realize that the amplitude of the garment might prove harmful for him.<sup>32</sup>

It is due to the “amplitude of the garment” that Pap’s soldiers are enabled to subdue the *mardpet*, who had failed to regard as he vested himself the accessibility of his weapons. “But although he grasped at a weapon, he was not able to reach a single one because it was caught in the multifold garment in which he was entangled.”<sup>33</sup> To summarize, the compiler concludes: “And so, although Głak was a tall and well-made man with large and powerful [*k’aj*] bones, the shield-bearers surrounded him, lifted him up, and carried him to the door of the royal hall [*tačarin ark’uni*].”<sup>34</sup> The *mardpet*’s prodigious size and strength, the compiler reminds his audience, are insufficient to compensate for his complacency or to eclipse the intellectual advantages of a thoughtfully developed strategy.

The compiler once again articulates this sensibility later in the text, writing of the Persian-installed Arshakuni king Varazdat, successor to King Pap, who—though potent and robust—is, like the *mardpet*, mentally deficient: “He was young in years, full of vigor, with powerful hands and a valiant heart, but he was light-minded, youthfully puerile of mind, and childish.”<sup>35</sup> It is this characterization of the Arshakuni monarch that

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<sup>32</sup> BP V.vi, p. 197.

<sup>33</sup> BP V.vi, p. 197.

<sup>34</sup> BP V.vi, p. 197.

<sup>35</sup> BP V.xxxiv, p. 215.

the compiler of the *Buzandaran* positions against the esteemed Mamikonean champion—in a text notorious for promoting, potentially under official patronage, the Mamikonean Dynasty at the incidental expense of the Arshakuni—the *sparapet* Manuēl Mamikonean.<sup>36</sup> The compiler includes an expository passage extolling not only the physical size and strength but also the loyalty and compassion—two of the qualities against which stature and vigor, to the Armenian mentality, must be countervailed so as to accord positive rather than negative connotations—of the *sparapet* and his brother:

Now the two brothers were on foot, and both of them were of enormous size, both of them were as strongly built as giants. And when they were on their way, Manuēl [became] unable to walk because his feet hurt. Then his brother Koms lifted him up on his back, and carrying this man of enormous size ten *xrasaxs* a day, he came bearing him to the land of Armenia.<sup>37</sup>

Illustrated here is the value that should the otherwise beneficial asset of one's enormous size become too cumbersome a burden to bear under duress, it is the obligation of his kinsman to marshal his own sinew so as to ensure the survival of his brother and, by extension, the continuity the dynasty as a unit. The Mamikonean, as the compiler demonstrates, virtuously possess the dignity and conviction to perform precisely such acts of integrity. Meeting the *sparapet* in battle, according to the *Buzandaran*, King Varazdat is captivated by the physical glory of Manuēl Mamikonean:

[Now] when King Varazdat lifted up his eyes as he came forward, looked, and beheld the *sparapet* Manuēl in the greatness of his stature, the splendor of his person, the extremely strong and impenetrable iron armor [*zēn*] [that covered him] from head to foot, also the

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<sup>36</sup> For a discussion of pro-Mamikonean bias in the *Epic Histories*, see Nina Garsoïan's introduction to the translated volume: Nina G. Garsoïan, introduction to *The Epic Histories Attributed to P'awstos Buzand (Buzandaran Patmut 'iwnk')*, trans. Nina G. Garsoïan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>37</sup> BP V.xxxvii, p. 218.

robustness of his person and the solidity of his armor-clad charger, also bearing indestructible trappings, he compared him in his mind to a tall and inaccessible mountain.<sup>38</sup>

This descriptive passage construes in composite the requisite physique, vigor, beauty, and paraphernalia of valor that in concert comprised an Armenian abstraction of idealized masculine virtue.<sup>39</sup>

Movsēs Khorenats‘i, like his contemporary who compiled the *Buzandaran*, liberally applauds men of the Arshakuni dynasty. Though neither text was authored under Arshakuni patronage, it appears the two compete with one another to assert regnal legitimacy in succeeding the fallen house. While the events related in the *Buzandaran* transpire above an undercurrent of Mamikonean supremacy, the *History* of Movsēs Khorenats‘i performs the same function for the rival Bagratuni house. In order to accomplish his task, incumbent upon each was to simultaneously extol the Arshakuni family as valid sovereigns of the Armenian realm and to subtly evince adequate connections between the former dynasts and his affiliated (or preferred) house. Only by authenticating his house’s historical connection to the Arshakuni could each author convince his audience of its accessional legitimacy. Thus, each vaunting the strength and beauty of the princes and noblemen of his own favored house, both historians praise in equal measure the Arshakuni Dynasty as the implied precursor to so magnificent an inheritor of its sovereignty. Of Tigran, Movsēs explicates: “So I praise my noble champion, the lancer well proportioned in all his limbs and perfect in the beauty of his

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<sup>38</sup> BP V.xxxvii, p. 219.

<sup>39</sup> For a discussion of valor as a property of virtue in fifth-century Armenia, see David Zakarian, “Women on the Throne and the Symbolic Attributes of Authority,” *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 22 (2013): 23-38.

frame, for he was vigorous and adept in everything, and in strength he had no equal.”<sup>40</sup> Movsēs is unique in his attention to the proportionality of his subjects’ limbs. He writes of the aforementioned Tigran as “broad shouldered, strong legged and with noble feet.”<sup>41</sup> He later conveys congruously the corporal verve and resplendence of Arshakuni princes Artashēs and Eruand.<sup>42</sup> Movsēs applies comparable language to Smbat Bagratuni, of the house that sponsors his enterprise, writing that the “stature of his limbs was in proportion to his valor.”<sup>43</sup> Movsēs is not, however, indiscriminately ingratiating of the Bagratuni, as demonstrated in a rather unflattering passage concerning the Bagratuni son-in-law of King Tiran:

King Tiran married his daughter Eraneak to a certain Trdat of the Bagratuni family, the son of Smbatuhi, daughter of the valiant Smbat, a spirited and powerful man, short in stature and ugly in appearance. She hated her husband Trdat and was continuously grumbling and complaining, lamenting that she, a beautiful woman, lived with an ugly man, and that being of noble family she lived with a man of ignoble origin.<sup>44</sup>

Despite softening his remarks by describing Trdat as “spirited and powerful,” these qualities were, evidently, insufficient to resign the Arshakuni princess to her husband’s unfortunate appearance. Incensed by the impertinence of the wife legally consigned to him through the customary marital protocols of the *nakharar* class, Trdat avenges this indignity by brutalizing his wife: “At this Trdat was angry, and one day he beat her severely. He clipped her blond hair, pulled off her thick curls, and ordered her to be dragged outside and thrown from the room.”<sup>45</sup> That shearing his wife’s beautiful

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<sup>40</sup> MX I.29, p. 115.

<sup>41</sup> MX I.24, p. 110.

<sup>42</sup> MX II.8, p. 142; MX II.37, p. 176.

<sup>43</sup> MX II.52, p. 191.

<sup>44</sup> MX II.63, p. 203.

<sup>45</sup> MX II.63, p. 203.

curls is elemental to his vengeance completes an important parallel: only through destruction to his wife's physical beauty can he rectify that which subjugates him to her in status – the disparity between their aesthetic valuations. Scholar Zaroui Pogossian has connected the insulting behavior of Eraneak toward her husband to that of P'arandzem toward King Arshak, and notes the significant pattern that emerges in fifth-century Armenian texts whereby noblewomen enjoy liberal latitude to disparage and even reject their husbands citing phenotypic deficiencies. Pogossian calls attention to the perhaps radical phenomenon of women's license to engage in such verbal attacks with impunity.<sup>46</sup> These women did not, according to the texts that report these accounts, exhibit any concern for retribution or reprisal in such forms as imprisonment, exile, dispossession or divestment of title, or execution.

Another royal distinguished for his regrettable stature is the Arshakuni king Khosrov, who, according to Movsēs, “did not attain the stature of his parents.”<sup>47</sup> Writing in the latter half of the tenth century, the bishop Ukhtanēs of Sebastia repeats this item, briefly reporting of the birth and marriage of Khosrov, “whose stature was unlike his parents' stature” – though Ukhtanēs omits the detail provided by Movsēs that Khosrov's wife, Ashkhēn, equaled (or perhaps even surpassed) her husband in height.<sup>48</sup> Khosrov's stature is once again cited by Step'anos Tarōnets'i, who supplies both more detail and more derision, embellishing that Khosrov was not only small but also cowardly and ineffectual: “And he did not display the brave courage of his father, for although he was

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<sup>46</sup> Pogossian, “Women at the Beginning,” 368.

<sup>47</sup> MX II.83, p. 230.

<sup>48</sup> Ukhtanēs I.67, p. 82; MX II.83, p. 229.

small and slight, he was not like Alexander of the Macedonians who was only three cubits in stature.”<sup>49</sup>

The seventh-century historian Sebēos records an entry that illuminates the early medieval Armenian admiration not only for ample physical size and strength but for the spectacular feats they enable. Sebēos documents the arrest of Armenian noble Smbat Bagratuni, who is subsequently detained and extradited to Constantinople. He is sentenced in penalty “to be stripped and thrown into the arena.”<sup>50</sup> In exposition to this heroic episode, the historian builds anticipation of Smbat’s Herculean capability by introducing him as follows:

He was a man gigantic in stature and handsome of appearance, strong and of solid body. He was a powerful warrior, who had demonstrated his valour and strength in many battles. Such was his power that when he passed through dense forests under strong trees on his big-limbed and powerful horse, grasping the branch of a tree he would hold it firmly, and forcefully tightening his thighs and legs around the horse’s middle he would raise it with his legs from the ground, so that when all the soldiers saw this they were awestruck and astonished.<sup>51</sup>

The exploits that await Smbat include combat with a bear, a bull, and a lion, all of which he adroitly defeats:

So they stripped him, dressed him in breeches, and threw him into the arena as prey for the wild beasts.

They released a bear against him. Now it happened that when the bear attacked him, he shouted out loudly, ran on the bear, hit its forehead with his fist, and slew it on the spot.

The next time they released a bull against him. But he grasped the horns of the bull ... raised a great shout ... and when the bull grew weary in the struggle, he twisted its neck and broke both horns over its head. Losing strength, the bull retreated and turned to flee.

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<sup>49</sup> ST II.1, p. 137.

<sup>50</sup> Sebēos, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebēos*, trans. Robert W. Thomson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999) [Henceforth: Sebēos] 20, p. 39.

<sup>51</sup> Sebēos 20, p. 39.

But he ran after it, seized its tail, and held on to the hoof of one of its feet. He pulled off the hoof, which remained in his hand. The bull fled away from him, with one bare foot.

The third time they released a lion against him. It happened that when the lion attacked him, he gained such a success from the Lord that taking hold of the lion's ear, he mounted it. Then grasping its wind-pipe, he throttled the lion and killed it. The roar of the large crowd filled the land and they requested mercy from the king.<sup>52</sup>

The valiant feats performed by Smbat at Constantinople echo a more concise account recorded by Movsēs two centuries prior concerning Varazdat Arshakuni:

This Varazdat was young in years, spirited, personable, strong, full of all deeds of valor, and very expert at archery. Earlier he had fled from Shapuh to the emperor's court and had become a noted champion—first by winning the pugilistic contest at Pisa; and then at Heliopolis in Hellas at midday he had killed lions, for which he was praised and honored by the contestants at the Olympic games.<sup>53</sup>

Like Smbat Bagratuni, Varazdat of the Arshakuni Dynasty finds himself in Byzantine territory under pursuit by a vengeful emperor (though Smbat's export to Constantinople occurs consequently to his capture, whereas Varazdat successfully evades his pursuer and seeks refuge in the city at his own volition). Both are glorified for their impressive strength and skill, both alleged to have bested lions as displays of their valor. Both exhibit, in their respective texts, extraordinary athletic prowess and attract widespread renown for these spectacles. It matters little that while Smbat performs these feats in penal captivity, Varazdat does so voluntarily for acclaim and recognition – the two represent metonymous iterations of a singular heroic archetype. This literary typology is reprised for a final appearance in the canon of early medieval Armenian histories under the pen of Step'anos Tarōnets'i. This permutation of the story introduces a

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<sup>52</sup> Sebēos 20, pp. 39-40.

<sup>53</sup> MX III.40, pp. 296-297.



variant character, neither Smbat nor Varazdat but, rather, King Trdat of the Arshakuni Dynasty. Adhering precisely to the pattern of his predecessors, Step'anos narrates:

Then Trdat was brought up in the country of the Romans and demonstrated many acts of valour. He seized the horns of two wild bulls in each hand and threw them down, having wrung their necks. And in the horse-races of the great Circus, he wanted to drive but fell to earth, knocked off by the skill of his opponent; but he seized and stopped the chariot, at which everyone was astonished.<sup>54</sup>

Step'anos's account is sourced from another fifth-century text, that of the historian Agat'angeghos, who chronicles the conversion of Armenia to Christianity in the early fourth century. As the reigning monarch during this event, King Trdat occupies a central position in the conversion narrative. It is this Trdat of whom Step'anos writes, referring to a passage in which Agat'angeghos characterizes Trdat as "...renowned for bravery in battle."<sup>55</sup> Agat'angeghos continues:

Not least in the Greek Olympics he had seemed as strong as a giant, showing there many deeds of prowess. He had waged no few battles beyond the river Euphrates in the regions of the Tachiks; where once he was leaving the combat on horseback gravely wounded, he picked up the horse and its armor and his own armor, and fastening them to his back he swam across the Euphrates river.<sup>56</sup>

It is the very same Trdat against whose strength Movsēs Khorenats'i compares that of his champion Varazdat, claiming, "I am bold to say that he was the equal of Saint Trdat."<sup>57</sup> While Step'anos incorporates this item to highlight the bravery and masculinity of Trdat, the original intent of Agat'angeghos in producing it is not to exalt the strength of Trdat but, rather, that of the martyr Hrip'simē who overpowers him. Step'anos also

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<sup>54</sup> ST I.5, p. 131.

<sup>55</sup> Agat'angeghos. *History of the Armenians*, trans. Robert W. Thomson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1976) [Henceforth: Agat'angeghos] § 202, p. 209.

<sup>56</sup> Agat'angeghos § 202, p. 209.

<sup>57</sup> MX III.40, p. 297.

omits Trdat's exploits in the Arab territories, though retains the element of his mastery over animals in combat.

Like Varazdat and Smbat, Step'anos's Trdat effortlessly subdues animals through sheer thew and physical aptitude – and, referentially of Smbat, Trdat is presented to have bested bulls in particular. Given the conspicuous sanctity of the bovine in Zoroastrian cosmology, the semiology of the bull may (however discreetly) proxy for the Persian suzerain whose potency pervaded the time of Agat'angehos and Movsēs and, as will become apparent in other cases, Step'anos consistently seeks to topologically revive. While the impetus for Trdat's arrival in “the country of the Romans” is unspecified by Step'anos, unlike the accounts of Varazdat and Smbat, he too is showcased in an exhibition of athletic competency as are his literary predecessors: just as Varazdat performs his spectacles at the Olympic games, and as Smbat broadcasts his muscularity in competition for his survival at the arena, Trdat exhibits his abilities at “the great Circus.”<sup>58</sup> Though the identity of the character and the circumstances of his transport mutate throughout the seven centuries over which this tale is developed and transmitted, the paragon and his exploits remain static.

Of some curiosity is a brief mention by the eighth-century cleric Ghewond, who lauds using similar verbiage not an Armenian figure but, rather, an Islamic one: the eleventh Umayyad caliph, al-Walid. “He was a sturdy strong man who devoted his time to athletics and wrestling. Whenever he heard of anyone having exploited bravery and personal power, he sent word [to such man] issuing him a challenge for the sake of

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<sup>58</sup> ST I.5, p. 131.

testing himself.”<sup>59</sup> This account is one of a scant few in the medieval Armenian corpus awarding praise to any Arab figure, though it merits clarification that this flattering description is followed shortly by al-Walid’s violent death at the hands of his kinsmen.<sup>60</sup>

Vastly more detestable than a slight frame, to the Armenians, was a corpulent one, as their traditional orientation toward asceticism had by this time saturated Armenian theological (and, by extension, axiological) discourse. This veneration for abstention engendered by default a profound revulsion for incontinence of carnal appetites—whether dietary, emotional, or sexual—and all signifiers thereof. An overweight body was among the most apparent indicators of an incapacity to abstain and became, thus, a most virulently attacked characteristic. The sixth-century writer Eghishē defames the traitorous apostate Vasak Siwni, in part, by ridiculing his “fat belly.”<sup>61</sup> Movsēs Khorenats‘i is the first of three dynastic historians to asperse Artawazd, son of Tigran Arshakuni, for his gluttonous and indolent habits: “...he gave no indication of any other act of nobility or valor and occupied his time with eating and drinking. ... Unconcerned with wisdom, valor, or good repute, truly a servant and slave to his stomach, he fattened his guts.”<sup>62</sup>

Movsēs continues that even Artawazd’s soldiers grew offended by his “excessive sloth and great gluttony.”<sup>63</sup> Of the same Artawazd, Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i asserts that “...unlike his father’s illustrious glory displayed no valiant deeds of gallantry. But

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<sup>59</sup> Lewond, *History of Lewond: The Eminent Vardapet of the Armenians*, trans. Zaven Arzoumanian (Wynnewood, PA: St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Armenian Church, 1982) [Henceforth: Ghewond] 23, p. 115.

<sup>60</sup> Ghewond 23, p. 115.

<sup>61</sup> Elishē, *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, trans. Robert W. Thomson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982) [Henceforth: Eghishē] VI, p. 191.

<sup>62</sup> MX II.22, pp. 156-157.

<sup>63</sup> MX II.22, p. 157.

rather being a glutton and a slave of the belly, he gave chase to the hunt, and onager, and enlarged the dumps. For this he was admonished by his own people.”<sup>64</sup> Just as Step‘anos Tarōnets‘I literarily humiliates King Khosrov for failing to achieve the standards of bravery established by his father, Hovhannēs similarly demeans Artawazd for the same failure to satisfy the expectations inherited from his own celebrated father, the renowned Tigran Arshakuni. Hovhannēs, however, writes somewhat less indelicately of Artawazd’s physical constitution, declining to reiterate that Artawazd “fattened his guts” from his likely source, Movsēs Khorenats‘i.<sup>65</sup> Of the same Artawazd, Ukhtanēs once again mirrors his precursor Movsēs: “Artawazd, son of Tigran, reigned over Armenia. He performed no act of nobility or valour, but only occupied his time with eating and drinking, hunting snouts and boars, neglecting wisdom and valour. He was dismissed and blamed by his troops for his excessive gluttony.”<sup>66</sup> While Ukhtanēs mimics his peers in deriding the king’s gluttonous comportment, he deviates from Movsēs (thus, aligning his portrayal more closely with that of Hovhannēs) in omitting the physical descriptor that Artawazd “fattened his guts.”<sup>67</sup>

Hovhannēs, however, would not accord such euphemistic courtesy to a foreign aggressor as to a native disappointment. Writing of a failed uprising by the *ostikan* (governor) Yusuf, which eventuated in his removal, Hovhannēs mocks the reigning caliph of the time, taunting that he, “prevented by his fat belly,” was unable to personally travel to Armenia to suppress the governor’s rebellion, and rather dispatched a delegate to

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<sup>64</sup> YD V, p. 75.

<sup>65</sup> MX II.22, p. 157.

<sup>66</sup> Ukhtanēs I.30, p. 43.

<sup>67</sup> MX II.22, p. 157; Ukhtanēs I.30, p. 43.

do so in his stead.<sup>68</sup> Decidedly less narrative mercy is afforded to Smbat (son of Gagik I Bagratuni) by Aristakēs Lastivertc'i, who writes of Smbat and his brother Ashot: "Smbat was physically large and quite fat, but they say that he was more learned than many; while Ashot was handsome, stout-hearted and warlike."<sup>69</sup> The coding of Ashot as "handsome" presages his victory against his less appealing brother, and evinces the chronicler's political bias toward the victor. Aristakēs proceeds to recount a territorial dispute between Smbat and Ashot, which was ultimately brokered by the Abkhazian king Georgi. Aristakēs continues, offering in his narration an amusing measure of humor: "Smbat accepted this and was returning to his city. On the way, he dismounted to spend the night because of the weight of his body, and he slept unconcernedly."<sup>70</sup> Smbat, however, dissatisfied with his allotment, surreptitiously claims as his own the territory of Shatik, which per their negotiation had been legally mandated to his brother. On discovering the violation, Georgi mobilizes a contingent to attack Smbat. "But because of his great physical weight, [Smbat] was unable to mount a horse."<sup>71</sup> This comical depiction of the rotund Ashot recalls Ḥovhannēs Draskhanakertts'i's obese caliph, both rendered immobile by their corpulence – that is, by the risible consequences of so reprehensible a moral defect as habitual gluttony.

### Visuals of Identity and Alterity: Phenotype and the Incursive Other

Among the most salient applications of aesthetic imagery in physically describing the Armenians is its juxtaposition against depictions of an invading other. Of the

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<sup>68</sup> YD LXI, p. 212.

<sup>69</sup> Aristakes Lastivertc'i, *History Regarding the Sufferings Occasioned by Foreign Peoples Living Around Us*, trans. Robert Bedrosian (New York: Sources of the Armenian Tradition, 1985) [Henceforth: AL] II, p. 8.

<sup>70</sup> AL II, p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> AL II, p. 9.

discursive strategies common to this mechanism, complexion proves of critical utility. Laboring in the tenth century, Իովհաննէս Ծրակհանակերտտ՛ի makes unambiguous his disdain for dark pigmentation on several occasions throughout his *History*, the first of which likening a dark complexion to a stain of sin to be dissolved through acts of righteousness. Իովհաննէս introduces the Arab governor Yusuf, who has by this time assumed administrative control over the Armenian territories. Yusuf, though “avaricious and greedy,” cannot commit himself to deceiving the Armenian nobleman Gagik, ostensibly due (according to Իովհաննէս) to sentiments of guilt. Իովհաննէս then opines of Yusuf: “...like an Indian divesting himself of the dark color of his complexion, and having covered the true color of his soul, he assumed the familiar white complexion, and sent envoys to the king for an immediate and compassionate reconciliation.”<sup>72</sup> Later in the text, Իովհաննէս again associates dark pigmentation to barbarity, writing that a cabal of Arab executioners seeks to “terrorize” a cohort of condemned Armenian confessors “...by brandishing their swords, pounding upon their shields, gnashing their teeth, and by their fiery red complexions.”<sup>73</sup>

Later that century, the raconteur claiming the fictitious identity “Իովհաննէս Մամիկոնեան” would echo Իովհաննէս Ծրակհանակերտտ՛ի’s disdain for those dark of complexion, particularly those identified with the Indian subcontinent. Of a group of pagan priests who reject conversion to Christianity, he pronounces: “But it was extremely awesome to see them, for they were black and long-haired and unpleasant to the sight, for they were by race from India.”<sup>74</sup> The second continuator to the *History of the House of*

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<sup>72</sup> YD LXIV, p. 219.

<sup>73</sup> YD LXVI, p. 227.

<sup>74</sup> Pseudo-Yovhannēs Mamikonean, *The History of Tarōn [Patmut’iwn Tarōnoy]*, trans. Levon Avdoyan (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993) [Henceforth: .Ps.Y.] III, p. 87.

*the Artsrunik* would describe the invading Turks as similarly unpleasant to regard: “They had the nature of bloodthirsty beasts; for they were people of awful appearance, and the sight of their faces terrified and dismayed onlookers.”<sup>75</sup>

The historical text of Movsēs Daskhurants‘i contains a most revealing abstraction of Armenian aesthetic values. In the following passage, dated to the seventh-eighth centuries, the author reflects not on the physical beauty of the Armenians but, offering insightful contrast, the ugliness of the exogenous. Recounting a Khazar incursion into the Armenian city of Partaw, Movsēs describes the invaders as “hideously ugly, insolent, broad-faced, without eyelashes, and with long flowing hair like women.”<sup>76</sup> His comparison of the long-haired Khazars to similarly coiffed women reifies the association of masculinity to Armenian ethnic nativity, the invasive other correspondently emasculated in text. Movsēs will again reveal the Armenians’ distaste for the features of a “broad” face and meager eyelashes—indicating perhaps an Armenian aesthetic preference for narrow faces and, more universally, voluminous lashes—in documenting the military repulsion of the Khazars by the inhabitants of Partaw:

For they brought a large pumpkin and drew on it the image of the king of the Huns, a cubit broad and a cubit long. In place of his eyelashes which no one could see, they drew a thin line; the region of his beard they left ignominiously naked, and they made the nostrils a span wide with a number of hairs under them in the form of a moustache so that all might recognize him.<sup>77</sup>

Once again Movsēs ridicules, by proxy of his literary subjects, the physical risibility of the foreign: their faces so broad as to merit satire by depiction upon the

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<sup>75</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 2] IV.12, p. 368.

<sup>76</sup> MD II.11, p. 62.

<sup>77</sup> MD II.11, p. 63.

canvas of a pumpkin (its dimensions totaling so absurd a proportion as a square cubit), an absence of eyelashes caricatured by a “thin line,” and deficient facial hair which the Armenians among other Mediterranean cultures associate to boyhood—which is to imply underdeveloped manhood—and inexperience.

The author’s election to specify these features as comically aberrant to the Armenian contingent communicates that it was these particularities perceived by this population as unfamiliar, unattractive, and, while perhaps not expressly feminine, certainly anti-masculine. The text, imposing these conventions upon male combatants and by extension the totality of Khazar humanity, suggests that these aesthetic preferences were gender-neutral if not explicitly male-identified, which conforms to the Armenian reluctance to describe the facial or corporeal features of women. This suggestion may initially incite dissent, as the features of a narrow facial structure and luxurious eyelashes are generally assigned feminine rather than masculine aesthetic values. The Armenian sources, however, consistently evince such gender-neutral phenotypic criteria as well as those applied to men which are more typically implemented to evaluate female rather than male attractiveness.

The closest approximation of any such descriptor referential to a native Armenian—rather than to a foreign exogeneity—is found in the *Buzandaran* amid an item recording the remarriage of the widowed noblewoman P’arandzem to King Arshak following the murder of her husband: “But as much as King Arsak loved the woman, so much did the woman hate the king, saying: ‘He is hairy of body and dark of color.’”<sup>78</sup> A

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<sup>78</sup> BP IV.xv, p. 145.



dark complexion is therefore identified with ugliness and undesirability as early as the fifth century, as the *Buzandaran* avers. It perhaps warrants attention that the Armenians, should P‘arandzem’s objection be considered generally representative of their aesthetic preferences, did not adopt the Greek appreciation for male body hair as did some later Islamic sensibilities.<sup>79</sup> By contrast to Arshak, the complexion of Tigran is characterized in the same century by Movsēs Khorenats‘i as “ruddy,” and ascribed positive connotations by the historian.<sup>80</sup>

A favored device of Armenian historians of the dynastic period is the projection of awe for the Armenians’ beauty into the observations of foreign spectators. Not only are invaders othered by blatant emphases on their dark and unattractive complexions, facial structures, and features; the beauty aesthetics of the Armenians are, thus, promoted by default. These annalists, then, insert the aesthetic superiority of the Armenians into the mouths of their opponents. Just as the Persian king Varazdat, on witnessing the reported beauty and strength of the *sparapet* Manuēl Mamikonean, “compared him in his mind to a tall and inaccessible mountain,” other foreign sovereigns and their subordinates are reported to have remarked on the beauty of the Armenians – some with pleasure, and others with contempt.<sup>81</sup> The caliph Jafar (al-Mutawakkil) is reported by T‘ovma Artsruni to have described a cohort of Armenian nobles as “personable and handsome, with noble countenance, decorous and elegant, ... worthy of compassion.”<sup>82</sup> Addressing the nobles,

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<sup>79</sup> For Late Antique Greek and Byzantine attitudes toward hair, see Mills, “Signification of the Tonsure,” 114; Kathryn Ringrose cites, regarding the same subject matter, the second-century writings of Aretaeus of Cappadocia, who likewise asserts the direct relationship of abundant body hair with masculinity – see Kathryn M. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 54.

<sup>80</sup> MX I.24, p. 110.

<sup>81</sup> BP V.xxxvii, p. 219.

<sup>82</sup> TA III.6, p. 221.

according to T‘ovma, the caliph states: “You are men of valour, and from your appearance it is obvious that there is much strength in you.”<sup>83</sup>

The second continuator to T‘ovma’s text conveys in corresponding terms Prince Gagik Artsruni and the renown commanded by his physical beauty. Aware of these pervasive rumors, the Arab *ostikan* Yusuf determines to personally corroborate the Armenian prince’s much-publicized beauty: “Since the emir Yusup‘ had heard of the repute and the valiant deeds and also of the wise intelligence of the prudent and renowned prince Gagik, he had desired for a long time to see him.”<sup>84</sup> Yusuf arranges an introduction to the Artsruni prince, whereupon he is indeed enthralled by Gagik’s exquisite appearance: “When the tyrant beheld his glorious youthful figure and the wondrous beauty of his lovely face, he was amazed.”<sup>85</sup>

Following the murder of the Arab governor Abū Sa‘īd, Jafar deploys to the Armenian district of Tarōn a military detachment to avenge his death. After slaughtering a multitude from among the populace, Jafar’s chief general Bugha “...segregated from the rest of the captives those that were handsome, brave, and healthy, in order to convert them to their impious faith, and ordered the rest of them to be put to the sword.”<sup>86</sup> Only the “handsome” and “healthy” are selected by the caliph for induction into Islam, disclosing an Armenian perception of the faith and its adherents as intrinsically vain and superficial. Hovhannēs, in whose chronicle these reports are contained, continues: “As in the aforementioned regions, in Tarōn as well, he performed the same atrocities. In a like

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<sup>83</sup> TA III.6, p. 221.

<sup>84</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 2] IV.3, p. 345.

<sup>85</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 2] IV.3, p. 346.

<sup>86</sup> YD XXV, p. 119.

manner, they segregated those of fine stature and the craftsmen from the rest in order to convert them to their faith, and put all the others [who fell short of these requirements] to the sword, covering the entire lower region with blood.”<sup>87</sup>

Bugha, under the orders of Jafar, subsequently reproduces this carnage in the Bagratuni capital of Dvin, and likewise directs that “those of fine stature” be culled from the masses and confined in his remand. Like their predecessors, these especially handsome detainees are instructed to apostatize. Hovhannēs then introduces the first extant iteration of the martyrdom of Atom and his companions:

Among them there were, in particular, seven men, whose leader was called Atom from the village of Orsirank‘ in the district of Albak. And as they possessed joyful faces, handsome statures and skill in the use of arms, they did not kill them along with the rest. For they still hoped to be able to cast at least these into the pit of damnation. They offered them many valuable gifts, treasures of gold and silver, and promised to give them villages and estates (*gerdastan*), as well as fame and glory at the royal court.<sup>88</sup>

Atom and his companions, being the beautiful protagonists of a medieval Armenian cleric, predictably refuse these temptations, instead virtuously accepting martyrdom.<sup>89</sup> The topos of Atom and his companions will appear once more in the Armenian record before the fall of the Bagratuni Dynasty, narrated in the early eleventh century by Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i. Adhering faithfully to the account furnished by Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i, Step‘anos documents that Bugha selected “the handsome and the young” for conversion to Islam.<sup>90</sup> Duplicating nearly verbatim Hovhannēs’s synopsis of these events, Step‘anos reports of Atom and his companions:

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<sup>87</sup> YD XXV, pp. 119-120.

<sup>88</sup> YD XXV, p. 121.

<sup>89</sup> YD XXV, p. 121.

<sup>90</sup> ST II.2, p. 175.

There were among these ones seven men whose leader was called Atom, who was from the district of Ałbak, from the village of Osiran. And since they were of striking appearance and valiant in battle, they did not kill these with the others. But they attempted to convert to apostasy and offered many treasures of gold and silver—they promised villages and possessions from the royal treasury. Then the valiant champions were rendered still more brilliant through their confession in Christ. Therefore the tyrant, even more enraged, tortured them cruelly with torments which no tongue is capable of describing.<sup>91</sup>

Perhaps prefigured by Atom and his companions, an analogous martyrdom appears in the text of Իովհաննէս Ծրսկանակերտի concerning “a comely and handsome youth by the name of Mik‘ayēl,” who captures the attention of encroaching Arab forces as they prepare to attack the Armenian contingent.<sup>92</sup> Իովհաննէս continues: “Wishing to save him, the above men snatched him away, lest he might be killed with the rest.”<sup>93</sup> The reluctance of the Muslim officers to kill Mik‘ayēl due his enchanting visage, veritably identical to their literary predecessors’ response to Atom and his disciples, discloses a national self-estimation by the Armenians as superlatively attractive and of superior phenotypic quality. Additionally, the prominence of these stories amid their respective texts and the rhetoric employed in relating them reflects a motivation on the part of the erudite elite to depict exogenous adversaries as aesthetically inferior to the extent that they regard with such awe the marvel of the Armenians’ endogenous phenotype that they aspire to enlist them into their own factions.

Though in later centuries this literary topology is applied exclusively to male characters, memetic parallels can be detected between these figures and the heroic Իրիփ՛սիմէ whose beauty predisposes her to the advances of heathen tyrants. Իրիփ՛սիմէ,

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<sup>91</sup> ST II.2, p. 175.

<sup>92</sup> YD LI, p. 182.

<sup>93</sup> YD LI, p. 182.

whose travails will be examined in a chapter to follow, becomes thus a mimetic object to be replicated as a moral archetype, her actions mobilized as a gender-neutral scripting device intended for both women and men of Armenian Christendom to emulate. Atom and Mik‘ayēl, then, function as moralizing proxies of the Hrip‘simēan archetype. The earliest reproduction of Hrip‘simē appears perhaps reconstituted as P‘arandzem—though complex and controversial her character development may be—and is thereafter transferred onto male rather than female agents. This illuminates perhaps that the Armenian aversion to acknowledging female beauty developed simultaneously to the vulcanization of Christianity in Armenia, manifesting in Armenian cultural products only after the fifth century.

This tendency is once again documented through an episode narrated first by Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i and reiterated decades later by Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i. Hovhannēs writes of his namesake, Hovhannēs the Philosopher:

Underneath [his outer garments] instead of wool he wore intolerable cilice made of goat’s hair. However, he adorned his external appearance with clothes of fine quality. Moreover, grinding gold with a file and mixing it with sweet ointments, he sprinkled it on his beard, which was white and reached down to the hem of his ephod. This is the way he displayed himself in public so that he might be a source of joy to the well-wishers, and arouse fear in the wicked and the immature so that they might turn from evil to good. And ... for this reason it became customary to adorn the inanimate stones of the church with beautiful ornaments. [And if stones could impress people,] then, [by the same token] a man could more so astonish the onlookers.<sup>94</sup>

In poeticizing of the wondrous quality of Hovhannēs’s exterior, the historian labors not only to glorify the eminent philosopher but also to communicate his virtue, as the philosopher’s choice to attire himself in “intolerable cilice made of goat’s hair”

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<sup>94</sup> YD XXII, p. 110.

beneath his beauteous external apparel attests his voluntary sacrifice of comfort.<sup>95</sup> The assumption of this burden, which falls along the continuum of ascetic self-deprivation so exalted by Armenian writers of this period (to be explored further in following chapters), illustrates the philosopher to be humble, resolute in devotion to Christ, and sensorially moderate – the sensory aspect in question being the tactile comfort of textile luxury. The lawgiving philosopher thus exemplifies the Christian notion that his comfort is received not from the sensory-temporal but from the anticipated bliss of liberation into the discarnate eternal—here expressed as the pleasure of faith in Christ—and upholds the abstemious ideal of Christian rectitude while fashioning of himself a “source of joy” to onlookers so as to inspire among his flock sensory delight in remembrance of Christ and His church.<sup>96</sup>

Reference to a “hair shirt” as a signifier of eremitic self-denial finds precedent in the works of the earliest literate Armenians. The historian Agat’angeghos writes as follows of Aristakēs, the younger of St. Gregory’s progeny:

He had entered the religious life of hermits in the mountains, and had undertaken many and various austerities according to the gospel with all diligence, and had given himself entirely to spiritual affairs—to solitude, dwelling in the mountains, hunger and thirst and living off vegetables, being shut up without light, wearing a hair shirt, using the ground as a bed, often spending the sweet repose of night—the need of sleep—in wakeful vigils on his feet.<sup>97</sup>

Later that century, Movsēs Khorenats‘i writes of the bishop Khad: “With him Satan had no success save in a single respect, for he was fastidious in his dress and a

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<sup>95</sup> YD XXII, p. 110.

<sup>96</sup> YD XXII, p. 110.

<sup>97</sup> Agat’angeghos § 859, p. 393.

lover of horses. For this he was blamed and mocked in return by those who were reproached by him. So from then on he abandoned his ostentatious clothes; dressed in a hairshirt he traveled around on a donkey until the day of his death.”<sup>98</sup> The willingness of the Armenian faithful to surrender physical comforts in exchange for the comforts of faith, then, has manifested in sartorial imagery for as long as Armenian has been written. Conceivably, there may exist a connection between the early Armenian adoption of woolen garments as a signal of austerity and the Islamic Sufi tradition, whose very name derives from the voluntary assumption of wool as an ascetic practice in refutation of temporal excess and so as, by extension, to facilitate communion with the divine.

Like the *ostikan* Yusuf seeking an audience with Prince Gagik to witness his reputed beauty, the caliph ‘Umar is informed of the beauty of Ḥovhannēs by Walid, Umayyad governor of Armenia, and similarly machinates to confirm the sensational reports of his visual splendor: “Wishing to see him, the caliph immediately sent one of his servants to bring the man of God. After he had been brought to the royal city with great honors, the caliph sent word to him that he wished to see him clad in his usual manner.”<sup>99</sup> Eager to advance awareness of the glory of Christ, Ḥovhannēs obliges the caliph’s invitation. In preparation for their encounter, he cosmetically enhances his external appearance so as to convey through these optics the magnificence of Christ. “Adorning his fine stature all the more with elegant and splendid clothes and setting his gray beard like a golden bouquet, he took into his hand the staff, which was made out of

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<sup>98</sup> MX III.31, p. 284.

<sup>99</sup> YD XXII, p. 111.

ebony painted with gold, and thus, graceful and robust, he presented himself before the caliph.”<sup>100</sup>

Ḥovhannēs achieves in the caliph his desired effect: “Upon seeing him, the latter was amazed by his handsome and august stature.”<sup>101</sup> Step‘anos, once again, replicates the account of Ḥovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i almost identically, introducing the Philosopher as follows: “Yovhannēs himself was exceedingly handsome in appearance and filled with every virtue. He had a garment of goats’ hair over which he was clothed and adorned in brightly coloured garments. He had tiny gold particles ground up, mixed with fragrant oil, and blown into the grey hairs of his beard.”<sup>102</sup> Unlike Ḥovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i, Step‘anos makes explicit the caliph’s awareness of the philosopher’s intention. Jafar, while impressed according to Ḥovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i by the striking appearance of the philosopher, is according to Step‘anos arrested by both Ḥovhannēs’s ornate adornments and, cognizant of the cilice garment they conceal, by the piety of his sensory sacrifice. Upon their introduction, “The caliph was amazed at him and ordered him to sit with great honour. And he questioned, ‘Why are you arrayed like this, because your Christ and his disciples enjoined an abject and simple life?’”<sup>103</sup>

Ḥovhannēs responds that he apparels himself in such majestic attire so as to “...spur on ignorant onlookers to a fear of God, just as you kings, for the sake of appearing awesome to men, are arrayed in gold-embroidered cloth.”<sup>104</sup> Ḥovhannēs compares the ceremonial robes of the terrestrial representatives of God—i.e., the

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<sup>100</sup> YD XXII, p. 111.

<sup>101</sup> YD XXII, p. 111.

<sup>102</sup> ST II.2, p. 170.

<sup>103</sup> ST II.2, p. 171.

<sup>104</sup> ST II.2, p. 171.



clergy—to that of imperial sovereigns, both telegraphing in their respective domains the opulence of royalty. Both, Hovhannēs reminds the caliph, are designed to elicit respect and deference. Just as kings display themselves “in gold-embroidered cloth,” the agents of Christendom will arouse in nonbelievers the veneration of God reserved on Earth for kings.<sup>105</sup> Hovhannēs concludes his explication: “‘But if you wish to view my clothing, watch piece by piece.’ And he divested himself of everything and showed him his very coarse hair-cloth. The caliph was astonished at this; he embellished him sevenfold, and with great-honoured treasure he sent him to Armenia.”<sup>106</sup> While the reaction of the caliph remains consistent between the two texts containing this account, the source of his amazement varies.

A final permutation of the theme by which foreign enemies are written to admire and even covet the beauty of the Armenians manifests in the Armenian variation of Semiramis. While the famed Assyrian queen appears in the mythoi of virtually all cultures across the region, her Armenian rendering is particularly unorthodox. Rather than address her oft-mythologized supernatural potency or the political circumstances of her reign, the Armenian sources present her singularly vis-à-vis the fabled Armenian king Ara, “the handsome.” Overwhelmed by her infatuation with the beautiful king, Semiramis dispatches emissaries to propose that he marry her – an audacious gesture in and of itself, her gender-subverting impertinence much maligned by the Armenian chronographers who report of her. Her display of candor is, to the medieval Armenian sensitivity that informs these historians, categorically anti-feminine and orients her

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<sup>105</sup> ST II.2, p. 171.

<sup>106</sup> ST II.2, p. 171.

decidedly toward the masculine; this contravention of gender dynamics construes her as impudent and recalcitrant in much the same way as will be her similarly defamed analogue, P'arandzem (to be discussed in the following chapters). As Movsēs Khorenats'i narrates, "Semiramis for many years had heard of his beauty and desired to visit him; but she was not able to do such things openly."<sup>107</sup> Repelled by her vulgar proposition, Ara rebuffs the infamous queen, in response to which she declares war upon his kingdom and proceeds to invade Armenia. Movsēs continues: "Many times the ambassadors came and went, but Ara did not agree. Semiramis became exceedingly angry, and at the end of these negotiations she took the host of her army and hastened to the land of Armenia against Ara. ... For in the folly of her great passion, at the reports about him she had become madly enflamed as if she had already seen him."<sup>108</sup>

The story is repeated by Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts'i, who elaborates upon the decency and piety of Ara: "Ara regulated the welfare of the land, and named his place of residence Ayrarat from his name."<sup>109</sup> Hovhannēs, like Moves, asserts that Semiramis "...hearing by way of rumor of Ara's comely fairness, through frequent embassies promised him generous gifts and munificent profits" should he accept her proposal of marriage or otherwise satisfy her sexually.<sup>110</sup> "Upon his refusal, Šamiram hastened [her men] immediately to reach Armenia and encounter Ara," consequently to which, just as Movsēs reports centuries before, Ara is inadvertently killed.<sup>111</sup> The yearning of Semiramis for Ara is documented for a final time in the annals composed by Ukhtanēs of

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<sup>107</sup> MX I.15, p. 93.

<sup>108</sup> MX I.15, p. 93.

<sup>109</sup> YD II, p. 69.

<sup>110</sup> YD II, p. 69.

<sup>111</sup> YD II, pp. 69-70.

Sebastia in the late tenth century, who is by his own admission sufficiently fluent with Movsēs's work that he cites the latter's historical text comprehensively throughout his own. Of Semiramis, Ukhtanēs relates: "Shamiram (Semiramis), having heard of [Ara's] beauty for many years, was passionately trying to reach him, but could not dare [expressing her desires] openly," which Ukhtanēs likely attributes in his own historical setting to the same gender dynamics implied in the fifth century by Movsēs Khorenats'i, whether due to Ukhtanēs's familiarity with the gender politics of fifth-century Armenia or to the continuity of these conditions through his own time.<sup>112</sup> The translation of early medieval figures by later traditors onto contemporaneous actors will be investigated at length in forthcoming chapters.

Following Movsēs and Hovhannēs, Ukhtanēs expounds that Semiramis then "sent messengers to Ara the Handsome with many gifts, asking him to comply with her wishes" and, subsequently, "Ara refused her. But that furious [Shamiram] became exceedingly angry, and took the host of her army and rushed to the borders of Armenia. She arrived in the Plain of Ara and waged war against him; Ara died in the battle."<sup>113</sup> The preservation of this episode between the fifth and tenth centuries, and the apparent enthusiasm of latter historians to duplicate it (selected from among many discarded elements of their fifth-century sources) evidences once again the enduring eagerness of the Armenians to depict themselves as objects of aesthetic pleasure for foreign consumption. Further, it substantiates the notion that while female beauty was considered so inappropriate a subject as to warrant its exclusion (however tacitly enforced) from the

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<sup>112</sup> Ukhtanēs I.18, p. 32.

<sup>113</sup> Ukhtanēs I.18, p. 32.

written record, that of men was literarily acceptable even through the eroticized gaze of a female admirer, provided she is of exoteric provenance or otherwise vilifiable. To insert such lustful ruminations into the character of a female protagonist—that is, a pious Armenian woman whose behavior conforms to established social customs and cultural protocols, as will be examined in the chapter to follow—as those projected onto Semiramis would constitute an egregious violation of literary convention and its somatic morality. Not once in the dynastic literature is an Armenian woman recorded to have behaved in so sexually brazen a manner. The Armenian rendering of Semiramis will be explored further by the present study in a forthcoming chapter.

A suspicion of foreigners, particularly as regards their inflammation at the beauty of the Armenians, is especially prominent in an eleventh-century text by the historian Aristakēs Lastiverts‘i, who so acrimoniously detested the exogenous that he trenchantly titled his work the “*History Regarding the Sufferings Occasioned by Foreign Peoples Living Around Us*.” Recurrently throughout his composition, Aristakēs inculcates foreign peoples and their successive invasions for the calamities that have befallen Armenia, which during his lifetime included the rise of the Seljuq Empire, an aggressive reconquest campaign by the Byzantines (who had long since relinquished a majority of their Armenian territorial holdings to the Rashidun and Umayyad Caliphates), the collapse of the last surviving Armenian kingdoms in the Caucasus, and, finally, the Battle of Manazkert, which decisively cemented Seljuq domination of the region only one year prior to the commencement of Aristakēs’s literary endeavor. Aristakēs notably invokes a Biblical caveat which he adjusts from the Book of Proverbs to serve this agenda, cautioning his readers to refrain from “adultery with foreign women,” further qualifying

of these women that “...whomever they find foolish enough, they shall convince to remain with them through their honeyed words.”<sup>114</sup> In his appeal to the Armenian faithful against intermarriage, Aristakēs is preceded by Ukhtanēs of Sebastia, who repeats in his chronicle the advice of the *katholikos* Abraham “...to stay away from intermarriage, except for those who are united by baptism, or those who would marry each other in the unity of the communion...” and by Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i, who exhorts his audience, “...do not mingle with the base, enticing and vile daughters of men who are of the race of the accursed fratricide Cain.”<sup>115</sup> Previously to this, Movsēs Daskhurants‘i praises the nobleman Juanshir for his rejection of exogamous marriage prospects:

Now the military commander of the Persians, seeing how glorious [Juanshir’s] name had become, pressured him to marry his sister. Juanshir, however, not wanting to take a wife from among the unbelievers, returned to his own country. At this his loving father was overjoyed... Thus did he embrace his son, and the color of his face was enhanced by the silver bloom of his hair.<sup>116</sup>

Movsēs Daskhurants‘i qualifies the elation of Juanshir’s father at this development by drawing the reader’s attention to the aesthetic enhancement—his facial radiance and its complementarity to his exquisite hair—that accompanies his delight. Juanshir’s commitment to endogamy imparts, then, both internal relief for family and nation as well as an externalized expression of beauty. Movsēs will later cite the reproach of the patriarch Ukhtanēs of the Aghuan nobility “because of their race-polluting marriages,” highlighting this position as a salient aspect of his tenure.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> AL XXIII, p. 152.

<sup>115</sup> Bishop Ukhtanēs of Sebastia, *History of Armenia, Part II: History of the Severance of the Georgians from the Armenians*, trans. Zaven Arzoumanian (Ft. Lauderdale: Zaven Arzoumanian, 1985) [Henceforth: Ukhtanēs II] 61, pp. 115-116; YD “Epilogue,” p. 234.

<sup>116</sup> MD II.18, p. 81.

<sup>117</sup> MD III.24, p. 124.

That masculinity is constructed opposite alterity is not to infer that it is wholly undefined by the contrast of femininity – or, more precisely, effeminacy, which according to the medieval Armenian construction is not identified with femininity but represents, rather, an inadequacy of masculinity. Movsēs Khorenats‘i denounces an “effeminate way of life and sensuous effeminacy and sloth,” suggesting an association between effeminacy—which is not to be conflated with femininity, a construct positively identified with women, whereas effeminacy is negatively associated as underdeveloped masculinity—and mortal sin.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, on invading the city of Tigranakert, the Persian king Shapuh taunts the marshaled Armenian infantry behind its gates: “... it is the mark of valiant men to fight on the open plain and in an unimpeded spot, while it is the mark of women to shut oneself up from fear of an impending battle.”<sup>119</sup> Movsēs later records a verbal altercation between Shapuh and the Armenian noble Atom of Mokka, the latter of whom insults the former by thusly disparaging his masculinity: “... And so if you call the Mokats‘ik‘ demons, I call you Sasanians effeminate.”<sup>120</sup> T‘ovma Artsruni repeats this account, preserving and even accentuating Movsēs’s testimony that Atom specifically targets the masculinity of Shapuh for derision: “Again in their exchange he called him effeminate.”<sup>121</sup> T‘ovma proceeds to embellish upon the account of Movsēs, contributing the detail that the nobleman Shavasp Artsruni escalates this exchange by augmenting the aspersion: “Even more stoutheartedly, Shavasp Artsruni, while they were playing polo, spurring after him took the ball away many times, saying: ‘Girl, leave the

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<sup>118</sup> MX I.21, p. 105.

<sup>119</sup> MX III.28, pp. 279-280.

<sup>120</sup> MX III.55, p. 319.

<sup>121</sup> TA I.xi, p. 136.

stadium; effeminate man, know yourself.”<sup>122</sup> T‘ovma earlier quotes “Asud son of Arshavir” approaching Alexander the Great in battle, including in his greeting the statement that cowardice “is more appropriate for the effeminate.”<sup>123</sup> Of the martyrdom of St. Gēorg, T‘ovma recounts the saint addressing his executioner as an “effeminate and wretched soldier” while T‘ovma’s near contemporary Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i refers to the Arab governor Yusuf as “the cruel Hagarite with the effeminate tongue.”<sup>124</sup> Perhaps the most peculiar of these references is found in the *History* of Eghishē, which in the sixth century reports the sentence of the apostate Vasak Siuni: “He was bound hand and foot, set like a woman on a mare, led off, and delivered to the prison where all those condemned to death were kept.”<sup>125</sup> Plausibly, the expression “set like a woman on a mare” may contain, set deeply within its overt emasculation of the condemned, a coded allusion to a homosexual act. Richard Bulliet identifies the punitive context of this action among Islamic societies, noting the frequency with which criminals would, in penance, be theatrically displayed “seated backwards on an ass.”<sup>126</sup>

## Conclusion

Medieval Armenian textual sources correlate phenotypic beauty to Armenian nativity and ugliness to ethnic alterity. Personified icons of these projections are consistently male-identified (or else insensate as topographical or geologic formations), the optics of physical beauty being the exclusive domain of the masculine. Medieval Armenian masculinity is, thus, constructed not in opposition to femininity but, by

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<sup>122</sup> TA I.xi, p. 136.

<sup>123</sup> TA I.vi, p. 105.

<sup>124</sup> TA III.viii, p. 236; YD XLVII, p. 172.

<sup>125</sup> Eghishē VI, p. 188.

<sup>126</sup> Richard Bulliet, *Hunters, Herders, and Hamburgers: The Past and Future of Human-Animal Relationships* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 130.

contrast, to alterity. Native femininity, rather, supports Armenian masculinity against the exogenous masculine (to be explored in the following chapter). The impulse to portray female beauty, considered by the Armenian clerical class at best immodest and, at worst, indicative of libidinal impiety, is consistently displaced onto elaborations of male beauty.

While female beauty is referenced abstractly, it is never explicitly described. This phenomenon coupled with the intricacy of detail concerning men's beauty, in the absence of vitriolic condemnation (albeit accompanied by overt disapproval) of homosexuality supports the argument that men's beauty comprises a subject of abundant attention at least partially due to a displaced or frustrated impulse to articulate the beauty of women. An episode from the *Buzandaran* illustrates this phenomenon, wherein the compiler presents a parable concerning the journey of St. Epip'an and his disciples to the Byzantine interior:

And as they were going, there chanced a woman on the way. And as they passed by the woman, Epip'an began to try them and said: 'How fair and attractive that woman was.' And a youngster among his disciples replied: 'The woman whom you have praised was one-eyed.' And St. Epip'an said: 'Why, indeed, did you look to see her face? Did you look because you have evil thoughts?' And he immediately separated the youth from himself and drove him away.<sup>127</sup>

The compiler here divulges that so stringent was the expectation upon the Armenian clergy to remain chaste in both deed and thought that they could expect, at any moment, to be tested for both behavioral and mental obedience. The impending potential of such scrutiny remained, as this parable reveals, ever present in the Armenian clerical

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<sup>127</sup> BP V.xxvii, p. 207.



consciousness. To err in even the slightest degree, as did the corrupted disciple of the compiler's account, would result in expulsion from the communion.

The *Letter* of Ghazar P'arpec'i, penned in the late fifth or early sixth century, makes equally apparent that a charge of lasciviousness or fornication constitutes both a vastly more common and more severe allegation among the medieval Armenian clergy than an accusation of homosexuality or effeminacy. In authoring his self-exculpatory epistle, Ghazar makes apparent his intent to exonerate himself of the charge of fornication issued, according to his testament, by his fellow clerics: "In such fashion did they persecute me at that time out of envy, piling up many slanders against me. They said: 'Lazar says that fornication is not a sin ... Those licentious and impure persons accepted the rumour of such charges with sweet delight, for the encouragement of evil deeds nestling in themselves.'"<sup>128</sup> Ghazar essentially deflects these incriminations by reciprocally inculcating his accusers, countering that they themselves are, in fact, guilty of the very crimes they allege.

In defending himself, Ghazar embarks on a harangue of several pages condemning the malignancies of fornication, quoting scripture and invoking gospel, before returning his attention to his accusers.

Then they say: 'He is a heretic.' And this they make energetic haste to reveal to everyone, persuading the weak-minded to notice the lack of grace for teaching in me. Now the very name of the heresy with which these impudent men libelled me I regard as too foul to be mentioned in writing. The indication of these men's blasphemies recalls similarities with what they wrote previously: that they regard acts of fornication as light and of no consequence.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Lazar P'arpec'i, *The History of Lazar P'arpec'i*, trans. Robert W. Thomson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991) [Henceforth: Ghazar] "Letter," p. 252.

<sup>129</sup> Ghazar "Letter," pp. 254-255.

So emphatic is Ghazar in protecting himself against an indictment of fornication or similarly lustful conduct that he composes this protracted refutation in response. By contrast, condemnations of homosexuality across medieval Armenian historical sources are few and far between, occurring only scarcely in texts of the dynastic period.

Homosexuality is first mentioned in the *Buzandaran*, in reference to St. Nersēs's injunction against a litany of sinful behaviors:

He held equally [destined] altogether for the same pit of perdition deceit, slander, covetousness, malice, lust, deprivation [of others], sodomy and effeminacy, defamation, unbridled drunkenness and gluttony, pillage, adultery, revenge on one's enemies, falsehood, hostility, mercilessness and the bearing of false witness, blood-shedding, murders, and foul bestiality, those who had no expectation of the Resurrection, and those who wept without hope over the dead.<sup>130</sup>

It is perhaps most staggering that the proscription of homosexuality appears only once more in the surviving Armenian literature before the tenth century – in the Canon Laws of St. Sahak Part'ew preserved in an eighth-century lawbook compiled by Hovhannēs Ōdznets'i. The fourth of these canons codifies the Armenian Church's prerogative “to deny Holy Communion to the adulterous and to the homosexuals.”<sup>131</sup> This final denunciation of homosexuality is so brief and singular as to render it practically inconsequential – by comparison, that is, to the copious injunctions against fornication and correlated behaviors engendered by lust, which appear in the *Kanonagirk'* alone on no fewer than five unique occasions. Concupiscence toward women, contrastingly, is condemned both more profusely and more vociferously by Armenian

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<sup>130</sup> BP IV.iv, p. 114.

<sup>131</sup> Hovhannes Otsnetsi, *Book of Canon Law*, trans. Zaven Arzoumanian (Burbank: Western Diocese of the Armenian Church, 2010) [Henceforth: *Kanonagirk'*], 21.

writers both before and after the assembly of the *Kanonagirk'*.<sup>132</sup> Vague admonitions against homosexual activity are peppered sporadically throughout Armenian texts to follow the *Kanonagirk'* in the tenth and eleventh centuries, though neither in quantity nor in enthusiasm do they approximate contemporaneous denunciations of heterosexual lust. It is evident, then, that the literate—that is, definitionally clerical—class of the Armenian Middle Ages regarded with considerably greater disdain sexual appetency for women than homosexual attraction to men, and, therefore, that to rhapsodize of masculine beauty afforded these men a productive outlet that would insulate them from accusations of impropriety. The chroniclers under investigation, then, clearly found themselves more concerned with appearing concupiscent toward women than with generating an impression of homosexuality.

Such an acute absence of female beauty descriptors, coupled with so robust a concentration on the aesthetics of masculine beauty, is remarkably unusual. It does, however, accord to a larger and more historically entrenched regional culture that relegated femininity to the domestic sphere, concealed women of advanced social station from public visibility—culturally, socially, spatially, and even sartorially—and prohibited their consumption as aesthetic objects (to be explored focally in the following chapter). Furthermore, notice of feminine beauty—specifically, that of a pious and meritorious Armenian woman—is reserved for foreigners, heathens, and a miscellany of essentialized others, and implicitly codes for barbaric alterity to be contrasted against the disciplined continence of commendable Armenian men. Interpretations of female beauty, by contrast, are not defined by physical attributes but, rather, attached to their

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<sup>132</sup> *Kanonagirk'*, passim.

demonstrated virtue and behavior. This will be discussed at greater length in chapter II of the present study.

## II. Maiden, Mother, Mourner, Martyr: Femininity in Motion

### Introduction

Medieval Armenian moral consciousness, as purveyed by the class of cleric-historians who recorded its tradition, mandates that both men and women conform equally to established formalities of gendered aesthetics and behavior. Masculinity is assessed by the observer along, in addition to exhibitions of valor, visual parameters mapped onto the physical body itself. This, however, does not apply to femininity, which is never passively observed but, exclusively, actively performed. As the previous chapter proposes, Armenian clerics considered inappropriate for written register any direct acknowledgment of female beauty. To compensate for the inapplicability of this criterion to appraisals of femininity (as it had so profitably assisted those of masculinity), medieval Armenian litterateurs engineered alternative depictions of femineity in text. An acceptable femininity, unlike masculinity, more closely aligns with behavioral than aesthetic conventions. Women must actively demonstrate and consistently maintain their femininity through essentialized actions and behaviors. These consist of the following: 1) Adherence to prescribed standards of appearance, spiritual practice, ethical comportment, and social conduct (noncompliance therewith effectively voiding feminine appellation); 2) Ritualized and conspicuous performance of grief; 3) Steadfast devotion to husband and family, ideally to the detriment of personal comfort, welfare, and even survival; and 4) Edification of sons in service of dynasty, nation, and church. Through each of these four dimensions of femininity a woman must traverse in order to earn a literary designation of virtue.

Each of these stipulations further requires that a woman adhere not only morally and spiritually but corporally through physical exertion by the incarnate vehicle of the female body. Similarly to masculinity, ascriptions of femininity are assigned upon the gender-neutral criteria of observed attractiveness and performed behavior. However, the proportions thereof are drastically adjusted to account for gender distinctions. While phenotypic aesthetics factor substantially in the estimation of masculinity, they receive only marginal consideration in the adjudication of femininity. Masculinity is static and inert: constantly beautiful, valorous, and athletically formidable. Femininity, by contrast, is not static but dynamic and motile, demanding agile navigation through a series of stations, challenges, and obstacles designed to reflect a woman's polyvalent position in Armenian society as she advanced in age through its progression. In maidenhood, her body is an investment of public property – a community asset meant to be consumed visually and evaluated for marital eligibility. As a young maiden she is expected to perform diffident modesty, delicate charm, graceful beauty, and sexual purity – all of which coalesce into spiritual commitment, at the pinnacle of Armenian virtue. Subsequently, she develops into a more mature and responsible isotope of the Armenian feminine, embodying matrimonial devotion and maternal dedication. These she demonstrates, respectively, through visible grief at the deprivation of spouse and through resolute cultivation of sons for service to the Armenian nation. Should she succeed in these domains, she is graced with the consummate reward for feminine righteousness: martyrdom. In each of these stations she must prevail in order to successfully complete her course of femininity. She must portray with integrity all characters assigned to her along her developmental trajectory from maiden to mother and beyond.

The behaviors incumbent upon women, enumerated above, appear copiously in the writings of medieval Armenian chroniclers. To embody these values is to exhibit, through the corporeal performance of her gender via her female constitution, moral virtue of an expressly feminine nature and, in reward, to be immortalized favorably—perhaps even in martyrdom—into the written record so valued among the Armenian nobility. Women denied this narratological approval are those who subvert these conventions. Failure or inadequacy along any of these stipulated axes—or, worse yet, deliberate defiance thereof—results not only in effective revocation of feminine ascription but in, additionally, narrative slander and ridicule in recorded posterity.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify and contextualize the criteria, outlined above, that factored into the medieval Armenian construction of femininity. In so doing, it will illustrate the complementarity of femininity to masculinity and its function within the broader gender dichotomy: where the Armenian masculine pursues in the civic sphere the valiant defense of nation, the Armenian feminine labors in the domestic to preserve and maintain that nation through the exercise of modesty, devotion, maternity, and sacrifice. Further, the chapter will explore the interactivity between abstractions of ethnos and gender vis-à-vis feminine manifestations of both nativity and alterity, and will highlight the activity of ethnic identity in assembling medieval Armenian templates of gender. This chapter contends that femininity was not erected opposite ethnic alterity as was medieval Armenian masculinity but, rather, in support of that masculinity and the national order that it maintains. As a holistic entity, then, the medieval Armenian gender binary operates centripetally to ensure its ethnonational and ethnoreligious differentiation from adjacent exogeneities.

### Feminine Aesthetics

The medieval Armenian construct of femininity does not depend as consistently upon descriptors of physical beauty as does masculinity. Nevertheless, physical descriptions of women in textual sources do provide remarkable insight into perceptions of the female appearance. Incumbent upon women, as upon men, is the expectation to be lean of body, fair of complexion, and pleasant of countenance. While an evaluation of male beauty was issued along a continuum of identity and alterity, female beauty was disposed to no such dichotomy. Women of this cultural environment were subjected to the social expectation, as were men, to maintain a low weight and a slender physique. The gender-neutral mandate of thinness more likely reflects, as previously proposed, the clerical preoccupation with the virtue of ascetic discipline than with any aesthetic value associated therewith (though reverence for asceticism likely influences an aesthetic preference toward slenderness for both men and women). Movsēs Khorenats‘i denigrates the mother of an Arshakuni nobleman, Eruand, as “fat of body, horribly ugly, and libidinous,” further characterizing her as a woman “whom no one could bear to marry” due to her exceptionally unpleasant appearance.<sup>1</sup> Five centuries later, Ukhtanēs of Sebastia refers to Movsēs’s assessment of the woman, writing that Eruand “...was born of an Arsacid woman, of a rough countenance, dark and heavy-set, who gave birth to Eruand after illegitimate intercourse, as says the historian.”<sup>2</sup> Ukhtanēs embellishes Movsēs’s account, omitting the historian’s characterization of “libidinous” but—of particular interest—supplying the datum that she is “dark.” While both the fifth- and the tenth-century descriptions of Eruand’s mother disparage her weight, only Ukhtanēs

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<sup>1</sup> MX II.37, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> Ukhtanēs I.41, p. 52.



writes of her dark and, implicitly, unattractive complexion. This descriptor he inserts with the transparent intention of exaggerating her turpitude, further substantiating that the Armenians had come to regard a dark complexion, phenotypically evocative of the invasive exogenous, unattractive – if not by the fifth century, then certainly by the tenth. This connotation, then, applies universally to both men and women in Armenian cognition. It merits mention that this Arshakuni woman so loathsomely depicted is the only woman described as “fat” or otherwise overweight by any Armenian chronicler across the first seven centuries of Armenian historical writing.

Little is revealed in the source texts of the specific physical attributes deemed aesthetically pleasing in women. They do display an emphasis on facial beauty for women as for men (as previously examined), though the facial beauty of women receives remarkably less precision in narration. This results perhaps from Armenian clerical injunctions (both explicit and implicit) against the entertainment of lustful impulses and fervid condemnations of the clergy for any attention to female beauty. What little is written of feminine facial beauty communicates similar ideals to those contemporaneously celebrated of masculine beauty. Agat‘angeghos writes in the fifth century of events taking place in the third: “It happened in those times that the emperor Diocletian sought a wife. Then were sent out and circulated throughout his whole empire painters who could produce a true likeness. Rendering naturally on tablets the beauty of the face and the mascaraed eyebrows, with faithful colors they made accurate pictures to show before the king and please his eye.”<sup>3</sup> The singular attribute specified is the eyebrow,

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<sup>3</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 137, p. 147. Thomson supplies the translation “mascaraed eyebrows” for *qũrũũqũrũrũ jũũhũũ*. I here suggest the alternative translation “dark eyebrows,” as the original terminology does not necessarily imply cosmetic enhancement but, rather, refers generically to the eyebrow’s pigment (natural or otherwise, which is unspecified in the original text) – a substantial semiotic distinction.

which mirrors descriptions of male beauty that emphasize the pleasantness of a dark and arched brow. This gender-ubiquitous appreciation for a deeply pigmented brow reflects the aesthetic importance of the feature, its prominence for the Armenians, and its omneity as a marker of physical attractiveness. Additionally, it is perhaps the only identifiable feature of a woman deemed permissible for literary observation due to its otherwise masculine ascription. Restated, its generalized implication of masculine beauty may render acceptable its inclusion in portrayals of feminine beauty, as it is considered by these cleric-scholars an indicator of beauty irrespective of the gender of its bearer. This item in Agat'angeghos's text calls to mind the description of Eruandakert by the author's contemporary, Movsēs Khorenats'i, who likens the estate's vineyards to "the arching brows of charming maidens."<sup>4</sup> The ambiguity of his subject enables the historian to evade censure by his peers and to address, perhaps somewhat mischievously, the allure of the female brow while artfully concealing his indulgence therein beneath the pretense of crafting a topographical image.

In similarly nebulous language, Movsēs records a vision purportedly experienced by "Azhdahak the Mede," whom he will discuss later in his *History*.<sup>5</sup> According to Movsēs, Azhdahak perceives in his vision "a woman dressed in purple and wrapped in a veil the color of the sky."<sup>6</sup> This female figment, Movsēs expounds, possessed "beautiful" eyes, a statuesque physique, and the healthy blush of reddened cheeks.<sup>7</sup> Finally, Azhdahak's vision concludes with her maternity, as the fictitious (and apparently

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<sup>4</sup> MX II.42, p. 180.

<sup>5</sup> MX I.26, p. 111.

<sup>6</sup> MX I.26, p. 112.

<sup>7</sup> MX I.26, p. 112.

pregnant) woman commences parturition.<sup>8</sup> The purple hue of her garment evokes royalty, while the radiance in her cheeks and the splendor of her eyes highlight the fantastical nature of her hallucinated appearance (comparable to the “smooth cheeks” of the personified feminine at Eruandakert).<sup>9</sup> As early as the fifth century, there begins to emerge an image of ideal feminine beauty composed of dark brows, rosy cheeks, striking eyes, and manifest fertility (an element also ascribed by Movsēs to Eruandakert).<sup>10</sup> Common among these descriptions is the suggestion that female beauty be measured, in part, by height – a trait that Movsēs will once again extol in his text. Documenting the arrival of Trdat in Armenia, Movsēs records Trdat’s marriage to the noblewoman Ashkhēn: “This maiden was no less tall than the king. He ordered her to be inscribed as an Arsacid, to be vested with purple, and to be crowned in order to become the king’s bride.”<sup>11</sup> Curiously, the transmission of this item evinces another revision of Movsēs’s account by Ukhtanēs of Sebastia in the tenth century, the height of Queen Ashkhēn yet another detail selectively discarded by Ukhtanēs in his quotations of the historian.<sup>12</sup> Whether Ukhtanēs does so intentionally to advance an agenda or unconsciously, due perhaps to an omission in the manuscript of Movsēs’s *History* available to him, is unclear. In any case, this detail—and any aesthetic attention to a woman’s stature—appears to have vanished from Armenian historical consciousness by the tenth century, as evidenced by the erasure of this earlier-attested descriptor. Some chapters prior, Movsēs writes admiringly of the “blond hair” and “thick curls” of Eraneak, the “beautiful”

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<sup>8</sup> MX I.26, p. 112.

<sup>9</sup> MX II.42, p. 180.

<sup>10</sup> MX II.42, p. 180.

<sup>11</sup> MX II.83, pp. 229-230.

<sup>12</sup> Ukhtanēs I.67, p. 82.

daughter of King Tiran.<sup>13</sup> Movsēs's text appears to be the last in which female beauty is described with any degree of specificity.

### Conspicuous Lamentation and the Aesthetics of Female Grief

Among the most salient representational actions to signify women's conformity to gendered behavioral conventions was public lamentation. Though the canon laws set down by St. Nersēs at face value reject and forbid excessive mourning—a conviction reified in the canons issued at the 444 Council of Shahapivan, rather extensively in Canon XI—throughout the corpus of medieval Armenian literature women are consistently witnessed behaving in precisely such a manner.<sup>14</sup> Curiously, however, the behavior does not detract from or confiscate the virtuous femininity (nor, by marginal contrast, the feminine virtue) of those who display it but, rather, appears to confer upon them enhanced merit. Scholars have previously addressed this quandary and observed the paradoxical approval of these theatrical expressions of grief (that is: exclusively when performed by women) by the annalists who preserve them. The present study submits for scholarly consideration that it was perhaps not despite but, rather, because of these women's conspicuous lamentations that they retained their designations as essentially feminine and, by extension, virtuously so. Lamentation, then, constitutes a foundational element of constructed Armenian femininity, even in conflict with inscribed moral protocols and the canon laws that legislate them.

The *Buzandaran* contains the earliest known iteration of this trope in an episode reporting the murder of Gnel Arshakuni by the design of his uncle, Tirit' (whose own

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<sup>13</sup> MX II.63, p. 203.

<sup>14</sup> Hovhannessian, "The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan," 84-85.

ethical deficiencies will be examined in a forthcoming chapter). Tirit‘ contrives to murder his nephew intending subsequently to marry Gnel’s widow, P‘arandzem, for whom Tirit‘’s lust is made explicit in the text. P‘arandzem, as recorded by the compiler, demonstrates the virtues of loyalty and dedication to her husband in her reaction to his murder: “...rending her garments and loosening her hair, she lamented with bosom bared among the mourners. She wailed aloud [and] made all weep by the mournful tears of her grievous lament.”<sup>15</sup>

P‘arandzem’s grief introduces a matter of some complexity in a fifth-century Armenian context. Previously Zaroui Pogossian has documented the presence of professional mourning women at Armenian funerary rites.<sup>16</sup> This vocation apparently pervaded the ancient and early medieval Mediterranean cultural sphere; Leila Ahmed cites it among the earliest “employment opportunities” available to Muslim women.<sup>17</sup> Nadia El Cheikh devotes a chapter in her 2015 monograph to female mourning practices in the Abbasid orbit.<sup>18</sup> More recently, David Zakarian has explored the politics and performativity of P‘arandzem’s public lamentation as well as its pre-Christian pagan and Zoroastrian origins.<sup>19</sup> The present study endeavors to scaffold upon existing scholarship by submitting that conspicuous lamentation not only was permitted of women by medieval Armenian cultural standards, but constituted an integral fundament to the Armenian construct of femininity. It is in the *Buzandaran* that the figure of St. Nersēs

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<sup>15</sup> BP IV.xv, p. 144.

<sup>16</sup> Pogossian, “Women at the Beginning,” 371-372.

<sup>17</sup> Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 84.

<sup>18</sup> Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 38-58.

<sup>19</sup> David Zakarian, “P‘aranjem and Her Husbands: A New Hypothesis on the Marriages of the Armenian Queen,” *Studia Iranica* 47 (2018): 75-88.

first appears in Armenian historical literature, bearing among his teachings an oft-repeated injunction against excessive (perhaps even moderate) lamentation over the dead. To lament in excess, Nersēs cautioned, was to publicly reject the precept of resurrection so vital to Christianity.

It is this decree that takes precedence over all others among Nersēs's commandments for the recently Christianized Armenians, who continuously cite this prohibition across seven centuries of textual production in the Highland. According to the compiler, St. Nersēs disdained "those who had no expectation of the Resurrection, and those who wept without hope over the dead."<sup>20</sup> Perhaps most telling of the importance placed upon this interdiction by the medieval Armenians are the accompanying sins alongside which it appears in a litany of those abhorred by St. Nersēs, which include (among others) slander, fornication, theft, gluttony, "sodomy and effeminacy," adultery, lust, and even bestiality.<sup>21</sup> Its inclusion herein reveals its commensurability with these sins, exposing the gravity with which medieval Armenian Christianity considered the offense.

Despite the Armenians' cultural emphasis on this tenet, adherence thereto appears to have fallen inconsistent following the death of St. Nersēs. The compiler clarifies in a later chapter: "And after Nersēs's death, whenever they mourned over the dead, men and women with slashed arms and lacerated faces accompanied the dead dancing mourning dances, with trumpets, *p'andur's*, and *vins*, and with foul and monstrous dances, which they performed face to face, striking their palms against each other."<sup>22</sup> While making

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<sup>20</sup> BP IV.iv, p. 114.

<sup>21</sup> BP IV.iv, p. 114.

<sup>22</sup> BP V.xxxi, p. 212.

known his contempt for such behaviors, the compiler provides striking insight into the contrast between dogma and practice in early medieval Armenia (or, perhaps, deliberately draws contrast so as to illustrate the state of perdition to which the Armenians had descended in the absence of Nersēs – such narrative pedestalization of the saint will appear elsewhere in the genre).

Seemingly cognizant of St. Nersēs’s admonition against excessive lamentation, Tirit’, the murderer of her husband, advises P’arandzem to discontinue this behavior, which he reminds her is improper and impious: “He sent a message to the wife of the murdered man, saying: ‘Do not put on such mourning for I am a better man than he. I loved you, and I made him perish so that I might take you as my wife.’”<sup>23</sup> Though the purpose of Tirit’s missive derives decidedly from untoward motivations, his instruction nevertheless invokes the doctrine of the saint. Tirit’ chastises P’arandzem for the dual follies of mourning excessively—violating the directives of St. Nersēs—and, from the perspective of his own agenda, failing to recognize his merits as a suitor amid the hysteria of her grief. That he so opportunistically exploits P’arandzem’s anguish for personal enrichment only further substantiates the malevolence of his character while reminding readers of their own responsibility to refrain from such spectacular lamentations. This injunction the compiler will insistently emphasize (as will his literary successors) even if it entails projecting the prescript from the dialogue of a villain.

P’arandzem responds to this alarming disclosure by assuming culpability onto herself. According to the compiler, the newly widowed noblewoman announces

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<sup>23</sup> BP IV.xv, p. 144.

vociferously to a crowd of mourners: “Hear ye all, my husband’s death was because of me, my husband was put to death because someone desired me!”<sup>24</sup> Following this declaration, she continues to mourn in defiance of the ordinances set down by St. Nersēs: “And she tore her hair, cried out aloud, in lamentation.”<sup>25</sup> Despite the doctrinal prohibition against excessive mourning, such behavior is consistently written into feminine behavior, even praised as such, across the textual canon of the dynastic period. P‘arandzem’s grief is portrayed not as the rebellious outburst of a disobedient woman but, rather, as the virtuous demonstration of loyalty by a newly widowed wife to her slain husband. Substantiating this is the development that it is not P‘arandzem but the nepoticial Tirit‘ who is ultimately demonized in the reporting of this episode. Were the wailings of P‘arandzem the compiler’s target, it would be she under literary scrutiny. The lamentations of the widow, however, evade reproach by the compiler, who instead directs his indignation toward the betrayal of kin – arguably the most egregious of social sins for the Armenian aristocracy, each house in constant danger of extinction at the hands of its rivals both internal and external.

The performance of lamentation conspicuously exhibited by P‘arandzem as a signifier of feminine virtue is not an isolated incident. Laudations of female mourning abound throughout the genre, and the expectation that a woman theatrically perform her grief—even in defiance of Nersēsian law—is consistently reinforced in medieval Armenian texts. This illuminates what is perhaps a culturally-instituted legal exemption accorded women for their innate emotivity and—unlike the disciplinary virtues

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<sup>24</sup> BP IV.xv, p. 144.

<sup>25</sup> BP IV.xv, p. 144.



compulsory of masculinity—societally accepted inability to control their emotional reactivity. This accords with medieval Islamic and Byzantine sensibilities of the body, which both defer to the value of emotional continence. Each of the aforementioned societies, in turn, situates emotional regulation as the domain of the masculine while relegating emotional lability, regarded as inherently female by both as well as by the ancient cultures that informed them, to the feminine. The Armenians regarded emotional control as the moral obligation of both men and women. David Zakarian identifies a remarkable degree of gender-equality among early Armenian Christians, and attributes this phenomenon to Armenia’s exposure (and adoption) of several centuries to Zoroastrianism.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, it does appear that, mirroring the gendered values of adjacent societies, emotional performance became assimilated and integrated as an essentially feminine domain. Sympathizing with mourning women in the late eleventh century, Aristakēs Lastiverts‘i writes that they “took leave of their senses” – a condition that the historian forgives them in text, even commiserating of their anguish.<sup>27</sup>

T‘ovma Artsruni will document a similar display of grief by the mother of Artsruni noblemen Gurgēn and Grigor upon their abduction by Abbasid soldiers: “...when the princess saw that her sons had been carried off into captivity, she herself followed them, tearing her hair, rending her garments, moaning, and sighing.”<sup>28</sup> This ritual demonstration of grief, despite its violation of the venerated Nersēsian ordinances, illustrates to the reader—and for the posterity of the Artsruni Dynasty—the moral virtue, both emoted and physically performed, of the princess. Movsēs Daskhurants‘i will

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<sup>26</sup> Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 66.

<sup>27</sup> AL XI, p. 74.

<sup>28</sup> TA III.5, p. 217.

observe in the aftermath of a Khazar invasion: “The cries of mothers lamenting for their sons rose up like the cries of a huge flock of sheep, like that of ewes calling to their lambs.”<sup>29</sup> In so characterizing these mothers’ grief, to the extent of employing such Messianic imagery as the ovine, Movsēs casts them as both sympathetic and essentially maternal—and, by default, effectively feminine—to his reader. The representation of feminine emotivity, as well as its classification as a disgraceful moral error deserving of reproach, will again return in Armenian historical literature of the Middle Ages. This idea, in turn, accords with the pervasive contempt for incontinence and aspiration toward restraint in all domains—dietary, sexual, and emotional, among others—that suffuses the values of the medieval Armenian literary tradition. This will be examined at length in a subsequent chapter of the present study.

Movsēs Khorenats‘i observes contemporaneously to the production of the *Buzandaran* the comparable presence of “wailing maidens dressed in black and mourning women” amid the funerary rights for King Artashēs.<sup>30</sup> Centuries later, Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i will conjure these familiar visuals in relating the despair of the Armenians during the initial Arab invasions “...whose cries and lamentations, as well as the piteous voices of the chorus of minstrels, accompanied by the wails of black-clad women and griefstricken [sic] men reached up to the heavens.”<sup>31</sup> The specificity applied to “the wails of ... griefstricken men,” accompanied by the textual separation of “black-clad women” from the other identified mourners, suggests that conspicuous lamentation may not have been an exclusively female activity (though women certainly account for

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<sup>29</sup> MD II.14, p. 70.

<sup>30</sup> MX II.60, p. 199.

<sup>31</sup> YD XXXII, p. 140.

the preponderance of such displays, and the practice was certainly—and explicitly—connotative of femininity).<sup>32</sup> Expanding this possibility, the eighth-century chronicler Ghewond records that the Armenian soldiers “grieved over their women and children with wails and lamentations while the captives were being taken to the country of the Syrians” by invading Arabs.<sup>33</sup> A seventh- or eighth-century passage in the historical text attributed to Movsēs Daskhurants‘i records the mourning of the nobleman Juanshir for his deceased spouse, revealed in the author’s attestation that the emperor Constantine commanded that Juanshir remove “the mourning clothes he was wearing because of his wife’s death.”<sup>34</sup> The eleventh-century historian Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i tells of the king Smbat Bagratuni so profoundly affected by the passing of his wife that he himself perishes as a consequence of his grief: “Thus, in his great wrath God struck first his wife and she died; when the king had been plunged into great mourning on her account, he himself was struck with a fever involving a painful inflammation. He died from this and was buried in the same city, in 438 of the Era.”<sup>35</sup> Likewise, Aristakēs Lastiverts‘i includes in his account the ritualized mourning of the local priest at a village called Khach‘, who grieves passionately—performing a pagan ritual—the vandalism of his church’s cross: “Observing that frightful scene, he grabbed his own collar and tore his clothing.”<sup>36</sup> The lamentation of the priest is textually identical to that of P‘arandzem and other aggrieved women of the source texts. Despite the sporadic participation of men in these rituals, conspicuous lamentation was an unambiguously female domain of

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<sup>32</sup> YD XXXII, p. 140.

<sup>33</sup> Ghewond 3, p. 52.

<sup>34</sup> MD II.22, p. 85.

<sup>35</sup> ST III.29, p. 292.

<sup>36</sup> AL XXIII, p. 154.

operation, as demonstrated by its consistent narrative connotations to femininity. Further, its ritualized function to preserving the masculine institution of the state from within the domestic quarters of femininity emerges in the urgency with which such lamentations express the instability instantiated by the destruction of male order and the patriarchs who maintain it.

### Sartorial Theatre and the Optics of the Veil

Just as, demonstrated above, lamentation is not the exclusive purview of women, nor is such performative grief reserved for women of Armenian extraction. One particularly instructive episode in the *History of the House of the Artsrunik*<sup>37</sup> illuminates the versatility of lamentation in depicting the grief of Muslim noblewomen widowed subsequently to an Armenian uprising:

The wives of the slain, together with the common rabble, with unveiled faces, bareheaded, and having discarded the natural apparel of women, as is their custom especially for the nations of Muslims, came on foot to the royal palace. They complained, tearing their collars and pulling out their hair, scratching their faces and uttering loud shrieks in lamentation and tearful sighing, moaning and imploring.<sup>37</sup>

This account is one of only few that survive from medieval Armenia containing any information about Muslim women.

Just as the female figment of Azhdahak's ethereal vision appeared to him "wrapped in a veil," so too did corporeal Armenian women practice customary veiling. Notable of the above passage from T'ovma Artsruni is its mention of Islamic mourning practices – the text identifies among Muslim women identical rituals to those illustrated of Armenian women. Whether this results from an embellishment on the part of the

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<sup>37</sup> TA II.6, p. 180.

author (one that presupposes the ubiquity of such rituals) or from confirmed observations of such behaviors is of little consequence; of far greater import is the perceived similitude (real or fictitious) attested between Armenian and Muslim women in this tenth-century text – one commissioned by a powerful Armenian noble. This similitude may serve to humanize and even sympathize the women depicted in the passage, who in their narrated resemblance to the women of Armenia are dramatically less othered than their male counterparts. This may indicate a gendered understanding of alterity, perhaps one suggesting that ethnicity and masculinity align in such a way that does not allow for an intersection with femininity (which, for the Armenians of this period, may constitute a unique category altogether distinct from ethnic identity). To condense: as elucidated in the previous chapter, ethnonational identity to the medieval Armenian comprehension is distributed along an axis of masculinity, one's native ethnicity correlating positively to his exhibited gender conformity. Alterity, by contrast, may present along a more nuanced spectrum of gendered gradations, femininity to some degree mitigating alterity in its benignity and masculinity potentially exaggerating it.

Equally informative are T'ovma's apparent attention to the Muslim women's headscarves and his explicit identification thereof as necessarily Islamic garments (lending credence to the notion that this account is founded more in observation than in conjecture). In this way, T'ovma documents both the sartorial alterity and the feminine similarity of Muslim and Armenian women. It appears that the veil represented visually the transformation of the Armenian culture-scape under exposure to Islam. While T'ovma expressly identifies female headcoverings as uniquely Islamic attire, there exists persuasive evidence for such veiling practices among Armenian women both before and

after the arrival of Islam. Ghazar P'arpets'i criticizes the "frequent turning of the eyes this way and that from under a veil" exhibited by Armenian women.<sup>38</sup> David Zakarian posits a veiling requirement among newly married Armenian women during their liminal postnuptial and prenatal interval.<sup>39</sup> Zakarian also notes the expectation, universal to the region, that female ascetics veil themselves – a custom that he connects to early Syriac monasticism.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, the garment transcended the locality and spatiality of religious practice – present in Armenian culture before the arrival of the first Muslims, it acquired a novel connotation in the new interreligious context through which the Armenians now filtered their experiences as Christians under the dominion of the newly ascendant Islamic exogeneity. Previously an article intended merely to facilitate observance of modesty, enabling women of station to mobilize their mandated concealment beyond their domestic confines, the veil transmuted into a textile that, for the Armenians, now indicated religious and cultural alterity and adherence to a rival set of beliefs.<sup>41</sup> In this way, the veil is a garment whose semantics both adjust and, in turn, indicate adjustment. Its semiology in flux under medieval Armenian scrutiny, it illuminates the development of religious iconography assumed onto the body itself – and the process by which fluctuations in religious semiotics impact the sartorial and visual cultures that they absorb.

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<sup>38</sup> Ghazar III.61, p. 161.

<sup>39</sup> Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 142.

<sup>40</sup> Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 119.

<sup>41</sup> For the veil as an object that enabled mobile concealment, see Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, "House and Veil in Ancient Greece," *British School at Athens Studies* 15 (2007): 251-258.

A final curiosity of T‘ovma’s account concerning Muslim women reports an attack on the Armenian troops by “...a band of raging infidels including women, their children and kinsmen.”<sup>42</sup> Regardless of its veracity, the suggestion that a contingent of Muslim women would accompany their husbands into battle provides invaluable insight into the Armenian perception of the Islamic other, particularly as it manifests in the feminine. While T‘ovma may sensationalize his account so as to further vilify an already dehumanized other, it may, conversely, be sourced directly from Islamic texts accessible to the author or perhaps even actual events witnessed by him or his associates. Significantly, early Muslim women were understood to engage in military campaigns alongside their male kin. Leila Ahmed writes: “Accounts of the battle of Uhud portray women, including Muhammad's wives, actively and freely participating in the ostensibly male domain of warfare.”<sup>43</sup> Both Ahmed and Nadia El Cheikh cite as a prominent literary model for the Muslim woman warrior Hind bint ‘Utbah, whose courage in battle, according to El Cheikh, “rehabilitated” her character.<sup>44</sup> It is thus conceivable that Muslim women in actuality participated alongside their husbands, fathers, and brothers in martial action against the Armenians, and thus that the astonishment expressed by T‘ovma at this occurrence is not manufactured for propagandistic effect but candidly authentic.

Remarkably, only one woman originating in Islamic cosmogony is ever named in an Armenian text of this period – the mysterious *History of the Anonymous Story-Teller*, approached by modern scholars with equal measures of skepticism and enchantment. The text, whose questionable dating (as an assemblage of constituent fragments each likely

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<sup>42</sup> TA III.29, p. 322.

<sup>43</sup> Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 53.

<sup>44</sup> Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 70; El Cheikh, *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity*, 31-33.

bearing a unique provenance of its own) has ranged inconclusively from as early as the ninth century to as recently as the fifteenth. The text specifically names Fatima, whom it describes as “a very beautiful woman,” incorrectly identifying her as the sister of the prophet Muhammad.<sup>45</sup> Such confusions of Islamic genealogies and personages will not be isolated to the immediate family of the prophet in the *Anonymous Chronicle*, though these certainly represent the preponderance thereof in a text conspicuously fixated on the life, network, and conduct of the Islamic prophet. That a foreign woman—no less, one belonging to the “lawless” faith of Islam, and more astonishingly still, one from among Muhammad’s immediate family (though erroneously identified she may be)—is characterized by an Armenian author as aesthetically beautiful presents as a curious anomaly. Though she is not the only Muslim woman described in this way in an Armenian text of this era—T’ovma Artsruni similarly describes the Muslim widow of Ishaq ibn Isma’il as “a beautiful woman”—she is one of only very few.<sup>46</sup> Considering the Armenians’ frequent military confrontations with Islamic combatants and pervasive exposure (however adversarial) to its culture, medieval Armenian historians impugn the phenotype of Muslim men perhaps more prolifically than those of any other extraction. It is highly irregular, then, that a text descending from a literary tradition that methodically exalts Armenian male beauty through the invariable denigration of foreign masculinity would, however fleetingly, extol the physical beauty of an exoteric woman so intimately connected to the very prophet of a competing religion – especially one that has so decisively subjugated the Armenians.

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<sup>45</sup> AST p. 183.

<sup>46</sup> TA III.9, p. 239.



T'ovma Artsruni relates in a subsequent chapter of his text the efforts of a widowed Muslim woman—the aforementioned “beautiful” wife of the emir of Tbilisi, Ishaq ibn Isma‘il—to seek justice for her husband’s murder at the hands of the caliph: “She went around the camp unveiled, which was not customary for the women of the Muslim people.”<sup>47</sup> T'ovma qualifies his narration with this detail, inferably, to accentuate her audacity and the attention that such insubordination attracts within both Armenian and Muslim social environments. T'ovma, then simultaneously centers both the visibility of female insolence and the alterity of Muslim sartoriality. Veiling, T'ovma implies, indicates Islamic practice now stripped of the pre-Islamic context it once occupied in Armenian consciousness.

Worthy of note is that T'ovma later reviews this account in preamble to a subsequent event, synopsising it as “the death of Sahak and his wife’s public lamentation” – a framing that centers Sahak’s unnamed wife in the narrative rather than the slain man himself named and, further, emphatically foregrounds her “public lamentation” as a device to ingratiate the widow to his readers (despite her foreign origin, to be discussed in a forthcoming chapter).<sup>48</sup> In this way it becomes apparent that the veil operates across medieval Armenian social terrain as a garment of both performative bereavement and conspicuous modesty, neither domain exclusively monopolizing the textile in connotation.

The tenth-century chronicler Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i documents the normativity of veiling among Armenian women amidst an item recounting the first

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<sup>47</sup> TA III.9, p. 239.

<sup>48</sup> TA III.15, p. 273.

Islamic invasions: “Due to the requirements of their needs, venerable women stripped their heads of veils and their bodies of clothing, and coming out in the open shamelessly, walked about begging.”<sup>49</sup> Likewise, Aristakēs Lastiverts‘i writes in the eleventh century of the anguish of Armenian women amid the Seljuq invasions: “*Azat* women, having come forth, their veils removed from their heads, were shamelessly disgraced in the open sunlight. Those who had hardly been able to travel on foot to visit the sick or to go to a place of pilgrimage, now bare-headed and barefoot went before the captors, stripped of adornments, having fallen from honor, and subject to myriad humiliations.”<sup>50</sup> He notes in particular the feminine shame of walking openly with heads exposed and the degradation therein entailed. A continuator to T‘ovma’s text writes of the mourning that follows the murder of Prince Derenik of the Artsruni Dynasty, remarking specifically on the gendered anomaly of a woman baring her head publicly: “There women and maidservants, putting aside the decorum of their female sex, heads bare, dragged themselves along the streets and roads.”<sup>51</sup> The author then turns to the grief of Derenik’s widow, Princess Sop‘i: “She cast off her noble veil adorned with pearls, dressed herself in black, and prepared a dark-coloured covering for her head.”<sup>52</sup>

Noteworthy is the detail that Princess Sop‘i does not merely veil herself as a ritual act of mourning; rather, the text specifies that she exchanges one veil for another. That the mourning veil replaces one previously worn implies that the bejeweled veil displayed just prior to it would have been disported regularly by women of the Armenian aristocracy as a matter of convention, suggesting that Armenian noblewomen customarily

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<sup>49</sup> YD LIII, p. 187.

<sup>50</sup> AL II, p. 14.

<sup>51</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 1] III.29, p. 329.

<sup>52</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 1] III.29, p. 329.

veiled through the tenth century. The totality of these passages in the sources under investigation suggests that veiling may have been a common (perhaps even standard) practice among Armenian women across the Middle Ages, perhaps more common than has been previously supposed. Though its precise beginnings among the Armenians are unknown, it appears that the practice emerged before the arrival of Islam, its social context likely transforming with the introduction of Muslim populations to the region. The expectation that Muslim women cover their hair as a matter of religious obligation may have conflicted with or even reconstituted the optics of the veil for Armenian women and their social milieux. Though the Armenian sources following the introduction of Islam acknowledge and often accentuate these practical differences, the incredulous sight of an uncovered woman, be she Christian or Muslim, maintains its connotation of aberrance, identically construed between Armenian and exogenous women. This aberrance is consistently treated by contemporaneous annalists, in both contexts, as a signal of righteous grief – the quality most celebrated of women in the surviving texts from this period. Thus, the veil operates as an equalizer between native and foreign femininities in the Armenian texts of this period despite its developing implication of gendered alterity.

### Masculinity by Proxy

The responsibility of a woman to prepare her son, through education, for a masculinity suitable to the continuation of dynasty and nation appears most explicitly in the narratives of Awarayr, the seminal battle of Armenian nationhood perhaps the epistemic origin of the idea and its mobilization. These passages have been previously examined by Zaroui Pogossian to substantiate a degree of education available to women in early medieval Armenia; in turn, Pogossian observes that mothers exercised

substantive supervision and agency over the religious instruction of their children.<sup>53</sup> Most recently, David Zakarian has concurred with Pogossian’s assessment, in copious detail elaborating on the instructional capacities of Armenian mothers especially in the aftermath of the Battle of Awarayr.<sup>54</sup> In conversation with these ideas, the present study submits that women not only effected control over the spiritual cultivation of their children, but that this constituted a project of national importance – the responsibility of these mothers was not only to raise pious Christian children but, in fact, capable defenders of the Armenian Christian nation. Ghazar P‘arpets‘i writes of the patrician children deprived of their fathers by Persian captors following the 451 uprising. Ghazar documents not mothers assuming responsibility exclusively for their own children but, rather, a cohesive campaign by the totality of these women for the collective guardianship and nurturance of all resident children: “They were instructed and taught and educated with great sollicitude [sic] by the wives of the martyrs and of the prisoners at court, despite their tribulation.”<sup>55</sup> The value herein conveyed is that the protection and preparation of children is not solely the obligation of the individual woman or mother, but a communal operation of femininity as a socially organized gender.

Especially noteworthy is the flattery applied to these noblewomen for assuming the mantle of pedagogical provision. Ghazar emphasizes that to attend to children—particularly male children—toward the goal of preparing them for defense of dynasty and nation is a work of feminine and moral virtue collapsed into a single gendered value: “These were not carefree and frivolous women, but like brave men they took care of the

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<sup>53</sup> Pogossian, “Women at the Beginning,” 373-375.

<sup>54</sup> Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 143-151.

<sup>55</sup> Ghazar III.62, p. 162.

whole education of these children in useful and noble accomplishments.”<sup>56</sup> In likening the women to “brave men” and, by extension, narratologically imbuing them with the vigor of masculinity (explored in the previous chapter), the author again alludes to the symbiotic unity of the two genders that anchor the Armenian construction of nation particularly under exigencies of faith. It is amid the Zoroastrian persecution of the newly Christianized Armenians that this narrative is set. The condition of religious persecution is significant in this regard, as the unicity of the dichotomized genders as a fortification in defense of the Christian faith is thereby reified. Ghazar concludes his praise of the maternal feminine with a reference to the virtue of a specific woman, one associated with the family who sponsored his opus: “The most notable was the wife of the martyr Hmayeak Mamikonean ... who was a renowned woman and the most virtuous and the wisest of all the women in Armenia.”<sup>57</sup> To punctuate the virtue of the Mamikonean widow, Ghazar confirms that she did, indeed, fulfill her feminine, maternal, and national obligations: “So her children were brought up and educated there, made great progress, and became famous.”<sup>58</sup> Ghazar later reveals himself a beneficiary of this system, attesting his own education by the mother and maternal aunt of his patron, Vahan Mamikonean.<sup>59</sup>

Returning to the grief of the princess Sop‘i, T‘ovma’s continuator elaborates upon the scene following her husband’s murder: “The palace of the great princess Sop‘i, beautiful as the sun, resounded with the beating of breasts and foreheads and with shrill wailings. In their lamentations they cried: ‘Woe, the renowned prince is lost, and the land

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<sup>56</sup> Ghazar III.62, p. 162.

<sup>57</sup> Ghazar III.62, p. 162.

<sup>58</sup> Ghazar III.62, pp. 162-163.

<sup>59</sup> Ghazar Letter, p. 250.

of Armenia remains without a lord.’’<sup>60</sup> It may merit consideration that while this passage immediately follows one describing the lamentations of women, the phrasing of this particular sentence does not eliminate the possibility that men too may have participated in these displays. This potentiality aside, the continuator returns his attention to the newly widowed princess, and quotes of her a lengthy monologue eulogizing her husband:

The princess, who had trusted in the invincible power of the mighty [prince], said: ‘Why, Oh men, and for what reason did you have the arrogance to do this? There are no enemies anywhere; no war has engulfed [us] from anywhere. Who dared to do this? Who could seize my golden-feathered champion and noble cock, or trap him in a snare, without himself being torn apart and killed? Who was able to bring low the high-flying eagle with his resounding and fearsome cry? Who could approach and bridle the unconquered dragon, and survive?’ Such words as these, and even more, did the princess address to the mourners.<sup>61</sup>

The monologue of Princess Sop‘i satisfies several requirements of acceptable femininity for the medieval Armenian cleric to endorse. Principally, it avers her loyalty to her fallen husband: a requisite element of performed lamentation by a woman recently widowed or otherwise deprived of her husband. The author makes unequivocal the fidelity of the princess, specifying that she “had trusted in the invincible power” of her deceased husband.<sup>62</sup> Secondly, Sop‘i performs a function perhaps more vital than the demonstration of marital allegiance: the preservation of masculinity.

According to the account of the chronicler, Sop‘i likens her husband to a cockerel, an eagle, and a dragon, illustrating throughout the masculine symbology of each and, it follows, the import of such entailed traits to Armenian constructions of masculinity. Though such constructs have been previously assessed in the preceding chapter, the

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<sup>60</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 1] III.29, p. 329.

<sup>61</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 1] III.29, p. 329.

<sup>62</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 1] III.29, p. 329.

present will revisit this material with the objective of examining its reflections of femininity. In particular, it will draw attention to paradigms of motherhood and the role thereof in preserving, recirculating, and intergenerationally communicating masculinity. Medieval Armenian abstractions of masculinity relied necessarily upon women and the preservation of archetypes gendered feminine, most prominently the maternal. A central function of motherhood was the maintenance and propagation of masculinity, transmitted from cultivated mother to fallow son, as it was constituted in the medieval Armenian consciousness. Incumbent upon a medieval Armenian mother—especially one of noble birth—was to inculcate her son with the heritage of Armenian masculinity insofar as that very masculine construct sustained the dynastic class and each of its constituent houses. Mothers, then, were automatically entrusted with this responsibility, and essentially vested as the guardians of masculinity. Particularly notable amid Sop‘i’s eulogy are the parallels drawn to birds of prey, as the Artsruni house derived its name from the Armenian *artsiw* (eagle) according to Movsēs Khorenats‘i.<sup>63</sup> Thus, Sop‘i’s spoken lamentation summons these visuals to evoke not only a generic masculine dominance, but, further, that imagistically unique to the Artsruni Dynasty. In so doing, the Artsruni-sponsored continuator to T‘ovma’s history reifies, through Sop‘i as conduit, the legacy of Artsruni masculinity. In specifying these terms of masculinity, equating her husband to as virile a creature as a cockerel, a dragon, and an eagle, Sop‘i concretizes for posterity the reputation of her fallen husband as a valiant defender of house and nation, conserving it as a model of both essential masculinity and familial valor for her sons to emulate. By channeling this message through female oratory, the continuator asserts that the

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<sup>63</sup> MX II.7, p. 135.

preservation of masculine rectitude in Armenian collective memory, along with the authority over its intergenerational transmission, resides rightly in the domain of the feminine.

It appears from T'ovma's text that it was perfunctorily the women of a noble house (and, feasibly, of any family irrespective of social class) who assumed responsibility for such internal matters as funerary proceedings. Prevailing in his attention to the princess Sop'i, the continuator writes: "Summoning her daughters, she prescribed rites of mourning and arranged in groups Jewish singers, and had them chant the laments of the kings of Israel."<sup>64</sup> Sop'i then resumes her mournful oration, once again accentuating her grief for the assembled spectators and attendees to witness. The continuator records her address as follows: "... Until God gives me among my sons one as courageous as his father, who in my lifetime or thereafter will declare over his tomb that he will take revenge for the spilt blood of his father on the heads of those who plunged me into this darkness."<sup>65</sup> It is further elaborated that "when the princess said this she stretched out her hand onto the shoulder of the splendid young Gagik. But I do not know if this was for the occasion, or whether the great lady Sop'i, blessed among women, did this prophetically."<sup>66</sup> The prophecy alluded to in this case is the nascent heroism of their son, Gagik Artsruni. The inclusion of this declaration, accentuated by the author's recognition of Sop'i's virtue, substantiates that the continuation of constructed masculinity through the edification of sons depended explicitly on the instructive activities of the archetypal mother (to be explored extensively below). Thus, the

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<sup>64</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 1] III.29, p. 330.

<sup>65</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 1] III.29, p. 330.

<sup>66</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 1] III.29, p. 330.



perpetuation of masculinity relied imperatively upon that of femininity as an autonomous apparatus with its own requisite functions formulated to sustain masculine order. The construct of femininity, and the perpetuation thereof, was essential to the proliferation of masculinity and was actively cultivated for this purpose. A symbiotic gender dichotomy, then, reinforced and propagated itself across the dynastic period. This mutualistic cycle, in turn, served to perpetuate the *nakharar* class and, by extension, the Armenian nation politically organized around it.<sup>67</sup>

Eight centuries after the codification of Nersēsian law, the injunction against excessive mourning endures so persistently that T‘ovma’s continuator yields to a perceived obligation to absolve the princess of the very sin through which he attests her virtue: “But then the ranks of patriarchs and hermits bestirred the minds of the princess and the other mourners to the fear of God, and gradually drove away the misery of their bitter distress.”<sup>68</sup> The “fear of God” to which the continuator refers is the Nersēsian mandate against such mournful excess; the addendum that Princess Sop‘i renounces her lamentation at the encouragement of the clergy exonerates her of so flagrant a sin and purifies her of any ensuing disgrace. It appears that Sop‘i is a favored figure of the continuator, possibly a patron to the continuation of the text or a relative thereof.

Conformity to established gender dynamics is evaluated upon and socially enforced through ritualized demonstrations. The public performance of grief is consistently typified by medieval Armenian chroniclers as a quintessentially feminine behavior and, further, an integral component to feminine virtue. Ritual mourning is, then,

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<sup>67</sup> “*Nakharar* class” as defined by Nina Garsoian, “Naxarar,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, last modified July 20, 2005, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/naxarar>.

<sup>68</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 1] III.29, p. 331.

inextricably entangled with gender as a binary construct and with the virtuous feminine as an imagined ideal. It is plausible, however, that a proneness to mourn excessively—and, it follows, to violate in so doing the exalted canon law of the Armenians’ most revered patristic figure—emerges as a characteristic to be perhaps not praised but pitied. Such inclinations may present not as indicators of feminine strength but, rather, weakness; it is perhaps the characteristic incapacity of women to contain their emotions, rather than their deliberately performed virtue, that is emphasized as the more salient component of femininity.

In a chapter subsequent to his encomium of Princess Sop‘i, T‘ovma’s continuator returns to the prophesied excellence of her young son, Gagik Artsruni: “The renowned lady Sop‘i oversaw the remarkable progress of her children, especially that of the young Gagik; for even from that young age he shone out with wonderful *éclat* among his brothers. On seeing this, the princess took hope and steadied her heart; and he ruled his principality like a man with the help of her father Ashot, king of Armenia.”<sup>69</sup> This epilogue to the martyrdom of Derenik credits Sop‘i, caricatured into an exemplar of idealized Armenian femininity, with the ultimate triumph of the Artsruni Dynasty and exalts her as a model for subsequent generations of Armenian noblewomen. In this way, feminine and masculine concepts of virtue are inextricably entangled to ensure in concert the continuity of the Armenian nation. In successfully cultivating so formidable an heir, Sop‘i fulfills her purpose as an archetypal noblewoman and mother.

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<sup>69</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 2] IV.1, p. 332.

The continuator, thus, content to conclude Sop‘i’s account, brings this episode to a satisfying close for both audience and patron: “Now Sop‘i herself, incomparable among women like the turtledove devoted to its mate, separated herself from all delights of this earthly existence; being so attached [to her husband], her heart was unable to endure the pain, and after seven months she peacefully departed this world to sleep with her ancestors, leaving her children young and tender in age.”<sup>70</sup> The passage extols Sop‘i once again for her flawless enactment of marital and maternal paradigms, and includes here a commendation of her righteous austerity – a virtue against which both the Armenian masculine and feminine are measured. The loss of her husband so profoundly devastates the princess that in response she eschews all sensory pleasures, wholly detaching herself from the material absent the treasured spousal companionship that tethered her thereto. In so doing, Sop‘i demonstrates her virtue as both wife and mother. To this end the continuator employs another avian simile; just as he depicts the masculine Gagik as a virile bird of prey, he likens the superlatively feminine Sop‘i to a gentle and delicate turtledove – a species distinguished by its devout commitment in coupling.<sup>71</sup> The application of avian imagery to nobles of the Artsruni is acute and unmistakable. Such allusions follow perhaps the direct request of the continuator’s patron and would constitute common referential knowledge to a contemporaneous audience conversant in Armenian literary conventions and dynastic politics. The continuator has, through exalting Sop‘i as an exemplar of optimal femininity, performed his duty to his patrons: by his pen she embodies the moral virtues of marital devotion and maternal regency so

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<sup>70</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 2] IV.1, pp. 332-333.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Thomson draws additional attention to the topology of the turtledove in classical rhetoric; see TA [Anonymous Continuator 2] IV.1, p. 332 (see n. 5).

highly revered in the medieval Armenian ethos. Sop‘i is thus immortalized as the essential feminine: guardian of both dynasty and nation.

Commissioned histories of the Armenian nobility will continue throughout the period to extol the temperance of their sponsoring houses through exaltation of their women, particularly the mothers of patrons and royals, and more particularly on the occasions of their death – signifying the completion of their temporal course in unblemished virtue. Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i writes, in the tenth century, of a mother to the Bagratuni brothers Sahak and Vasak: “Here, their mother, who was the sister of king Smbat, and a woman renowned among the ascetics for her virtuous and most holy manner of life, died.”<sup>72</sup> Almost a century thereafter, Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i will translate such glorifications onto the mother of King Abas Artsruni: “Then the mother of king Abas, a pious princess from pious parents ... laid down her earthly crown, and reckoning as nothing the transient glories, pursued the heavenly [crown]. She embarked upon the monastic life; she went and settled at the site which is called T‘rinvank‘ ... She applied herself to prayer, good works and spiritual virtue.”<sup>73</sup>

The feminine dedication to raising sons for service to Armenian Christendom as a particular aspect of national preservation resounds through later centuries, as the collective historical memory of the patriarch Esayi confirms. Writing c. 925, Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i narrates the determination of Esayi’s mother to ensure her son’s ascent through the clerical hierarchy: “It is narrated that he was the only child of a widow; reduced to a state of penury and wandering around with her suckling babe seeking alms,

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<sup>72</sup> YD XLVII, p. 172.

<sup>73</sup> ST III.17, p. 249.

the woman attached herself to the house of the *katholikos*, and remained there unnoticed by most people. Since she never departed from the gates of the temple of the Lord, she was benumbed by the winter cold and parched by the summer sun.”<sup>74</sup> Esayi’s unnamed mother so relentlessly pursues her son’s ecclesial career that she perseveres, as do the noblewomen of Ghazar and Eghishē (to be explored below), through climatological extremes and resultant physiological distress to achieve her objective. She is then questioned by the parish priest of her convictions: “...‘Why do you lodge in the open air and suffer with your suckling babe all the harshness of the elements, which you could avoid by seeking shelter with anyone?’”<sup>75</sup> The determined mother replies: “‘Don’t you realize that I am nursing my son here with the expectation that he may become *katholikos*?’”<sup>76</sup> Hovhannēs then praises the resolve of the widow, writing of her: “The woman was almost like a prophetess concerning her child, for after being nourished and educated in the same patriarchate, he was first elevated to the episcopal rank, and then summoned to the august patriarchal office.”<sup>77</sup>

A similar account appears within a century of Hovhannēs’s – that of Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i, who records c. 1004 the same episode in nearly identical detail:

He was the only son of a widow, who through poverty became a beggar; with the child at her breast, she became attached to the house of the palace of the catholicos. And she did not enter under its roof but, afflicted with great heat and cold, she ministered at the doors of the church. The priests asked her, ‘Why are you suffering in this way?’ And she said, ‘Do you not know that I am nourishing my young child for the sake of the office of catholicos?’ He was brought up in the same church and became first bishop of Goł‘n, and then catholicos of Armenia.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> YD XXIII, p. 113.

<sup>75</sup> YD XXIII, p. 113.

<sup>76</sup> YD XXIII, p. 113.

<sup>77</sup> YD XXIII, p. 113.

<sup>78</sup> ST II.2, p. 172.

Both Hovhannēs and Step‘anos adhere to a familiar didactic pattern, praising the feminine virtue of unwavering maternal commitment to patrilineal success undeterred by environmental hazards and abject poverty that could be otherwise evaded in idle comfort.

A variation on this trope appears in the historical text (dated controversially to the tenth century) of the Pseudo-Hovhan Mamikonean, who relates the tenacious pursuit by a noblewoman called Mariam of access to the relics at Glakavank‘. The resident monks deny her entry, citing a canonical prohibition against women’s handling of or even proximity to the relics of saints.<sup>79</sup> Notwithstanding the reality that many of the relics venerated by the Armenians are themselves body parts or belongings of women, it is clear that the literate clergy of medieval Armenia grappled strenuously with the relationship of femininity to divine objects. It appears female bodies can be (in whole or in part) the sacrosanct objects, or can retrieve the objects as did the hallowed St. Helena, but cannot profane with their vulgar presence the sanctity of those objects once recovered, restored, and deposited in their respective reliquaries. In compromise, Mariam’s infant son is admitted without objection: “But they did take the infant from the Lady’s embrace, and brought him into the church, and before the holy altar, they had him offer obeisance before the Lord.”<sup>80</sup> Though, lamentably, Mariam incurs the consequence of death for her insubordination, the Pseudo-Hovhan later notes that her child eventually ascends to supreme patriarchal rank and ultimately achieves the abbotship of the very monastery that his mother so audaciously trespassed. In this way, the immodest and obstinate Mariam is afforded some measure of posthumous dignity, her recalcitrance

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<sup>79</sup> Ps. Y. III, p. 87 (see n. 299).

<sup>80</sup> Ps. Y. V, p. 107.

cleansed from her legacy and recompensed with the eminence achieved by her son. This accomplishment is itself, even in the estimation of the exclusively male cohort of traditors, the fruition of the virtuous feminine, which has successfully equipped the child through maternal cultivation for success in such prestigious clerical office.<sup>81</sup>

The story of Esayi departs, however, from its fifth- and sixth-century antecedents at Awarayr in its enhanced emphasis on ecclesial rather than dynastic preservation. Both having developed amid a clerical hierarchy that prioritized church over dynasty, and neither loyal to a particular house or yoked to its narrative under contract of patronage, both Pseudo-Ḥovhan and Step‘anos exhibit reverence for the preservation of Armenian Christendom in a manner afforded only secondary consideration by Ghazar and Eghishē – both of whom, while similarly edified within the clerical hierarchy, labored under Mamikonean patronage and were therefore beholden to its prescribed dynastic narrative. The source material recounting the Awarayr narratives weights the mothers’ virtue on their preservation of patrilineage, while those of latter centuries prioritize in value the preservation of the Armenian nation not through dynastic continuity but through institutionalized Christianity – now its sole anchor to any distinct identity amidst domination by their imposing foreign occupants (most consequentially—by contrast to the initial Zoroastrian suzerain—the Arabs and, later, the Turks).

### The Mantle of Masculinity

Especially productive for the analysis of gender constructs in medieval Armenia—particularly in analyzing maternity—are the near-coeval manuscripts of

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<sup>81</sup> For a more detailed analysis of this passage, see Alison M. Vacca, “Death at the Door of the Karapet: Gendered Space, Masculinity, the Breastfeeding Mother, and Cultic Competition in Late Antique Tarōn,” *Journal of Late Antique, Islamic and Byzantine Studies* 1, nos. 1-2 (2022): 41-64. I am grateful to the author for providing this article to me in advance of its publication.

Ghazar and Eghishē. Each of these texts narrates the Armenians' astonishing resistance against the Persians at the 451 Battle of Awarayr, each containing florid passages that illuminate the mundanities, observances, routines, and communities of Armenian women. Most peculiarly, both texts dramatically belabor the resolute endurance of abject misfortune—determined by their diminished station and reduced standard of living—as a cryptic marker of feminine virtue exhibited by the wives of Armenian war captives. Zaroui Pogossian has previously characterized the presentation of these women by Ghazar and Eghishē as virtually hagiographical, terming them “mother-martyrs” and their position within the Armenian family cell “sainthood.”<sup>82</sup> Chronologically the earlier of the two, dated to the late fifth or early sixth century, the *History of Ghazar P'arpets'i* articulates the association between marriage, femininity, and moral virtue.<sup>83</sup> Of the women deprived of their husbands by Persian captors, Ghazar writes: “Likewise the women whose husbands had been martyred, and other women whose husbands were imprisoned in Hrev, surpassed each other in purity and virtue, dying every day to their bodily passions.”<sup>84</sup>

In connecting “purity” and “virtue,” as well as in qualifying this relationship by the containment of corporal desires (left unspecified perhaps so as to render the connotation intentionally vague), Ghazar reinforces the medieval Armenian preoccupation with asceticism and its association to moral superiority. This association applies evenly to both men and women, and will be examined more intricately in a forthcoming chapter. Ghazar goes on to designate these women “living martyrs” in

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<sup>82</sup> Pogossian, “Women at the Beginning,” 375-379.

<sup>83</sup> For the dating of this text relative to Eghishē's, see Robert Thomson's introduction to the English translation as well as Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 31-35.

<sup>84</sup> Ghazar III.61, p. 161.



recognition of their marital sacrifice, his operant subtext being that deprivation of husband—and, perhaps, the subsequent revocation of nuptial station or mitigation of marital function within the vital family unit as protector of both dynasty and nation—constitutes a sacrifice so insufferable as to approximate death in severity.<sup>85</sup> Eghishē, whose account Robert Thomson dates to the sixth century, echoes Ghazar’s praises of the women’s virtue: “Although their minds were thus agitated from every side, they did not lose heart or slacken in heavenly virtue.”<sup>86</sup> To this effect, Zaroui Pogossian likens the ascetic continence of the Awarayr wives to that of the Gayianeank’, drawing the parallel that the former group exhibits this ascetic martyrdom in mortal matrimony and the latter does so while consecrated in terrestrial celibacy to Christ.<sup>87</sup>

Ghazar’s exaltation of the women then takes a curious turn. While recognizing (both previous to this passage and following it) the constructed distinctions between women and men, Ghazar collapses the two into a single complementary unit necessary for the righteous endurance of suffering essential to martyrdom. Referring again to the abandoned women enduring the agony of their husbands’ absence, he writes that “no word can describe precisely the severe austerities of their lives, which surpassed those of many men.”<sup>88</sup> In describing the tribulations of the women, and the strength required for them to successfully endure their adversity, Ghazar attaches greater weight to the dispossession of husband than to the trauma of captivity experienced by the men themselves. He elaborates upon the reversal of male and female characteristics and the eclipse of masculine potency by feminine durability: “Rendering the natural weakness of

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<sup>85</sup> Ghazar III.61, p. 161.

<sup>86</sup> Eghishē VII, p. 248; see Robert Thomson’s introduction to the text, p. 23, regarding its date of origin.

<sup>87</sup> Pogossian, “Women at the Beginning,” 375-376.

<sup>88</sup> Ghazar III.61, p. 161.

women's bodies stronger than men's, they were gloriously victorious.”<sup>89</sup> Eghishē will later assert perhaps more emphatically the same idea: “Let a wife strive with her husband,” the chronicler cites of the ethos that matrimonially bound the Armenian masculine and feminine in their righteous resistance against Persian subjugation.<sup>90</sup> Eghishē continues, further stressing the fusion of the two genders that anchor the binary even to the extent of rendering women linguistically masculinized: “When this had been so confirmed and established, they all mustered armed and helmeted, girt with a sword and shield in hand, not only valiant men but also virile women.”<sup>91</sup>

Armenian precedent exists for the narrative masculinization of women. In the fifth century, Agat'angeghos writes of the martyrdom of Hrip'simē at the hands of King Trdat, who fails in his efforts to dominate the young woman due her fortification through Christ:

When the king entered, he seized her in order to work his lustful desires. But she, strengthened by the holy spirit, struggled like a beast and fought like a man. They fought from the third hour until the tenth and she vanquished the king who was renowned for his incredible strength. While he was in the Greek empire he had shown such bodily strength that everyone had been amazed; and in his own realm, when he had returned to his native land, he had shown there too many deeds of mighty valor. And he, who was so famous in every respect, now was vanquished and worsted by a single girl through the will and power of Christ.<sup>92</sup>

Agat'angeghos again emphasizes the intervention of Christ in virilizing Hrip'simē, repeating later in his narrative that “such a powerful soldier and strong of body, by the will of God was defeated by a single girl.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Ghazar III.61, p. 161.

<sup>90</sup> Eghishē III, p. 109.

<sup>91</sup> Eghishē III, p. 109.

<sup>92</sup> Agat'angeghos § 181, pp. 189-191.

<sup>93</sup> Agat'angeghos § 202, p. 209.

Agat'angeghos insistently perseverates on the supernatural fortification of Hrip'simē, recurrently presenting and reiterating precise details of her struggle against the impious king:

But (Rhipsimē) was still fighting with the king from the tenth hour of the day until the first evening watch, and she overcame him. The maiden was strengthened by the holy Spirit; she struck him, chased him and overcame him; she wore the king out, weakened him and felled him. She stripped the king naked of his clothes; she tore his robes and threw away his royal diadem, leaving him covered with shame. And although her own clothes had been torn to shreds by him, yet when she went out she still victoriously retained her purity.<sup>94</sup>

Again purity is connected to masculine strength and virtue amid a context of religious struggle and, more precisely, martyrdom. In resisting an eminently more powerful aggressor, Hrip'simē demonstrates the masculinity conferred upon her by the omnipotent Christian God. Underlying this passage is the indissoluble relationship between sexual purity, masculine vigor, and feminine virtue: that to struggle in defense of one's sexual purity, which must remain intact until conjugal union either with mortal husband or with Christ upon resurrection, is to assume masculine qualities in order to protect it, and that to assume such masculinities produces a uniquely feminine act of virtue. Commenting on both hagiographical conventions generally and, specifically, the martyrdom of Hrip'simē, Zaroui Pogossian qualifies death in defense of chastity a female saint's "supreme apostolic act."<sup>95</sup> The retention of sexual purity through physical resistance borrows (or else is supplied through faith in God) masculinity so as to integrate the two flanks of the gender binary into a union sufficient to activate both the defense of Christian faith and the communal worship of God. Thus, a woman's struggle to retain sexual purity

<sup>94</sup> Agat'angeghos § 191, pp. 197-199.

<sup>95</sup> Pogossian, "Women at the Beginning," 361; for consecrated virginity in early medieval Armenia, see Pogossian, "Female Asceticism," 178-179.

illustrates in the totality of its action the defense and practice of faith by both masculine and feminine constitutions. Agat'angeghos narrates: "But as for saint Rhipsimē, you yourselves know how the Lord preserved her and saved her from your hands, from impious pollution. And you yourself know the measure of the strength and firmness of your own bones, how you became weakened in front of a single girl. For the power of the Lord of all, Christ, preserved her."<sup>96</sup> The preservation of virginity, then, represents the obligatorily feminine conservation of family, dynasty, and nation, which cannot survive absent the certainty of a woman's inviolacy from foreign transgression – both those foreign of faith and of nation.

Eghishē again resumes his insistence upon the compulsory masculinity improvised by the valiant women, now amplified in the absence of their husbands: "As for the wives of the blessed heroes and prisoners and of those who fell in the war... All of them without exception exhibited a heavenly zeal ... like laboring men used to peasant tasks they endured the toils of country life, and even more than their husbands accepted and sustained such labors."<sup>97</sup> Eghishē's insistence on the alleged virility of these women further extends the thematic legacy of Ghazar in constructing medieval Armenian conceptions of gender, its demarcations, and the larger societal structures that it supports. Eghishē even proclaims unequivocally that the abandoned noblewomen, under circumstances of dire necessity, exchanged their feminine gender identity for that of men: "They forgot their feminine weakness and became men heroic at spiritual warfare."<sup>98</sup> In divesting themselves of their feminine frailty—amid a context in which frailty is coded as

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<sup>96</sup> Agat'angeghos § 233, p. 233.

<sup>97</sup> Eghishē VII, pp. 243-244.

<sup>98</sup> Eghishē VII, p. 246.

feminine, and feminine as frail in turn—the women figuratively transform themselves into men by assuming the armor of virtuous strength, resilience, and faith. Notably, their enlistment to “spiritual warfare” purifies them of their enfeebling femininity and renders them virtuously masculine, as medieval Armenian cosmogony deems spiritual struggle and domestic defense inherently masculine virtues. By another interpretation, one might characterize their transformation of gender not as an enhancement of or purification from femineity but, rather, an escape from the gender binary entirely – an act that enables these women to access masculinity and thereby harness the full complementarity of an otherwise dichotomized circuit in defense of faith and nation.

In this respect, Eghishē entrusts to the abandoned women during crisis the mantle of masculinity, shared in equal measure with the inescapable obligations of femininity that remain incumbent upon them as they struggle with both spiritual defense and national preservation through the edification of sons. This contradicts Ghazar, who, despite his praise of the women in their essentialized feminine virtue, does not confer upon women any such applications of masculinity. Rather, Ghazar often laments the feminine condition, resigning himself to its inherent impotency and, in fact, frequently citing its intrinsic deficits. Eghishē, who overtly expresses a more favorable disposition toward femininity, expounds further upon the unity in purpose and relational equanimity among men and women in an earlier passage: “Then they each abandoned their villages, towns, and estates. Brides left their chambers and grooms their rooms; old men fell from their chairs and infants from their [mothers’] bosoms. Young men and maidens and the whole populace of men and women went out and occupied the safe parts of the desert and

the secure places of numerous mountains.”<sup>99</sup> Interlacing once again the women’s virtuous devotion in marriage, Eghishē laments the suspended (perhaps even unconsummated) marriages, and associates despair in their separation more as the women’s tragedy than the men’s: “The hangings and bed curtains of the newly married brides became dusty and sooty; spiders’ webs were spun in their nuptial chambers.”<sup>100</sup> Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i will later lament in parallel verbiage of women’s spousal deprivations: “The containers of their ornaments stood in sorrow, and the vessels of their dining tables were left in disorder. Their nuptial chambers were filled with smoke.”<sup>101</sup> Over a century later, documenting identical effects of the Seljuq invasions, Aristakēs Lastiverts‘i will mourn: “What shall I say about brides in [the wedding] chamber about grooms on the nuptial-couch...”<sup>102</sup>

Noteworthy, however, is Eghishē’s consciousness of contemporaneous attitudes toward women, against their apparent opposition to his own, that permeated medieval Armenian society. He quotes of the embattled Armenian noblemen defying the Persian edict to apostatize: “...For even if our brave heroes fell in the great battle, and ... all our delicate Armenian women have fallen prey to dangerous afflictions and terrible deprivations—we shall not obey your deceitful commands or submit to your impious princes.”<sup>103</sup> Eghishē, despite his egalitarian optimism, clarifies that he remains acutely aware of the social attitudes of his contemporaries: that women are “delicate” and vulnerable to the “deprivations” of invading forces who, by default of their alterity, covet

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<sup>99</sup> Eghishē VI, p. 176.

<sup>100</sup> Eghishē VII, p. 245

<sup>101</sup> YD XLVI, p. 171.

<sup>102</sup> AL X, pp. 55-56.

<sup>103</sup> Eghishē VI, p. 176.

and desire the beauty of the Armenians both male and female (as has been discussed in the previous chapter).<sup>104</sup> This passage also reinforces the assertion by Ghazar, to be addressed below, that it constitutes a masculine virtue to disregard wife, marriage, and the microcosmic family unit in sacrifice of committing one's undivided attention to the collective defense of faith and nation.

### Virtuous Endurance and Feminine Sensoriality

Elaborating upon the virtue of the abandoned noblewomen, Ghazar contrasts their recent plight with reminiscences of an opulent past, aggressively feminizing them to perhaps the extremity of caricature:

Delicate women, daughters of princes and wives of nobles, would eat millet instead of fine wheat flour, would drink water in moderation instead of pure wine, would wear rough wool instead of silken garments embroidered with gold, would lie on the ground on brushwood instead of in elaborate beds. Those who formerly slept late became sleepless like celestial beings. They did not anoint themselves with perfume, they did not arrange the hair of their heads with combs.<sup>105</sup>

Ghazar's report exposes the quotidian experience of Armenian noblewomen and the conditions that comprised their sensory environment. The archetypal Armenian noblewoman, according to Ghazar, would have been accustomed to culinary delicacies prepared with finely milled wheat flour, premium wine, ornate clothing fashioned of luxurious silk, and the comfort of "elaborate beds."<sup>106</sup> They apparently enjoyed, prior to their perdition, the pleasure of sleeping late as well as such cosmetic indulgences as perfume and intricate coiffures. This specific passage alone provides invaluable insight into the lived experiences of Armenian noblewomen. It delivers, in supplement, precious

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<sup>104</sup> Eghishē VI, p. 176.

<sup>105</sup> Ghazar III.61, p. 161.

<sup>106</sup> Ghazar III.61, p. 161.

knowledge about the material culture of early Armenian nobility, the semiotics of the material in influencing the *nakharar* class (which can, in turn, introduce novel information about Armenian integration into local and regional trade networks and the economic and geographic processes by which they acquired these materials), and the sensory culture of nobility in the medieval Middle East. Notably, it substantiates the omneity of wool and the bearing of woolen attire as symbolic of virtuous discomfort. As Ghazar elucidates, this iconography applies symmetrically to women as to men (as identified in the previous chapter).

Similarly, Eghishē reports in his text the condition of the abandoned noblewomen, employing language virtually identical to Ghazar’s and reproducing details of equal character and magnitude. Perhaps the most extraordinary facet of Eghishē’s text, however, is its attention to the circumstances of not exclusively noblewomen, but women of the common class as well. David Zakarian draws scholarly attention to a complex social hierarchy among the women of this society constructed upon each woman’s domestic function and her degree of seclusion therein.<sup>107</sup> Eghishē devotes considerable attention, in fact, to dissolving distinctions between women of noble and common station, highlighting their unity in struggle and the resultant obfuscation of hierarchal stratifications: “For although they each had their domestic servants, none could be distinguished among them as being mistress or maid. All wore the same clothing and both alike slept on the ground. No one made another’s bed, for they did not distinguish one’s straw from another’s. Their mats were the same shade of gray; their pillows the

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<sup>107</sup> Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 153-154.



same shade of black.”<sup>108</sup> Orienting his focus toward the generational diversity among the women, Eghishē further equalizes: “For if some were older and some younger, yet they were clothed with a single virtuous faith. They did not at all recall the memory of the comfort of their matronly nobility....”<sup>109</sup> Eghishē repeats Ghazar’s account of the deprivations imposed upon the women, including mention of their diminished comforts. He specifies a reduction in quality of bedding: while Ghazar reports that the noblewomen were reduced from luxuriating in “elaborate beds” to sleeping “on the ground,” Eghishē embellishes upon these conditions to specify that the beds of women both noble and common were equally furnished of indistinguishably gray straw mats equipped with uniform black pillows.<sup>110</sup>

Eghishē elaborates further upon the details of the women’s perdition:

They had no confectioners for individual delicacies nor separate bakers to serve them in accordance with their noble rank, but they shared all they had. The Friday evening [fast] they observed like solitaries who dwell in the deserts. No one poured water over another’s hands; the younger did not offer the older towels. The delicate women did not use soap, nor were they offered oil for merry feasting. Immaculate dishes were not set before them, nor plates for jollity. No butler stood at their door, and no illustrious men were invited to their homes. Nor did they have any recollection of who was one of their domestic nurses and who one of their dear relations.<sup>111</sup>

Especially resonant of Eghishē’s account is his methodical insistence on the equalization enforced upon the women by their travail. He reiterates the details enumerated by Ghazar, providing in comparable gravity complex insight into the daily sensorialities that characterized their material and aesthetic environment, but in so doing amends each item

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<sup>108</sup> Eghishē VII, pp. 244-245.

<sup>109</sup> Eghishē VII, p. 244.

<sup>110</sup> Ghazar III.61, p. 161; Eghishē VII, pp. 244-245.

<sup>111</sup> Eghishē VII, p. 245.

to display the social reconstitution entailed therein. As Eghishē specifies: noblewomen did not enjoy priority of service—now discontinued—from designated culinary or domestic staff assigned to them due their elevated status, no woman served another (ranked not even according to age), the quality of their food was uniformly demoted across divisions of age and class, noblewomen could no longer anticipate hosting “illustrious men” such as dignitaries or visiting nobles of affiliate houses, and, perhaps most salient among this litany of equilibrating items, none among them retained any memory of the social hierarchy as it had once consisted – former attendants and handmaidens of dynastic women were rendered now equal in status to their own sisters and mothers, their noble birth now erased of its functional value.<sup>112</sup> Curiously, Eghishē’s visible and insistent equilibration of noble and common women appears to defiantly contravene the legal distinctions applied discriminatingly to women of high and low birth in the canon laws issued at Shahapivan in 444 – mere decades before the commencement of his narrative. These canons in numerous instances apply more lenient penalties to women (and men) of aristocratic station, their counterparts of the common class often punished with the corporal violence legislatively inapplicable to propertied dynasts.<sup>113</sup>

Further, Eghishē validates Ghazar’s report that Armenian noblewomen enjoyed such refined extravagances as sumptuous confectionaries, jewelry, hairstyling adornments, aesthetic and olfactory enhancements such as fragrant soaps, oils, and perfumes, and potentially even pigmented cosmetics. “Their treasures were confiscated by the court, and there remained no ornaments at all for their faces.”<sup>114</sup> Contrastingly,

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<sup>112</sup> Eghishē VII, p. 245.

<sup>113</sup> Hovhanessian, “The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan,” 80-84 et passim.

<sup>114</sup> Eghishē VII, p. 245.

Aristakēs Lastiverts‘i will, several centuries later, condemn the “showy immodesty” of women, inculcating them foremostly for the arrogance of humanity: “What shall I say in condemnation of the women? ... I consider arrogance to be the root of all evil, the mother and first cause of it. ... This disease is damaging to all, but especially so to womankind.”<sup>115</sup> Aristakēs proceeds to rebuke the vanity that women exhibit in their sartorial and ornamental ostentation: “First and foremost [women] should be charged with this [fault], and then one might recall their heavy [trains] which they drag along the ground, the earrings, finger-rings, bracelets, the ruffles, necklaces, and everything else.”<sup>116</sup> The contrariety of the two against one another highlights both diversity and consistency of gender attitudes among medieval Armenian clerics – though roughly half a millennium separates the two, the misogyny expressed by Aristakēs is not unique to the literature of latter centuries, and finds obvious precedent in works contemporaneous to Eghishē. Certainly, the values of Aristakēs were informed and influenced by his predecessors, and by theirs in turn, creating over many centuries a genre remarkable for its intra-referentiality and topological recirculation. This derivativity may well issue from direct exposure of Aristakēs to the Awarayr narratives or those that emulated them as discursive models. While Eghishē extols the impressive display of righteousness inherent to these women’s sacrifice, Aristakēs will rebuke them for having ever enjoyed their sensory luxuries.

Eghishē further lionizes the women, stressing their righteous persistence through such challenging conditions – though, curiously, he again renders them sympathetic

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<sup>115</sup> AL XII, pp. 80-81.

<sup>116</sup> AL XII, p. 81.

through an ascription of fragility (issuing a conflation of femininity therewith). Such an appellation contradicts his earlier contentions of female virility, though certainly ingratiate these women to a contemporaneous audience:

The delicate women of Armenia, who had been cossetted and pampered in their litters and sedan-chairs, regularly attended the houses of prayer without shoes and on foot, begging with tireless entreaties that they might be able to endure their great tribulation. Those who from their childhood had been raised on the marrow of steers and the dainty parts of game, most joyfully ate grass, living like wild animals and not at all mindful of their accustomed luxury. The skin of their bodies turned black in color, for by day they were burned by the sun, and the whole night they lay on the ground.<sup>117</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, blackness of pigmentation is considered unattractive and undesirable in a man, possibly even an indicator of defective masculinity and/or dangerous alterity. Sunburn is rendered, however, when earned by a woman, an optical token of virtuous perseverance. To sacrifice the coveted fairness of complexion that epitomizes physical beauty, and to complaisantly embrace such a forfeiture, is to endure selflessly for the preservation of the Armenian nation. The inclination to perceive women as frail or fragile is echoed in the eighth-century chronicle of Ghewond. Of the Arab invasions contemporaneous to his activity, he writes: “Many dainty ladies, unaccustomed to tribulation, were beaten with whips and dragged to the public places only to scream out laments for the unexpected agony.”<sup>118</sup>

For a woman, especially one of noble birth, to descend from such finery and accustom herself to modest austerity—certainly to a diminished quality of life if not reduced summarily to utter squalor—exhibits amid each text a reverence for female endurance of worldly suffering. For Ghazar, that suffering is virtuously endured by

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<sup>117</sup> Eghishē VII, p. 246.

<sup>118</sup> Ghewond 3, p. 51.

noblewomen; for Eghishē, by all women deprived of the vital company of their husbands irrespective of social rank. Eghishē does not limit his egalitarianism solely to the gender binary, but extends this vision across the broader social architecture of feudal Armenia:

Thenceforth the lord seemed no greater than the servant, or the pampered noble than the rough villager, and no one was behind another in valor. One willing heart was shown by all—men and women, old and young, and all those united in Christ. For all together put on the same armor and donned the same breastplate of faith in Christ’s command; with one belt of truth men and women girded their waists.<sup>119</sup>

For Eghishē, a hierarchy leveled in service of advancing Armenian Christendom is as much a signet of virtue as is for Ghazar the sacrifice tendered by these women in aspiration toward national survival. These deprivations are coded symbolic of righteousness, and the patient endurance of such discomforts as exemplarily virtuous. The same ideas will be later expressed by Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i, who writes in the tenth century of the Abbasid persecution of the *nakharars*:

Even women of distinction, such as princesses, were seized by the conquerors. More than ever, they bore the heavy burden of physical toil, and in no way remembered of the luxury of *azat* motherhood which they had enjoyed. Some of them were confined in dark prisons, clad only in cilice and coarse close [sic]. They were handicapped by poverty, and lacked their daily provisions.<sup>120</sup>

In like fashion to Eghishē, his antecedent by some four centuries, Hovhannēs glorifies the suffering of the lower nobility in particular, testifying to their leveled status to that of the *ramik*: “The *azats* enjoyed less tenderness than the unfortunate peasants.”<sup>121</sup> He adds the

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<sup>119</sup> Eghishē III, p. 118.

<sup>120</sup> YD XLVI, p. 171.

<sup>121</sup> YD XLVI, p. 171.

macabre visual that “Certain expectant mothers met their end in unbearable agony, and became their children’s graves.”<sup>122</sup>

### Feminine Failings

Despite his laudations, Ghazar’s words about women do not flatter without exception. He closes his soliloquy by reminding his reader of the most prominent of feminine failings. This betrays Ghazar’s antipathy, however minute, toward women even as he (perhaps at the behest of his patron) extols their virtue as durable defenders of faith and nurturing mothers of nation. In spite of their documented virtues, Ghazar cautions, women bear inherent flaws, recalling Biblical parallels, that ethically subordinate them to the definitional perfection of masculinity (as espoused by classical models of gender with which Armenian scholars were conversant). The totality of the source material enforces an ontological system, continuous over the course of seven centuries, in which individual men may possess faults despite the fundamental purity of their gender while it is, conversely, the natural state of women to be flawed in the ways identified by Ghazar and his peers both past and future. As Zaroui Pogossian has previously observed, the natural predisposition of women to excessive loquacity constitutes a popular trope in early Armenian literature.<sup>123</sup> She cites the following statement by Ghazar: “And what is impossible for women to overcome – speaking too much ... they curbed, and they moderated their tongues from excessive speech.”<sup>124</sup> The author’s commentary recalls his aforementioned praises of the virtuous noblewomen performing righteousness in the absence of their captured husbands, in which Ghazar interjects the qualifier that “These

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<sup>122</sup> YD XLVI, p. 171.

<sup>123</sup> Pogossian, “Women at the Beginning,” 370.

<sup>124</sup> Ghazar III.61, p. 161; Pogossian, “Women at the Beginning,” 370.

were not carefree and frivolous women,” implying that such a quality represents a departure from the natural proclivities of women.<sup>125</sup> This criticism resonates an earlier condemnation of female volubility by Movsēs Khorenats‘i, who praises the foster-daughter of King Trdat, Khosrovidukht, for her virtuous reticence, which he regards in such high esteem that he likens the young maiden to an ascetic: “Similarly his foster-daughter Khosrovidukht was a modest maiden, like a nun, and did not at all have an open mouth like other women.”<sup>126</sup>

Ghazar shortly thereafter reaffirms his disposition toward the inborn characteristics of femininity in a subsequent account. He documents the arrival of Georgian saboteurs who falsely report encouraging news of the Armenian noblemen held captive in Persia. The wives of the detained react impulsively with inordinate jubilation and, in response, hasten to orchestrate their rescue:

But especially when news of their husbands reached the ears of their wives and they heard that they were alive—for these devilish men had spoken that very night about the bond of husband and wife, and had made themselves credible—then their wives did not cease day or night, in accordance with the fickle and unstable nature of women, urging their friends and relatives, their tutors and servants to make haste and go immediately to bring them.<sup>127</sup>

Ghazar toggles instantly between praise of their marital devotion and scorn for their innate feminine volatility. It is this impulsivity, and, by extension, femininity itself, that Ghazar implicates in the events that follow, even causally connecting the positively connoted spousal dedication to the impetuous reactivity he finds so distasteful. In this way, Ghazar codes as negative even the most celebrated of qualities in Armenian women.

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<sup>125</sup> Ghazar III.62, p. 162.

<sup>126</sup> MX II.82, p. 228.

<sup>127</sup> Ghazar III.77, pp. 200-201.

Ghazar further expounds upon the noblewomen's "eagerness and haste and impatience—which flamed like a furnace in their minds and which no one could calm," and the catalysis of such reckless spontaneity to impelling the (ordinarily circumspect) commander Vahan Mamikonean to action.<sup>128</sup> The annalist continues: "But then these thoughtless and light-minded men, and especially the wives of the heroes and their families and tutors, persuaded the Mamikonean noble Mušel."<sup>129</sup>

Ghazar proceeds to another event illustrating the follies of femininity, this time one resulting in their own capture. Invading the lands of the Armenians, the Persian commander Hazarawukht encounters the wives of the noblemen Nerseh and Hrahat Kamsarakan. "Seizing the wives of the two Kamsarakan brothers, Nerseh and Hrahat, they took them to the Persian camp."<sup>130</sup> The narrative then takes a curious turn: despite their detainment, the Kamsarakan noblewomen are protected—perhaps even pampered—by their Persian captors. "When he discovered that the Kamsarakan women were really their wives, he greatly rejoiced in his mind... He ordered the wives of the two Kamsarakan to be guarded honourably and with all respect according to the Christian religion, as he had accurately heard."<sup>131</sup> As David Zakarian speculates, the depiction of Persian benevolence is, in all likelihood, strategically inserted into the narrative so as to posthumously corroborate the purity of the Kamsarakan noblewomen and to dispel any collective historical suspicion of their sexual violation.<sup>132</sup> To assert that the captured noblewomen were treated with dignity by the Persians is, for Ghazar, to preserve the

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<sup>128</sup> Ghazar III.77, p. 201.

<sup>129</sup> Ghazar III.77, p. 202.

<sup>130</sup> Ghazar III.79, p. 204.

<sup>131</sup> Ghazar III.79, p. 204.

<sup>132</sup> Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 202-203.



purity of the Kamsarakan brothers' wives—illustrious noblewomen—in narrative posterity.

According to Ghazar's account, the Persian king Shapuh attempts to leverage the captured wives of the Kamsarakan brothers in exchange for Armenian submission to Persian dominion and a national resumption of Zoroastrianism. Ghazar inserts this suggestion into the very mouths of the detained women:

For the wives of the Kamsarakan often said the same thing, frankly and out-loud: 'If you really wish to subject our husbands, merely have them informed that we are unmolested. Then whatever you command them they will heed and perform. For we are telling you what all Armenians know, and the Armenians here among you can testify, that they [our husbands] know no other women except us. But if they hear anything else about us, of outrage or shame—let alone of sin or immorality in the eyes of our religion—they will rather risk death and perish.'<sup>133</sup>

The Kamsarakan wives entrust their confidence in the virtue of marital loyalty and the sanctity of the matrimonial bond, which occupies a privileged position amid the hierarchy of feminine priorities. This faith, however, is immediately betrayed by their husbands, who share no such attachment to the nuptial union. In response to Shapuh's invitation to the Kamsarakan brothers to collect their wives in exchange for unmitigated subjection, the Kamsarakan decline, citing as paramount their love for God above that for all Earthly valuables – including family:

“Our efforts and concern are not for any earthly pleasures, nor for wife or son—which seem to you weighty and important. ... To us in our love for such an awesome mystery all the various pleasures of this life seem small and of no account—the world, and wives, and possessions, and magnificence. For if we did not see for certain that heaven and earth and everything in them are not comparable to that excellence which we desire, we would not be so senseless as not to be able to deceive you like those other parasites among you, and to take a measure of ashes and give them to one of our maids to sully as she might wish. ... But as for our wives, we give you a sign, and do you test and examine it well.

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<sup>133</sup> Ghazar III.80, p. 205.

For if we really endure this tribulation for the faith ... and [if] our efforts are pleasing and acceptable to the true God, he will rescue us from our tribulation, keep our wives completely inviolate, and restore them to us. But if such does not occur, we shall blame our own lack of faith and not your violence or threats.”<sup>134</sup>

In quoting the response of the Kamsarakan brothers to the Persian king, Ghazar illuminates the severe contrast between the masculine and feminine approaches to conjugal unity. While a devotion to the marital covenant is a requisite virtue of femininity, one to be unquestioningly adhered to and resolutely pursued, it is best disregarded by men, whose energies are explicitly directed toward more inherently masculine pursuits such as the political and military defense of the Armenian nation and its Christian faith. Dedication to the sacrament of marriage is, thus, an essentially feminine characteristic, while it is projected as decidedly masculine to dispense with such frivolities in favor of martial action or, as for the Kamsarakan brothers, passive resistance. To entrust their faith in the Christian God, the Kamsarakan purportedly inform Shapuh, is sufficient to defend their wives. They, as men, need not concern themselves with the defense of wife, marriage, or family – these are necessarily the responsibilities of women and the rightful domain of femininity. To abstain from mortal intervention, then, becomes the feat of faith that will exhibit as victorious the power of the Abrahamic God over their Zoroastrian adversaries.

Somewhat contradictorily, roughly one century prior, the *Buzandaran*—potentially (though not conclusively) commissioned under patronage of the Mamikonean noble house that sponsored the narratives of Ghazar and Eghishē—rebukes the defector Garegin ʔshtuni for abandoning his wife, Hamazaspuhi of the very same Mamikonean

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<sup>134</sup> Ghazar III.80, pp. 206-207.

Dynasty, amid a Persian offensive: “Her husband Garegin fled and left her at the time that Šapuh king of Persia came to the land of Armenia, but the lady of Rštunik‘ [remained] in the citadel of the fortress of Van, which was a city in the district of Tosb.”<sup>135</sup> Hamazaspuhi is later martyred at the hands of invading Persian forces, while Garegin is later dismembered—his corpse and legacy desecrated—in retribution by her kinsman identified as Danun.<sup>136</sup> It appears, however, that Garegin’s spousal desertion is condemned not for its abdication of the marital covenant, which belongs decidedly in the domain of the feminine, but for its effective humiliation of dynasty (particularly that possibly sponsoring the narrative) and gentry as a class. He abandons his wife and the sacrament of their marital bond not as an exhibit of pious Christian fortitude as in the case of Ghazar’s Kamsarakan captives but, rather, as a selfish and self-preserving act of cowardice. Garegin’s actions reflect thusly his impaired masculinity, not only unable but wholly unwilling to protect house and clan – the constituent units that ultimately compose the Armenian nation and its vital national faith. This display undermines the tenet so crucial to *nakharar* cosmology—that of dynastic and national preservation—that it manifests itself as a defining incumbency upon the Armenian feminine. Garegin has committed the unforgivable sin of abandoning the covenant forged by the Armenian Church with his wife, with her Mamikonean kin, and with the broader Armenian nation whose very survival depends upon the fulfillment of such contracts. Garegin, then, is dishonored in narrative (through vivid construal of his gruesome demise) not for his

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<sup>135</sup> BP IV.lix, p. 179; though no known patron is identified of the *Buzandaran*, its perspicuous bias toward the contemporaneously potent Mamikonean Dynasty makes plausible the suggestion of its composition under Mamikonean sponsorship.

<sup>136</sup> BP V.xxxvii, p. 220.

nonconcern with his wife's perdition, but for his abdication of the responsibilities entrusted to him by faith, by family, and by virtue of his masculinity.

Eghishē, by contrast, ascribes this virtue to the women, even virilizing them to a considerable degree. It is unclear whether Eghishē intends once again to wrest masculine virtue away from the men and bestow it upon their wives, as he has done previously, or whether he designs deliberately to masculinize the women independently of their husbands. In the following quotation, the women's actions precisely mirror the sacrificial behavior of the men so exhaustively praised by Ghazar, wherein concern for wife and family is dismissed and relinquished to the will of God. This surrender represents an act of resolute Christian devotion – one that is coded as virtuously masculine. Presented in contrast as more characteristically feminine, even if approvingly so, is to impulsively yearn for the marital partner: “No more were they accustomed to ask a visitor from afar: ‘When shall we be able to see our dear ones?’ But the desire of their prayers to God was that, as they had begun, so they might be able valiantly to complete [their course] full of heavenly love.”<sup>137</sup> Eghishē here demonstrates that, like the virtuously faithful men who deny their terrestrial anxieties even for wife and family, the women too are capable of resisting their own anguished desperation for marital reunion. Righteously, as Eghishē contends, they entrust their faith in God for their husbands' safe return (as do, reciprocally, their husbands according to Ghazar), and faithfully endure with pious patience their Earthly tribulation – disavowing, hence, the temporal for the eternal. It is

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<sup>137</sup> Eghishē VII, p. 248.

this virtuous endurance that enables these women without distraction to perform their feminine obligations for the preservation of dynasty, nation, and faith.

### Conclusion

Unlike masculinity, femininity is largely coded not by physical aesthetics but, contrastingly, by behavior. Female virtue is inscribed around the apparatus of family and a woman's position therein. Foundational to the medieval Armenian construct of femininity is the responsibility to preserve, maintain, and reinforce the family structure trans-generationally as daughters, wives, mothers, and even martyrs. They did so through the exhibition of loyalty, dedication, and sacrifice in each of these capacities. It is not unlikely these episodes demonstrating the feminine virtue of loyalty were transmitted as scripting materials (both written and oral) to provide young Armenian noblewomen as models of femininity to emulate in their own behavior. Zaroui Pogossian and, scaffolding therefrom, David Zakarian agree that the typology of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* notably provide the foundational template over which later hagiographical topoi specific to female martyrs were packaged and transmitted for this purpose.<sup>138</sup> David Zakarian proposes a topological construction to which Thecla, Sandukht, and Hrip'simē conform, and identifies its progenitor as an amalgam of the Armenian pagan goddess Anahit and a miscellany of Biblical women.<sup>139</sup>

Medieval Armenian femininity was primarily constructed along a map of domestic and communal protocols directed toward the objective of dynastic continuity. This, in turn, would filter upward into the continuation of the Armenian nation and its

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<sup>138</sup> Pogossian, "Women at the Beginning," 365-367; Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 25, 71-74.

<sup>139</sup> Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 91.

faith. In this way, Armenian femininity integrates into the broader schema of gender mechanics that support the ethnoreligious differentiation of the Armenians and their national church from incursive extraneities and the pollutive infiltration of their foreign faiths. This collaborative endeavor is, then, publicly masculine in its defense of the Armenian nation and domestically feminine in its conservation thereof. The infrastructure of the gender binary is here devised to measure compliance with the tenets of *awrēnkʻ*. Femininity is, thus, assessed along familial criteria: an acceptably feminine woman must perform properly throughout her lifetime in the roles of maiden, mother, mourner, and (should she receive the fortune) martyr – a station to be explored at length in the forthcoming chapter. The challenges therein entailed, unlike those of masculinity, are not fixed but mutable, and evolve continually. Masculinity is coded by passive physicality, sufficed sometimes by mere physical beauty or aptitude to compete, irrespective even of actual performance in contest. While masculinity depends upon the relatively static and inert phenotype, femininity is kinetic and chaotic, entailing constant and extemporaneous adaptation and reflective adjustment. Femininity, like masculinity, measures piety. Accordingly, its assignment is contingent upon one's success in all domains of terrestrial femininity: as a maiden in embodying beauty and modesty, as a wife in adequately exalting her husband in both life and death, as a mother in preparing her daughters and sons to perpetuate the Armenian nation both culturally and militarily, and as a mourner in supporting Armenian masculinity by vociferating the tragedy of its destruction. If she succeeds across these stations of femininity, she is honored with admittance to its elite ultimate status: martyrdom. The behaviors that code for femininity deviate most tangibly from those that communicate masculinity in their centering of the matriarchal archetype.

She does not parallel proportionally the superlative male archetype of the valorous gladiator poised for both spiritual and military combat – the pinnacle of Armenian masculinity. Rather, she complements his public performance in domestic analogue, securing in private that which he achieves in the civic arena.

Unique to the invention of Armenian femininity—and much unlike Armenian masculinity, as examined in the previous chapter—is its predication in contrast not against the exogenous, nor against the masculine. As this chapter has demonstrated, Armenian and foreign femininities often cohabitate cultural territory – Armenian and exoteric women are virtually indistinguishable by some behavioral measures documented in the texts under inquiry, as exposed in this chapter’s exploration of veiling practices. Rather, Armenian femininity is erected around masculinity, carved into its margins so as to support the institution of Armenian masculinity which sustained the nation and the national church that preserved it from external hostilities. Armenian femininity, then, is a category defined by its extrinsic support for masculinity rather than by any intrinsic quality in isolation therefrom. In reinforcing Armenian masculinity, Armenian femininity transitively fortifies national identity and its individuation from the adjacent other. Still, the curiosity remains that Armenian femininity is not afforded the same opportunity to compete for gendered supremacy with its rivals such as Zoroastrian, Muslim, or Greek women, as is afforded to men. Rather, both the native and foreign feminine occupy and operate in common praxiological dimensions, unified in femininity whereas rival masculinities compete for ethnic dominance. The oral and literary transmission of these archetypes would have been thus actively mobilized with the purpose of instilling such gendered values in both women and men – these feminine virtues coded into familiar

narratives as ideals for young girls to aspire to, and internalized as expectations for young men of their future wives and daughters. Together, these ideas would reconstitute sequentially over each generation of the Armenian family structure: one that revolved on a dual axis of masculine action and feminine conservation. These ideas would be further reified by the organic materialization of moral archetypes, to be explored in the following chapter.



### III. Archetypes of Sexual Morality

#### Introduction

In her 2021 study of the *houris*—female companions of Islamic eschatology—Nerina Rustomji writes: “The tendency to conflate a feminine model belonging to paradise and the societal expectations of earthly women creates odd misperceptions.”<sup>1</sup> This in many ways applies to the approach of medieval Armenian traditors to the incorporation of female archetypes in their own record. Though the individuals here under inspection operated in the temporal (whether historically or mythically) by contrast to the Islamic *houri*, a generic and nebulous figure fabricated of the extratemporal, the women upon whom medieval Armenian traditors scaffolded archetypal templates very much belonged, as Rustomji writes of the *houris*, “to paradise.” The Hrip‘simēan martyrs had long ascended to the Kingdom by the time of their incorporation into the Armenian literary canon, which itself formed only centuries after these women lived and died.<sup>2</sup> These martyrs occupy in Armenian subjectivity the spaces of both Heaven and Earth: composed of Earthly material and imbued with a Heavenly morality that marked them as objects to be returned through martyrdom to the divine realm reserved for their habitation.

Historical though they were, these women represent as divine an image as can be conceived to a medieval Armenian rationality. Living incarnations of feminine virtue, these women personify the Christian values inscribed for Earthly Armenian women—literally, those of *Երկիր Հայոց*, the physical land of Armenia—to observe. Rustomji

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<sup>1</sup> Nerina Rustomji, *The Beauty of the Houris: Heavenly Virgins, Feminine Ideals* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), 149.

<sup>2</sup> See the introduction to this dissertation, p.17, for clarification on eschatological terminology.

continues of the *houris*: “Writers evaluate earthly Muslim women by comparison to idealized, unattainable feminine attributes.”<sup>3</sup> The attributes of the Gayianeank‘ are likewise, to a measurable degree, unattainable to Earthly Armenian women. Their piety, continence, and devotion to God serve as models in their perfection – their proportions so exponentially inaccessible to mundane women, even those who exhibit these qualities in diluted extract. The Gayianeank‘, Earthly though they may once have been, are mobilized as models for women to emulate in their daily comportment. To achieve the ranks of the Gayianeank‘ is to embody their devotional and behavioral examples. The archetype, by definition, cannot be replicated identically. It is the aspiration toward reproducing its essence that regulates an otherwise chaotic and frenetic femininity.

The Gayianeank‘, who will be discussed at length in this chapter, comprise only one flank in a centuries-long literary campaign by Armenian traditors. This campaign sought to circumscribe sexual behavior among the newly Christian Armenian faithful through the deployment of archetypes. The reduction and distillation of moral posture into these archetypes generated various permutations, revealing meticulous detail by their architects. These archetypes, curiously, do not assume exclusively feminine presentations – nor do they instruct exclusively through affirmative examples. Often, they instruct through simulation of the prohibitive, serving as cautionary paradigms that exemplify moral failure and prominently display its insufferable consequences: shame, degradation, and social rejection. Through the mobilization of behavioral archetypes, specifically those that inscribe sexual morality, medieval Armenian cleric-historians disclose a

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<sup>3</sup> Rustomji, *The Beauty of the Houris*, 149.

marital and sexual morality in transformative development commenced to support the recently installed national church and its values.

The social paragon that these propaganda convey is one of sexual continence, emotional purity, marital devotion, and temperamental moderacy. These, in turn, scaffold upon the gender constructions discussed in the previous two chapters, which propagate these values in more abstracted representations. Invariably, these archetypes reinforce the moral messages stationed at the intersections of gender and ethnic identity, as the behaviors represented thereby come to illustrate the sexual politics of ethnic purity. The necessary entanglements of sexuality and ethnicity, then, dictate the design and action of these literary exemplars. Each of the archetypal figures analyzed in the present chapter represents sexual and somatic morality filtered through the prism of ethnic identity, sexuality in this way communicating adherence to or defiance of not only spiritual but ethnonational regulation of the body. This chapter will converse with the preceding two by integrating their conclusions about Armenian gender constructions into the mechanism that ultimately emerged to disseminate them: the archetypes presented herein. Further, it advances the larger argument of the dissertation by demonstrating the function of these archetypes within medieval Armenian notions of ethnic identity and the body.

### The Armenian Semiramis

Perhaps nowhere in the literature of medieval Armenia is lust so conspicuously condemned than in the collective narrative of the Assyrian queen Semiramis, whose unrequited lust for the beautiful Armenian king Ara figures as a favored literary trope among medieval Armenian chroniclers. The Armenian characterizations of Semiramis depart dramatically from those of neighboring traditions. In some ways, the Armenian

Semiramis functions as analogue to Salome of the Old Testament: a powerful ancient royal whose raw, unattenuated sexuality and unfettered carnal potency stigmatize her as unstable, irrational, and—to the literal definition of the word—hysterical. The Armenian Semiramis first appears in the fifth-century text of Movsēs Khorenats‘i, who documents the mythologized queen’s desire for Ara as follows:

But the dissolute and lascivious Semiramis for many years had heard of his beauty and desired to visit him; but she was not able to do such things openly. However, after the death of Ninos, or his flight to Crete as I believe, Semiramis freely paraded her passion and sent messengers to the handsome Ara with gifts and offerings, [requesting] with many entreaties and the promise of gifts that he come to her in Nineveh, either to marry her and reign over the whole empire that Ninos had ruled, or to satisfy her desires and then return to his own land in peace with magnificent gifts.<sup>4</sup>

Movsēs reminds his reader that Semiramis incubates these desires for Ara sight unseen: “For in the folly of her great passion, at the reports about him she had become madly enflamed as if she had already seen him.”<sup>5</sup> The historian continues to detail the manner in which Ara rebuffs the lustful queen, who becomes so incensed by this rejection that she, in response, amasses her army to invade his kingdom: “Many times the ambassadors came and went, but Ara did not agree. Semiramis became exceedingly angry, and at the end of these negotiations she took the host of her army and hastened to the land of Armenia against Ara.”<sup>6</sup> She does so, Movsēs is careful to accentuate, not with the objective of killing the king or even annexing his lands but, rather, of coercing him into sexual submission: “she was anxious not so much to kill him or put him to flight as to subject and dominate him to fulfill her desires.”<sup>7</sup> Despite her express command that

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<sup>4</sup> MX I.15, p. 93.

<sup>5</sup> MX I.15, p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> MX I.15, p. 93.

<sup>7</sup> MX I.15, p. 93.

Ara be captured alive, he falls slain in battle, having died in valiant defense of his homeland – an essential signal of competent Armenian masculinity, as discussed in chapter I. The lust of Semiramis, and Ara’s righteous rejection of her sexual advances, initiate both a sexual and a military invasion of Armenia. The wanton queen’s sexual desire, then, recirculates native anxieties about the motives of the exogenous and their incorrigible sexual appetency for the Armenians, which they are often illustrated indulging to the extreme of behavioral incontinence – the rapacious, the violent, and the carnal. The Semiramis of Movsēs Khorenats‘i’s ideation then proceeds to abduct the corpse of her paramour for use in a pagan necromancy ritual, to be examined extensively in a forthcoming chapter.

Inexplicably, the Armenian literary tradition does not again name Semiramis until the tenth century, when T‘ovma Artsruni resurrects her tale, pronouncing her to be “opulent, licentious, and sensual.”<sup>8</sup> The legendary queen occupies a status of such eminence to the chronicler that he opens his text with her saga, presenting her in its introductory chapter. Though he writes that Semiramis “palpitated with lasciviousness,” curiously T‘ovma omits the queen’s pursuit of Ara, suggesting that he finds more objectionable her sexuality in the abstract than in its potential to effect domestic destruction.<sup>9</sup> Considering that Movsēs’s text was perhaps T‘ovma’s sole exposure to the legendary exploits of Semiramis, and that his account may have provided the most complete exposition of Semiramis’s character available to him, expands a unique avenue for investigation: why might T‘ovma neglect an item that so visibly displays the

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<sup>8</sup> TA I.i, p. 69.

<sup>9</sup> TA I.i, p. 70.

esteemed national valor of the Armenians against exogenous savagery? T'ovma's casual and cursory treatment of the episode merits attentive scrutiny.

Capitalizing upon the construct of motherhood, which operates unconsciously in the substratum of Armenian identity as explored in chapter II, T'ovma not only derides Semiramis for her sexual incontinence but, further, alludes to the maternal deficiency that must necessarily accompany such indecency: "And since in her lascivious wicked life she paid no attention to her sons, thinking only of her lovers ... She herself went from Assyria to Armenia in lustful desire..."<sup>10</sup> The lust of Semiramis—the imagined (and overtly sexualized) intruder—represents as existential a threat to Armenian national continuity as do the actual invasions experienced by these traitors and the real sexual violence that they entail. T'ovma encapsulates this idea in Semiramis's neglectful treatment of her sons, which demonstrates not only the destructive potential of lust but, additionally, the association of malevolence to maternal incompetence. Movsēs includes the detail that Semiramis's son, Ninuas, kills his "wanton mother" in a rare incident of matricide discursively pardoned by the Armenian historians.<sup>11</sup> Semiramis's reckless carnality, in this way, not only imperils the Armenian nation but also constitutes the outrageous social violation of endangering the welfare of her own children. T'ovma's second continuator likewise reduces Semiramis to her sexuality, summarily dismissing any discernible complexity to her character and referencing her only in brief as "the amorous and lascivious Semiramis, queen of Assyria."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> TA I.iii, p. 88.

<sup>11</sup> MX I.17, p. 100.

<sup>12</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 2] IV.7, pp. 354-355.

Իովհաննէս Ժրսկհանակերտտ՛ի, writing shortly after Կ՛ովմա, reports equivalent information likely sourced from Մովսէ՛ս՛s account: “After a number of years, the lustful, passionate and wanton Տ՛ամիրամ, hearing by way of rumor of Արա՛s comely fairness, through frequent embassies promised him generous gifts and munificent profits, provided that he would be willing either to take her as his wife, or at least fulfill her desires.”<sup>13</sup>

Իովհաննէս follows Մովսէ՛ս in identifying the motives of Semiramis as purely libidinal. Her primary objective being marriage, according to both, she will negotiate for the minimum conciliation of a sexual arrangement. The pursuit of sexual gratification, as will be demonstrated throughout this chapter and the next, profoundly violates the conventions of Armenian virtue ethics as expressed by the Armenian traditors who purport these events. It is not the beauty of Արա but, rather, the lust of Semiramis that is causal to destruction – in totality that of both parties and to the Armenian populace. Culpability, then, is imposed upon the agent of lust rather than its object – this applies evenly to both the male Արա and the female archetypes Իրիպ՛սիմէ and Ք՛արանձեմ, which the present chapter will explore at length below.

Իովհաննէս follows Մովսէ՛ս in reporting that Արա is killed in battle, violating Semiramis՛s command that he be captured alive. Մովսէ՛ս then details the intentions of Semiramis to resurrect her fallen paramour through ritual invocation of the demonic (to be addressed in a forthcoming chapter).<sup>14</sup> Իովհաննէս, however, omits Մովսէ՛ս՛s allegations of necromancy, perhaps in an attempt to preserve the corpse of Արա in narration from the blight—real or imagined—of desecration at the hands of foreign

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<sup>13</sup> YD II, p. 69.

<sup>14</sup> MX I.15, p. 94.

actors, especially those who transgress on such libidinous impulses. Hovhannēs's recension of the tale concludes as follows: "Upon his refusal, Šamiram hastened [her men] immediately to reach Armenia and encounter Ara not to persecute or kill him, but rather to subdue and seize him in order to carry out the will of her who desired lust. Although she had warned her men to keep the object of her passion alive, Ara was unintentionally killed amidst the warriors who were fighting."<sup>15</sup> Whether by authoritative exercise or due simply to an interruption in transmission, the element of Semiramis's necromancy appears to vanish from the Armenian record after its introduction by Movsēs Khorenats'i, and is not reiterated by any Armenian historian through the fall of the Bagratuni Dynasty.

Decades after Hovhannēs, the historian-bishop Ukhtanēs of Sebastia will model his account of Semiramis, as he does many of his reports, on that of Movsēs as well:

The lascivious and unchased [sic] Shamiram (Semiramis), having heard of [Ara's] beauty for many years, was passionately trying to reach him ... Then that same lascivious Shamiram, freely paraded her passion and sent messengers to Ara the Handsome with many gifts, asking him to comply with her wishes, either by marrying her or by satisfying her passions. Ara refused her. But that furious [Shamiram] became exceedingly angry, and took the host of her army and rushed to the borders of Armenia. She arrived in the Plain of Ara and waged war against him; Ara died in the battle.<sup>16</sup>

Like T'ovma and Hovhannēs before him, Ukhtanēs omits the Assyrian queen's attempt to revive Ara through necromancy, suggesting that he, too, may have worked from a manuscript sterilized of the event (or else determined of his own volition to expunge it).

The Armenian emphasis on the libidinousness of Semiramis reinforces attendant

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<sup>15</sup> YD II, pp. 69-70.

<sup>16</sup> Ukhtanēs I.18, p. 32.



articulations of female sexual restraint and its consummate urgency. Noteworthy in this respect is Movsēs Khorenats‘i’s appraisal of the mother of Eruand (discussed in the preceding chapter) as simultaneously unattractive and uninhibited in carnal appetites both dietary and sexual. That she is depicted by the historian as both corpulent and licentious refers the audience to Armenian exhortations that the pious, both male and female, exert discipline and continence over all corporeal impulses.

### Hrip‘simē and Her Companions

Similar to Semiramis’s pursuit of Ara is the gender-inverted pursuit of the virgin Hrip‘simē by King Trdat, recounted in exhaustive detail by Agat‘angeghos. Trdat’s lust for the maiden is documented in parallel language to that utilized in the various portrayals of Semiramis, as previously noted by Robert Thomson.<sup>17</sup> Identified as a Roman noblewoman and Christian convert of the late third century, Hrip‘simē enters a convent administered by the abbess Gayianē.<sup>18</sup> Agat‘angeghos introduces her travail as follows: “It happened in those times that the emperor Diocletian sought a wife. Then were sent out and circulated throughout his whole empire painters who could produce a true likeness. Rendering naturally on tablets the beauty of the face and the mascaraed eyebrows, with faithful colors they made accurate pictures to show before the king and please his eye.”<sup>19</sup> The author continues that these painters “...entered by force into the holy dwelling-place of these virtuous women; and seeing the modest beauty of Rhipsimē they were amazed and charmed at her wonderful appearance. They painted her likeness on their tablets and

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<sup>17</sup> MX I.15, p. 93 (see n. 144).

<sup>18</sup> For female monastic communities in late antique and early medieval Armenia, see Pogossian, “Female Ascetics.”

<sup>19</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 137, p. 147.

sent it to the emperor.”<sup>20</sup> Upon viewing the image of Hrip‘simē, Diocletian becomes instantly enchanted by the young maiden’s beauty: “And when the emperor saw the graceful beauty of Rhipsimē’s portrait, he went mad with licentious desire. The unbridled passion of his folly increased, and he set a time for the marriage, anxiously anticipating the wedding celebration.”<sup>21</sup>

Agat‘angeghos chastises the emperor for his lust, employing such mordant language as “mad” (*ἀνηλεῆς*) to characterize the abandonment of control over his faculties and “folly” (*ἄσχετος*) to qualify the poor judgment that such indiscretion engenders.<sup>22</sup> The admonition is clearly placed, even to so precise a degree as the linguistic, not upon Hrip‘simē for possessing such beauty but, rather, upon Diocletian for failing to moderate his reaction thereto. By contrast, Hrip‘simē is lauded for her piety and virtue: “But the blessed and chaste Gaianē, with the saintly Rhipsimē and their other companions, remembered the covenant of holiness, the religious rule of chastity into which they had entered, and lamented amongst themselves over the impure and impious emperor’s command to have their portraits painted.”<sup>23</sup> So cognizant is Hrip‘simē of the covenant to which she has dedicated her virginity that she resists even to be artistically rendered for what she knows to be an impure purpose – the lust of Diocletian. In this way, Hrip‘simē’s own physical beauty constitutes an obstacle to the fulfilment of her vows – one to be surmounted through martyrial sacrifice. The dedication of both her

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<sup>20</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 139, p. 149.

<sup>21</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 140, p. 149.

<sup>22</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 140, pp. 148-149.

<sup>23</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 143, pp. 151-153.

spiritual and corporeal devotions to Christ is contrasted palpably against the uncontained sexual desires of the pagan monarchs who desire her.

Profane lust for Hřip'simē is then transferred from one heathen monarch to another via dispatch from Diocletian to the Armenian king Trdat, at the time an adherent to Armenia's native religion – a syncretic paganism exhibiting permeant Zoroastrian influence.<sup>24</sup> In his communication, Diocletian requests that Trdat apprehend and extradite Hřip'simē to Rome to be forcibly married to the licentious emperor, violating her sacrificial marriage vow to Christ. The missive of Diocletian, however, permits Trdat himself to marry the maiden should he feel so inclined: “And send back to me that beautiful charmer. But if her beauty pleases you, then keep her for yourself, for no one like her has ever been found in Greek lands.”<sup>25</sup> This provision conveys several significant implications. It further corroborates the beauty of Hřip'simē, declaring it so rare and precious as to defy even the most potent measure of carnal restraint – even that of so formidable a man as Trdat, whose physical power is dramatically pronounced in the same text (as discussed in chapter I of the present study). In addition, this device concretizes for the literate Armenian audience the constraints that encircle Hřip'simē – surrounded by the hazards of lust, her only salvation through resolute commitment to Christ. The schematic also reifies the unparalleled importance of sexual purity in evaluating virtue—both feminine and masculine—and the redemptive power over one's chastity as the singular prerogative of Christ.

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<sup>24</sup> James Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 235-260.

<sup>25</sup> Agat'angeghos § 156, p. 167.

The author further underscores the correlation between beauty—universally coded with virtue—and virginity: “After those two days the report of the chastity and wonderful beauty of Rhipsimē became known to the public. And astonishment multiplied as word passed from man to man.”<sup>26</sup> The beauty of Hrip‘simē accrues such renown that it attracts masses of eager spectators to marvel at her: “To see her beauty a great and confused crowd gathered—princes and nobles rushed to view her, competing with each other; freemen and common people together jostled one another in the passion of their dissolute concupiscence and the debauched, polluted and heathen habits of their deranged minds.”<sup>27</sup> This passage applies a similar equalizing effect to the rhetoric of Eghishē in exalting the egalitarianism of the deserted women, though does so with the intent to equalize sin rather than virtue – the lust of the amassed spectators contrasted with the austerity of perseverant wives. Agat‘angeghos notes carefully that the reported beauty of Hrip‘simē entices men of every stratum across the social hierarchy, alleging each of them equally unable to resist his temptation: in addition to two sovereign monarchs, men of the upper and lower nobility as well as those of the peasantry are uniformly incapable of containing their libidinous curiosities. Just as Eghishē, writing a century after Agat‘angeghos, lauds the women of Awarayr for the equity of their virtue unmitigated by social station, Agat‘angeghos levels equally at all strata the sin against which virtue prevails.

Agat‘angeghos enunciates the virtue of Hrip‘simē and her companions, collectively the *Gayianeank‘* (the acolytes of the abbess Gayianē), citing not only their

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<sup>26</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 162, p. 171.

<sup>27</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 163, p. 171.

dedication to sexual purity but, further, their public lamentation when confronted with a threat to their chastity:

But the blessed ones, when they realized the evil intentions of these senseless and depraved men, with loud lamentations and tears they raised their hands to heaven in prayer, seeking salvation from the almighty omnipotent Lord, who had rescued them the previous time from the impious, impure, wicked and licentious heathens; (they begged) that he would give them victory and glorify their faith. And covering their faces, they fell to the ground in shame at the impudent sightseers who had gathered to stare.<sup>28</sup>

Reinforcing the equity with which lust has enthralled men across the social spectrum, Agat'angeghos reminds his reader that the crowd of gawking observers has continued to accumulate throughout the supplication of the Gayianeanak': "After this, many of those who were friends of the king and had come out to see her beauty, informed the king and made him marvel."<sup>29</sup> The reports of these "friends," perhaps courtiers or noblemen, so entice the king that he orders Hrip'simē delivered to him:

Then straightaway they sent a golden litter with attendants from the palace to the door of the vat-store, where they had been dwelling outside the city. They also brought for her from the palace honorable raiment, beautiful, soft and shining, and fine ornaments for her to adorn herself, so that she might enter the city and meet the king in splendor and honor. For he had not yet seen her, but planned to take her to wife because of what they had told him about her wonderful beauty.<sup>30</sup>

The narrative parallels later settings of Semiramis's pursuit of Ara (perhaps adapted from the Hrip'simēan canon) whose lust for the famously handsome king preempts even the very sight of him. Like Semiramis, Trdat determines to marry the object of his lust based solely upon secondary accounts of her appearance before even glimpsing for himself her beauty of such repute. Implicit to the narration is the propensity

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<sup>28</sup> Agat'angeghos § 164, pp. 171-173.

<sup>29</sup> Agat'angeghos § 165, p. 173.

<sup>30</sup> Agat'angeghos § 166, p. 173.

for female beauty to compel men, irrespective of social rank, to reckless impulsivity and sexual incontinence: estimably the sin most reviled by this authorship, and of both scope and quality that approximate Ghazar's admonition of female spontaneity. The destructive potential of beauty can be observed here more tangibly than in any source to follow.

Following a strenuous battle—partially detailed in the previous chapter and, in part, to be addressed in the forthcoming—Hrip'simē vigorously defends her virginity against the pagan king, inducing his order that she and her companions be executed. The command, however, does not alleviate Trdat of his humiliation, nor of his lust for the virtuous maiden: “The king spent six days in profound grief and deep mourning because of his passionate love for the beautiful Rhipsimē.”<sup>31</sup> The destruction of physical beauty, then, is insufficient to quell his distress, as it is not the beauty of the maiden but the lust that it has aroused within him—his own spiritual obligation to contain—that is the destructive force. Trdat is subsequently transformed into a porcine beast in divine retribution for his crime:

Especially the king, because he had been changed into the form of a wallowing pig. For his whole body had become hairy, and on his limbs bristles had grown like those of great wild boars. And the nails of his hands and feet had hardened like the claws of beasts that dig the earth or eat roots. Similarly the appearance of his face had turned into the likeness of the hard snout of an animal living among reeds. Because of the beast-like nature of his way of life he had fallen from the honor of his throne, and he roamed about in the likeness of pasturing beasts among the animals in the reeds, lost to the society of men.<sup>32</sup>

A previous passage overtly registers the surrender of Trdat's humanity, proclaiming that “...he lost his human nature for the likeness of wild pigs and went about

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<sup>31</sup> Agat'angeghos § 211, p. 217.

<sup>32</sup> Agat'angeghos § 727, p. 269.

like them and dwelt among them.”<sup>33</sup> Only when Trdat assumes control over his carnal deprivations, ultimately converting to Christianity and committing to its propagation throughout Armenia, does he resume his human constitution and regain composure, expressing his gratitude and newfound faith through the adoption of an ascetic lifestyle in which he persists throughout the remainder of his life. The exercise of restraint over his carnal impulses—and not release from the thrall of enchanting beauty that would have been otherwise achieved through the death of Hṛip‘simē—is singularly the redemptive agent that restores to Trdat his humanity.

Trdat’s porcine transformation—which Nina Garsoïan has previously proposed referential of Zoroastrian frailty—is portended by the petitions of Hṛip‘simē and her companions for deliverance from the hazards brought upon them by her beauty: “‘Let us not be joined to the degradation of pagan filthiness. Permit not the chastity of our holiness to be a brothel for those obscene dogs; give not the pearl of the virginity of our faith to their impious and swinish ways.’”<sup>34</sup> Agat‘angeghos’s employment of the term “swinish” (*junqughluu*) will presage Trdat’s imminent metamorphosis, which is later emphasized in vivid animal imagery: “And the king, in swinish form, cried out in a loud voice, he called out, grunted and slobbered and foamed at the mouth in his snout-like face, and in the likeness of a four-footed beast ran from the boars’ reedy pasture to the same spot.”<sup>35</sup> The martyrdom of Hṛip‘simē and her companions is not again recounted in an Armenian historical text until the tenth century, when it is briefly summarized by

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<sup>33</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 212, p. 217.

<sup>34</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 147, pp. 155-157; For Trdat’s porcine transformation as a Zoroastrian analogue, see Nina G. Garsoïan, “The Iranian Substratum of the ‘Agat‘angelos Cycle,’” in *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, eds. Nina G. Garsoïan, Thomas F. Mathews, and Robert W. Thomson (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), 151-174.

<sup>35</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 728, p. 271.

Ukhtanēs of Sebastia, who writes of her virtuous chastity and corporeal dedication to Christ: “She wanted to be the bride of Christ, King of heaven. By virtue of her familiarity with and likeness to [Christ], she maintained her true virginity, believing that true virginity has affinity with angels.”<sup>36</sup>

Leila Ahmed writes of the early Christian ascetic cultures (notably, that of the Syriac Church) that glorified celibacy for both men and women: “...the mere notion that virginity was superior to reproductiveness undercut the idea that women's bodies and their reproductive capacity defined the limits of their duties and proper aspirations.”<sup>37</sup> Ahmed characterizes this relationship as one of “superiority of virginity even to wifely obedience.”<sup>38</sup> Because both Zoroastrianism and Islam—the chief ethnoreligious threats to flank the Armenian Middle Ages and influence the development of its sexual identity across these seven centuries—opposed celibacy as a model of sexual comportment, Armenian Christianity in particular embraced ascetic values as a modality (one among many of their utensils to this end) of ethnonational dissimulation from both encroaching powers in their respective eras. The H̄rip‘simēan martyrs are, then, applauded not only for their sexual commitment to Christ but for the resistance therein entailed against the ethnic other communicated in the Zoroastrian oppressor. Veneration of the Gayianeank‘ necessitated careful diplomacy in text, as the literate women who accessed these texts belonged overwhelmingly to the secular nobility and, by default of their station, married and procreated. As such, the auteurs of these texts labored under the dual obligations to glorify Armenia’s national saints and the unique ascetic values that they expressed while

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<sup>36</sup> Ukhtanēs I.64, p. 80.

<sup>37</sup> Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 26.

<sup>38</sup> Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 25.



avoiding affront toward their patrons (or otherwise powerful consumers of their content). The result was a female model whose resistance to ethnic pollution was to be revered – a behavioral exemplar in purity of conduct rather than solely in adherence to celibacy (both unrealistic and suboptimal for a woman of noble parentage). The evasion of sexual defilement became instructive to the Armenian noblewoman in possession of these texts, her conclusions therefrom the urgency of sexual minimalism in resistance of foreign assimilation. To borrow Ahmed’s framing, it was not the “superiority” of celibacy to “wifely obedience” that the Armenians absorbed and recirculated into their national narrative through the archetypal proxy of Hrip’simē, but the integration of ascetic values—sexual temperance, emotional continence, and devotion to Christ as a nativized messiah—into a secular uxorial that preexisted it. It was in this respect that the archetype of the Hrip’simēan virgins fused into popular femininity.

### P’arandzem

Medieval Armenian condemnations of lust are—defying preconceived expectations—remarkably gender neutral. Despite the apparent misogyny ensconced within the condemnations of Semiramis, such caustic castigations are leveled at only one other identified woman in the Medieval Armenian historical literature: the rotund mother of Eruand Arshakuni, whose promiscuity (addressed in chapter I) is attested by Movsēs Khorenats’i and, replicating his account, Ukhtanēs of Sebastia.<sup>39</sup> The lust of men is, perhaps surprisingly, coded as equally destructive to that of women, as highlighted in a particularly sensational account in the *Buzandaran*. The compiler recounts the death of the Arshakuni nobleman Gnel, whose murder at the hands of his own cousin, Tirit’, is a

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<sup>39</sup> MX II.37, p. 176; Ukhtanēs I.41, p. 52.

product of Tirit's lust for Gnel's wife, P'arandzem. The compiler identifies P'arandzem as the "beautiful daughter" of the *nahapet* Andovk Siwni,

...who was greatly renowned for her beauty and her modesty, and the young nephew of the king, Gnel, took her as his wife. The fame of the maiden's loveliness spread about, and the renown of her beauty grew, increased, and resounded. And another cousin of Gnel named Tirit' quivered with desire toward his sister-in-law because of this fame, and he therefore sought some secret way whereby he might see her. Once he had succeeded in seeing the one whom he desired, he sought means of destroying the woman's husband so that by these means he might perhaps be able to carry her off afterward.<sup>40</sup>

The compiler's employment of the word "quiver" (*unphkuu*) accents the visceral sensoriality with which Tirit' desires P'arandzem, and locates the lust of Tirit' not only in his heart and mind but in the physical space of his body.<sup>41</sup> This signals the magnitude of Tirit's iniquity – he has not only failed to contain his desire, infracting fatally against his own kin in consequence, but has allowed the sins of temporal flesh to infect his discarnate spirit and wrest agency from his rational faculties to his incarnate instincts. He has thus exposed his inability to contain the sin ignited within his flesh. Just as Trdat before him is divested of his humanity and demoted to the habitus of a "wallowing pig," so too is Tirit' dispossessed of the rational control over carnal compulsion that renders mankind superior to impulse-governed animals. The lust of Tirit' has, then, escaped the internal realm of emotivity and externalized into physical sensation, palpable to the conscious reader.

Consistent with contemporaneous expectations of femininity, P'arandzem is praised not only for her visual beauty but for her performed "modesty" as well.<sup>42</sup> This

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<sup>40</sup> BP IV.xv, pp. 140-141.

<sup>41</sup> See BP IV.xv in MH vol. 1, p. 340.

<sup>42</sup> BP IV.xv, p. 140.

modesty codes P'arandzem as innocent, obedient to gender protocols, and therefore inherently virtuous, applying the destructive capacity not to her beauty, which is textually indicative of virtue, but instead to the profane lust that it attracts. The compiler makes this explicit through P'arandzem's attestations to her husband's innocence: "She screamed aloud: 'Hurry, go! They are unjustly killing my husband who has done no harm or wrong!'"<sup>43</sup> The judgment is, in this way, cast unambiguously upon his assassins. Further, the compiler emphasizes: "But the one who had deceitfully and slanderously plotted this and treacherously brought death upon his kinsman, had done this for the sake of the [dead man's] wife, for he was greatly enamored of her. I speak of Tirit', who was extremely taken with that woman and had consequently deceitfully contrived the murder, by means of the king."<sup>44</sup> The compiler, however, swiftly reverses this position, assigning to P'arandzem the contradictory assumption of guilt. He attributes to her the following exclamation: "'Hear ye all, my husband's death was because of me, my husband was put to death because someone desired me!'"<sup>45</sup>

A number of interpretations may explain the sudden reversal. This statement may evidence, as posited by David Zakarian, an application of liability to the destructive beauty of P'arandzem.<sup>46</sup> To offer an alternative interpretation, the narrator employs this device not to cast blame upon the woman but, perhaps, to signify her virtue – to assume culpability for so reprehensible an act as the murder of her husband is to accept voluntarily the burden of marital deprivation – the same path toward feminine virtue

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<sup>43</sup> BP IV.xv, p. 142.

<sup>44</sup> BP IV.xv, p. 144.

<sup>45</sup> BP IV.xv, p. 144.

<sup>46</sup> David Zakarian, "The 'Epic' Representation of Armenian Women of the Fourth Century," *Revue des Études Arméniennes* 35 (2013), 10-11.

embraced by the martyred wives of Awarayr according to Ghazar and Eghishē, as discussed in the previous chapter. To incriminate female beauty, by extension, absolves a male aggressor of his obligation to actively regulate his passions and instead indicts the passive and involuntary sin of attracting resultant calamity. This, however, is inconsistent with the values elsewhere espoused by the compiler and his ilk. Culpability for the murder of Gnel, then, defaults not to P‘arandzem in denunciation of her beauty (coded without exception to accompany virtue, as asserted in the previous chapters), but to expose of Tirit‘ his deceit, malice, and—the most detestable violation of the Armenian social order—the murder of kin.

P‘arandzem raises a vociferous commotion upon discovering Tirit‘’s lust for her and its causality to the murder, which he himself confesses in a missive to the newly widowed noblewoman: “And so, while lamentations for him grew most vehement, Tirit‘ became unable to withstand his passion. He sent a message to the wife of the murdered man, saying: ‘Do not put on such mourning for I am a better man than he. I loved you, and I made him perish so that I might take you as my wife.’”<sup>47</sup> It is noteworthy that the compiler juxtaposes the sinful desire of Tirit‘ alongside the virtuous lamentation of others over the death of their kinsman – ironically contrived, unbeknownst to the mourners, by his own hand. This contrast further accentuates the barbarity of Tirit‘’s actions, explicitly connecting destruction—most abhorrently, the destruction of family, dynasty, and (by extension) nation—to the mortal sins of carnal incontinence and coveting the wife of a

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<sup>47</sup> BP IV.xv, p. 144.

kinsman. The compiler articulates this moral judgment through the locution of King Arshak:

Then the king began to speak, striking one hand against the other in great contrition over the deeds he had done [and] said: ‘Because Tirit‘ was smitten with shameful passion for the wife of Gnel, he plotted this evil [deed], this treachery, this violent death, groundless and unjust. And because of his lust, he stained us also with innocent blood. He gave his own brother over to slaughter, and he made us the heir of irremediable torments and maledictions, that shall not pass away.<sup>48</sup>

The beauty of P‘arandzem, however, does not evade even the king’s notice, who himself becomes so enflamed upon sighting the woman that he determines to wed her rather than accord Tirit‘ the reward for his crime: “But when King Arsak saw the wife of the murdered man among the wailers he was stricken with passion, and desired to take her as his wife.”<sup>49</sup> Just as sexual pursuit of Hrip‘simē is transferred from Diocletian to Trdat, sexual pursuit of P‘arandzem is transferred from Tirit‘ to Arshak. The marriage of P‘arandzem to Arshak marks a crucial juncture in her saga, to be addressed in later chapters. It bears supplementary mention that King Arshak’s marriage to P‘arandzem may in fact conform to the agnatic marriage customs conventional to a Zoroastrian sociopolitical climate, which David Zakarian has extensively explored in a 2018 article.<sup>50</sup>

P‘arandzem acts multifariously as a correlate to Hrip‘simē. Each is introduced to her audience as a pious young woman distinguished for her aesthetic beauty. Each is identified in her respective text as unequivocally virtuous, coded as such by both her conspicuous beauty and, further, her unyielding marital devotion: in the case of P‘arandzem, to her husband, and for Hrip‘simē, to the Christ whom she has ritually wed.

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<sup>48</sup> BP IV.xv, p. 144.

<sup>49</sup> BP IV.xv, p. 144.

<sup>50</sup> Zakarian, “P‘arandzem and Her Husbands,” 75-88.

Each is victimized by a lecherous male aggressor whose lust effects destruction both personal and national, each subjected to the devastations of carnality despite her personal piety. In addition, each represents a unique marital value, each of which is in like manner endangered by the corruptions of carnal desire. Hrip'simē diverges as an archetype from Ara and P'arandzem only in the sanctified virginity wrought by her covenant of marriage with Christ. The plight of P'arandzem is the loss of her similarly sanctified marriage, albeit an Earthly union to a mortal spouse. While P'arandzem is deprived the essentially feminine privilege of matrimony, Hrip'simē is in contrast rewarded for her devotional steadfastness with the actualization of her deferred marital union to Christ. The allegiance of Ara, as a man, is not to spouse (who is curiously never named, though the existence of at least one legal wife is implied through reference to his son) but rather to nation, in defense of which he sacrifices his life. Resisting the destructive capacity of lust visited upon the Armenians by Semiramis, Ara dies a martyr for the Armenian nation as does Hrip'simē. It is the son of Ara, in turn, who must assume the mantle of national defense, and it is for this reason that his identity eclipses that of his mother in text.<sup>51</sup>

The narrative arc of Hrip'simē corresponds to that of P'arandzem, further, in the realm of the carnal, through the parallel of Trdat to Tirit'. The sexual desire experienced by each of these villainous men manifests not only as spiritual struggle but as a palpable sensation. Each account deliberately conjures not only the spiritual quandaries associated with lust, but the sensory and somatic intricacies of sexual attraction. Lust is then presented in text as the most profoundly carnal (and, thus, the most existentially disturbing) engagement of the human body. Each of these accounts evokes the potent

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<sup>51</sup> YD II, p. 70.

sensoriality of sexual arousal at the perception of feminine beauty and, more narrowly, the exertion to confine it within the incarnate body. To observe and absorb the aesthetic beauty of a woman is, then, to medieval Armenian cognition, to be challenged not only spiritually but corporally. Both Trdat and Tirit' fail this challenge, each accordingly punished for his inadequacy. This applies gender-neutrally, as the Armenian interpretation of Semiramis validates.

It is significant that the two women most renowned for their beauty—Hrip'simē and P'arandzem—are also the recipients of the most graphic and extensive violence ever depicted in medieval Armenian literature (to be explored at greater length in chapter VIII). In no ensuing text does so explicit an account of gendered violence appear in the Armenian record. This suggests a direct correlation between female beauty and the incurrence of physical aggression. More urgently, both Hrip'simē and P'arandzem receive violence of a nature that is explicitly sexual, suggesting that their sexual allure is, in kind, punished with sexual violence, and that violence of an intrinsically sexual quality is applied congruously to the degree of a woman's beauty and sexual magnetism. Her punishment for the crime of arousing men's sexual urges is violence of a necessarily sexual modality so as to punish and perhaps even destroy the very source—her irresistible beauty—of the men's consternation and carnal arousals. In extinguishing that aesthetic element of a woman which so frustrates the containment of male carnal desire, the very property that confers or (if deficient) denies an ascription of masculine virtue, the aggrieved man exacts retribution on the feminine quality that itself engenders his concupiscence. Producers of these textual artifacts, such as Movsēs Khorenats'i and the compiler of the *Buzandaran*, hereby reflect a somatic philosophy in which, despite the

unequivocal burden upon men to contain their own sinful carnalities, women too must be held to account and commensurately punished for the arousal of men's carnal impulses. Reciprocally, Ara is requited with death for the arousal of Semiramis's lust – albeit her own responsibility to contain.

### Marriage, Sex, and Divorce in the Gregorid Line

As early as the fifth century, when Armenian writing commenced, a tradition consolidated around the mythos of the Gregorid line – the paternal lineage of Armenia's patron saint, Gregory the Illuminator. Each generation of its descendants after Gregory, himself of noble Parthian extraction, conforms to a pattern whereby two sons are born, of whom one marries—of necessity to continue the bloodline—while the other (consistent through the first two generations) does not. The marriage of the former is, without exception, a matter of shame and remorse. The first two generations of unmarried brothers are exalted as virtuous ascetics, an opinion likely inserted into the narrative so as to maintain a continuous veneration of purity through the Gregorid line while justifying its propagation, while the third and fourth are condemned for their unbridled licentiousness. The third generation of these heirless brothers, Pap, produces his sole child not with his legal wife, a princess of the royal Arshakuni house, but through a concubine.<sup>52</sup> Little else is known of his illegitimate son, Vrik, other than his inherited debauchery. His elimination from patriarchal succession imparts the effect of separating original sin from the lineage of St. Gregory and detaching it from the heritable line of Gregorid patriarchs, Vrik in some sense functioning as literary sacrifice for the purity of the hereditary patriarchate.

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<sup>52</sup> BP III.xix, p. 94.



The marriage of St. Gregory is first attested by Movsēs Khorenats'i:

But when the child reached maturity, a certain Christian called David married him to his daughter Mariam. After the birth of two sons in three years, they both willingly separated from each other. Mariam with the younger child entered a convent and became a nun. When this child reached maturity he joined a hermit called Nichomachus. But the elder child remained with his tutors and later led a secular life and married.<sup>53</sup>

Centuries later, Ukhtanēs of Sebastia will repeat this account: “As he reached the age of adolescence, he married and bore sons. Three years later, when the two sons were born, [Gregory] separated from his wife by mutual agreement and went to Trdat, while he was in the country of the Romans.”<sup>54</sup> Both accounts attest the mutuality of the couple’s estrangement – an element that will vanish from future recensions. Movsēs is careful to accentuate the virtue of Mariam alongside that of her husband in specifying that she, too, adopted an ascetic lifestyle following the dissolution of her marriage. Ukhtanēs here departs from his source, omitting Mariam’s virtuous assumption of post-marital austerity. Neither account—the latter likely sourced directly from the former, in this specimen as in others—claims the birth of their two sons from a single act of intercourse, implying that at least two such encounters transpired during the course of their three-year marriage.

The *Buzandaran* continues the narrative to the next generation of Gregorid marriages. It relates of the sons of St. Gregory:

Vrt'anēs and Aristakēs were the sons of the great high-priest Grigor. Aristakēs remained celibate and holy from childhood and therefore he ascended his father’s episcopal throne first, though he was the younger son. Vrt'anēs, however, was married, though childless, and for a long time he implored God that He should not deprive him of the blessing of

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<sup>53</sup> MX II.80, p. 225.

<sup>54</sup> Ukhtanēs I.60, p. 74.

children, but that one of his progeny should stand before him in the service of the Lord. And in his old age the Lord heard his prayer. His wife conceived and bore twin sons....<sup>55</sup>

This account is the first to identify the grandsons of Gregory as twins – an idea that will later solidify into canon so as to assert the sexual piety of the lineage, demanding that posterity acknowledge only one coital union to produce both sons rather than two unique acts. The result is a sanitized history of the Gregorid line, one that contains as minimal sexual activity as necessary throughout its heredity so that the ignominy of sexual excess need not pollute the sacred house (sacred both in function and in Armenian collective memory). The compiler also attributes the wish of Vrt'anēs to father a child to an inherited commitment to serve the church. His sexual engagement, nevertheless a blemish of impurity despite its decent objective and occurrence within the licit confines of sacramental marriage, is neutralized of its venality and rendered permissible to the fifth-century chronicler only by its resultant contribution to the national church – his admirable son, Grigoris. The expectation of celibacy among the Armenian patriarchs applies, then, not to its earliest progenitors, as the office passed hereditarily between its first six generations, but only to those occupying the office after the death of the final Gregorid patriarch, St. Sahak, in 438 CE.<sup>56</sup> The procreative act itself, however, remained inexorably stained with original sin: permissible among the naturally fallible laity (among them the illustrious nobility who overwhelmingly commissioned and funded these literary projects), but unacceptable for association to the venerated Gregorid line. This

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<sup>55</sup> BP III.v, p. 70.

<sup>56</sup> Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 132.

predicament would necessitate creative diplomacy and narrative cleansing of a specialized approach.

The *Buzandaran* continues to chart the lineage of the Gregorid line, turning its attention to the sons of Vrt‘anēs. The compiler notes the chastity and moral virtue of the elder son, Grigoris, specifying that he “did not marry” and describing him as “of handsome stature, outstanding in spiritual merit, and filled with the knowledge of God.”<sup>57</sup> Movsēs Khorenats‘i similarly exalts the sexual abstinence of the same Grigoris, even promoting his celibacy amid coinciding Armenian virtues and citing the practice to pedestalize him above his ancestors: “When he arrived he was a model of integrity and behaved with the virtues of his fathers. But he was superior to them by reason of his virginity, and equal to the king in the severity [of his asceticism].”<sup>58</sup> Movsēs Daskhurants‘i will, centuries later, concur with the assessments of his predecessors, praising that Grigoris “restrained the desires of the flesh,” thus ascribing to him the highest virtue of Armenian morality as conveyed in the manuscripts penned under clerical authorship.<sup>59</sup> H̄usik, by contrast, partakes of a secular life, marrying an Arshakuni princess—a granddaughter of King Khosrov by his son Tiran—and their ill-fated union is lamented by both the fictionalized H̄usik and the litterateur who crafts him:

And while he was [still] a youth he knew her once on the first night, and his wife conceived. Then he immediately saw in a vision that he would have two sons and they would not be fit for the ministry of the Lord God; and he repented his marriage. He wept and implored God, repenting with great anguish. He had been forced by the king into marriage as a youth, yet this [too] was done through the grace of God ... Although he did not go near his wife except for that one night, yet the woman bore twins, as he had seen in his earlier vision,

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<sup>57</sup> BP III.v, p. 70.

<sup>58</sup> MX III.3, p. 253.

<sup>59</sup> MD I.14, p. 14.

and the first was called Pap and the second At'anaginēs. And after his intercourse with his wife on that one night he did not know her again because of his youthful virtue.<sup>60</sup>

The author once again mitigates all sexuality in the Gregorid line, protecting its legacy from all association with carnal instinct, in attesting the birth of twin sons born of a single coital act. This literary motif delivers each generation of Gregorid patriarchs from the modicum of original sin conveyed inescapably through their humanity. Ḥusik's virtue is demonstrated by his carnal continence and extreme sexual restraint – he approaches his wife only once for the ecclesiastically endorsed purpose of procreation and, following his fulfillment of this sacramental obligation, withdraws from further intimacy. The sexual purity of Ḥusik and his Gregorid kin is, then, elevated as the ultimate rejection of the material and the temporal in favor of the celestial and the eternal.

Nevertheless, the text softens its position toward marriage, clarifying of Ḥusik that “[It was] not that he considered marriage polluting,” perhaps so as not to offend secular patrons or impugn the institution of marriage and the procreative union that sustained the Armenian nation and faith.<sup>61</sup> Noteworthy, however, is the disdain toward marriage that characterizes Armenian writings of the fifth and sixth centuries. The cleric-historian Ghazar P'arpets'i, despite otherwise according respect to the sanctity of “the bond of husband and wife”—likely in deference to his aristocratic patrons who, of political exigency, customarily married—includes in his text a conspicuous indication that he, likely among his monastic companions, may in fact privately consider marriage a spiritual contaminant.<sup>62</sup> Of a cohort of Syrian priests, Ghazar asperses: “They lived a

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<sup>60</sup> BP III.v, pp. 70-71.

<sup>61</sup> BP III.v, p. 71.

<sup>62</sup> Ghazar III.77, p. 200.

dissolute life, having brought wives with them from Syria according to the custom of their land.”<sup>63</sup> Drawing scholarly attention to an important distinction, however, David Zakarian identifies these unions vituperated by Ghazar as *syneisaktic*—unofficial and informal marriages arranged voluntarily by male and female ascetics for spiritual companionship and devoid of conjugal activity—rather than consecrated nuptial unions.<sup>64</sup> Such relationships are expressly forbidden by canon law, specifically by Canon XIV of those issued at the 444 Council of Shahapivan.<sup>65</sup> Ghazar’s near-contemporary, Eghishē, will evince a similar moral orientation toward asceticism in praising the *katholikos* Abraham: “Just as he had not participated in the earthly institution of holy matrimony, so he did not become involved in any corruptible matters of this world for bodily needs.”<sup>66</sup> Unlike his ancestors, Ḥusik does not separate from his wife, perhaps because of her royal station. Rather, he is “delivered” from the bemoaned union by her death, which the compiler presents as an event that heralds not sorrow but relief – a sentiment to be regarded vile if expressed on behalf of a woman, as explored in the previous chapter.<sup>67</sup>

The Buzandaran is decidedly less ingratiating of the subsequent generation of twin Gregorid sons – that born to Ḥusik amid his apparently discordant marriage. The two sons born of this union, Pap and At’anaginēs, do not exhibit the acclaimed restraint of their ancestors – rather, they indulge their carnal instincts and surrender to the temptations of the temporal, the sensual, the sexual, and the gluttonous. The brothers are depicted defiling the church in the holy city of Ashtishat with their lewd and drunken

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<sup>63</sup> Ghazar I.15, p. 61.

<sup>64</sup> David Zakarian, “Syneisaktism in Early Armenian Christianity,” *Le Muséon: Revue d’Études Orientales* 130, nos. 1-2 (2017): 132-133.

<sup>65</sup> Hovhannessian, “The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan,” 87.

<sup>66</sup> Eghishē VII, p. 237.

<sup>67</sup> BP III.v, p. 71.

conduct: “Having given themselves totally over to drunkenness, they scoffed at God’s temple and, entering into the bishop’s-residence which was there, the two brothers drank wine in it together with harlots, singing girls, *gusans*, and buffoons, scorning the holy and consecrated place and trampling it underfoot.”<sup>68</sup> In this manner, the compiler chastises the twin sons of Ḥusik for both their sexual incontinence and their insatiate intemperance, linking these behaviors with the desecration of holy places and of, by extension, of the Armenian national faith. The compiler later laments the discontinuance of magnanimous sons born to the “house of the descendants of Grigor, for these were his only children according to the flesh, and they followed ways unworthy of their ancestors.”<sup>69</sup>

The compiler hastens through the disposable generation of twin sons born of Ḥusik to address his grandson, perhaps the most celebrated of the Gregorid patriarchs after their originator: Nersēs the Great. “A son of At‘anginēs [sic] by the king’s sister Bambišn survived, however. His name was Nersēs, and he subsequently ascended the patriarchal throne of the entire land of Armenia....”<sup>70</sup> As does Movsēs Khorenats‘i of St. Gregory, the compiler of the *Buzandaran* rationalizes the marriage of Nersēs (and, thus, the proliferation of his bloodline) as a youthful indiscretion: “In his youth he had been married and had led a secular life.”<sup>71</sup> Separated from this notation by mere paragraphs, however, lies a curious juxtaposition: the compiler praises King Arshak for his reverence of the nuptial covenant, praising that the king was “observant of the sanctity of marriage, and perfect in the love of God.”<sup>72</sup> It is perhaps more accepted that a head of state publicly

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<sup>68</sup> BP III.xix, pp. 93-94.

<sup>69</sup> BP III.xiv, p. 86.

<sup>70</sup> BP III.xix, p. 94.

<sup>71</sup> BP IV.iii, p. 109.

<sup>72</sup> BP IV.iii, p. 109.

honor the procreative union than the class of celibate clerics, though each office practiced hereditary succession during the period here chronicled. It appears the guardians of the written record hold in higher esteem the veneration of marriage by their literary subjects than the matrimonial contract itself; the compiler also, in all likelihood, seeks to conciliate his intended audience of *nakharar* elites (being the only demographic possessing the resources to finance and acquire such valuable resources as literary preparations).

The lineage of Pap, by contrast, is further vandalized in narrative. The *Buzandaran* continues of this fifth generation of Gregorid brothers: “Pap left [no son] by his legitimate wife. But he had a concubine ... and he left a son named Vrik by his concubine.”<sup>73</sup> The author effectively voids the legitimacy of Vrik’s parentage by directly identifying him in the permanency of the written word (perhaps even falsely) as the son of a concubine. This Vrik is never again attested in the canon of Armenian literature through the period under inquiry, all but expunged from its written annals with the singular exception of the *Buzandaran*. The marriages of the Gregorid line conferred upward mobility upon those of its dynasts who intermarried with royals—first the Arshakuni and then, following its abolition, the Mamikonean who enjoyed *de facto* sovereignty—as well as prestige upon the royal families who could publicize as social and cultural capital their affiliation to Armenia’s revered illuminator. The fortuity of these marriages, then, elevated all involved parties by consolidating the legitimacy of each into a dually powerful union of church and state.

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<sup>73</sup> BP III.xix, p. 94.

Especially peculiar of this trope is the celebration of marital separation that persists endemically through narratives of the Gregorid line, illustrating the vehemency with which medieval Armenian chroniclers, via their enduring orientation toward asceticism, condemn sexual desire as they do all carnal appetites – even within a marital (and, thus, definitionally sacramental) context. A matter of even greater curiosity is the presence and popularity of this notion amid a culture that otherwise extols the nuptial union (as explored previously in chapter II). A respect for marriage, family, and procreation for the continual repopulation of the Armenian nation and its church suffuses these very texts, even if relegated to the scripting of femininity. That the genre would coterminously exhibit such contradictory values provokes confusion, but can perhaps be explained by the authorship of the genre as a cohesive corpus. The texts under inspection were produced almost exclusively by the elite clerical class of the *vardapets* – theological scholars who remunerate their immersive education in scripture, ecclesiology, doctrine, and patristics with lifelong commitment to the academic advancement of the church, akin to monks of the western tradition.<sup>74</sup> Serving the church primarily as teachers, copyists, and intellectuals, *vardapets* were (and are) definitionally celibate, contractually renouncing all material pleasures upon assumption of the office. It is perhaps this condition that so vividly colors the *vardapet*'s social attitudes as to imbue his texts—and for the depersonalized *vardapet* as an extensive cohort to imbue in the entire genre of these texts—with such vehement castigations of that which he himself has voluntarily surrendered. It is not only, then, the ubiquitously detestable amarital or extramarital sexual appetite that attracts the scorn of the *vardapet*; equally loathsome does he find the

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<sup>74</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the *vardapet* class in early Christian Armenia, see Thomson, “*Vardapet*,” 367-384.



sanctified conjugal union which he has also disavowed. Evident in these various iterations of the Gregorid marriages is the struggle inherited by the Armenian clergy who grapple with the simultaneity of Gregory's exaltation and exteriority from the canon laws that constrain them. While Gregory is to be revered as founder of Armenian Christianity and inaugural patriarch of its national church, and his descendants honored for their hereditary occupation of patriarchal office, his siring of children—proscribed among latter successors to this mantle—provokes sufficient controversy to warrant such literary convolutions. The *vardapet* class that guards the historical record must, then, celebrate Gregory and his lineage while also contending with the newly institutionalized requirement that they themselves, as his clerical disciples, remain celibate and thus sacrifice the procreative prerogative that Gregory himself retained. The remedy implemented by the clergy who act as custodians of this tradition is to minimize Gregory's marriage, and those of his descendants, by retroactively tempering the births of virtuous sons with righteous contrition for having partaken of carnality even within the sanctified marital union. The regretful Gregorid groom then repents of his sexual engagement (in some cases, merely a singular act) and, acting on his contrition, assumes the ascetic codes imposed upon the celibate narrators themselves.

Beyond the monastic echelon, however, marriage is esteemed universally sacred by the Armenian Church as the foundational unit of Armenian nationhood. The consummately incorruptible Gregorid lineage notwithstanding, the Armenian tradition approaches divorce with contempt even in extreme conditions such as spousal violence, as the sixth canon of Shahapivan illustrates:

If a woman leaves her husband, they shall seize her and bring her back to her husband ... However, if the husband is a wicked man, a fornicator, a gambler, drunkard or a pervert, let them rebuke the husband by caning and counseling him, and reconcile the couple. If the husband is a nobleman, discipline him with penalty and advice. And if the husband is easily reformed, let the wife follow him.<sup>75</sup>

Though the abusive husband is subject to corporal punishment (unless of noble station, in which case his person is not to be violated), following the administration of his sentence, his wife is to be restored to him. The woman is thus recovered involuntarily, the transaction occurring (as the language of the canon makes apparent) irrespective of her consent. In this way, the most formative of Armenian legal documents discloses the gravity with which its informing culture regards the sacramental commitment of marriage. Nevertheless, erotic impulses are discouraged as are all sensory arousals, illuminating the attitude from which a medieval Armenian legal and monastic mentality approached marital affection and intimacy. Sex even within a marital context was, thus, actively discountenanced, and scripted accordingly in such discourses as these, following Armenia's national conversion to Christianity. This moral position develops in tandem with the extinction of such phenomena as prostitution and concubinage in Armenia as well as other manifestations of sexual deviancy, as will be explored in the following chapter.

### Archetypal Variants

The premise of the Hrip' simēan sacrifice will be replicated by Movsēs Daskhurants'i, who employs this narrative paradigm as the template over which he sets identically a similar event contemporary to his own activity. Amid a Hunnic invasion, Movsēs casts a noblewoman called T'aguhi in the role—originated by Hrip' simē and

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<sup>75</sup> Hovhannessian, "The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan," 82.

revived to a considerable extent by P'arandzem—of the virtuous and beautiful woman victimized (even, to some interpretations, destroyed) by the lust of an incontinent male admirer. Each of these women is presented to audiences as correspondingly high-born, pious, and remarkably beautiful:

Now it happened that there was [among these captives] a woman called T'aguhi, one of the local noblewomen of the district of Uti from the village of Bagink', an extremely rich woman who frequented the missionaries from Jerusalem. When the general of the Huns spotted her among the prisoners, he became inflamed with a demonic and lascivious passion, for she was very beautiful. He ordered that she should be guarded with great care, since he planned to take her to wife.<sup>76</sup>

Metonymously to Hrip'simē who prefigures her, T'aguhi through her extraordinary beauty captures the attention of a foreign and idolatrous authority (in this instance, a general substituted for a king as in the trope's previous iterations). In this way, the Hunnic general conforms to the characterological and praxiological schema of his archetypal predecessors, Trdat and Arshak, transposing the character of the lecherous heathen authority from a native to a foreign actor and updating the literary model to account for the newly arrived exogeneity.

At the conclusion of a productive day of raiding and conquest, the general “...ordered the blessed T'aguhi to be fetched that he might satisfy his lewd desires upon her. Armed with the power of the Lord, however, she scorned him, resisted and ridiculed the filthy barbarian.”<sup>77</sup> That Movsēs identifies the general as a “filthy barbarian” emphasizes his conspicuous alterity and the revulsion with which the Armenians regard it. T'aguhi's response to the general evokes that of Hrip'simē and her companions to

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<sup>76</sup> MD I.29, p. 47.

<sup>77</sup> MD I.29, p. 47.

Trdat: "‘God forbid’, she said, ‘that I should yield my chaste virginity to a son of a dog, a pig-like heathen, or that I, out of fear of torture, should be afraid to die and exchange this worthless life for one which does not pass away!’"<sup>78</sup> T‘aguhi’s ascription of the insult “pig-like” (*junquppuṣṣuṣṣu*) to the general precisely and directly refers to King Trdat, who famously transformed into a pig in divine retribution for his persecution of the Hrip‘simēan martyrs.<sup>79</sup> The reference would have been readily assimilated by virtually any literate Armenian, every semiotic detail of this episode by this time emulsified into the Armenian national mythos. Movsēs employs language that deliberately recalls Hrip‘simē—and, perhaps less deliberately (if at all consciously), P‘arandzem—threading a direct line of continuity between these narrations, all variations on an essential topos. Movsēs will continue to summon porcine imagery of the heathen general, noting that in reaction to T‘aguhi’s repudiation, “The tyrant, filled with fanatical anger, flew into a rage in his snarling and growling bestiality, and ordered that she be put to death with terrible tortures if she would not come to him in honour and respect.”<sup>80</sup> Like Trdat, the general of the Huns is depicted in animalistic terms that discursively divest him of his humanity and allegorically demote him from man to beast. Movsēs will later employ the same literary device when disparaging an unidentified Arab prince, whom he characterizes as “inhuman” and “beast-like,” describing his comportment as that “of a dog rather than of a man.”<sup>81</sup>

Like Hrip‘simē, T‘aguhi is martyred for her resistance to the lecherous heathen authority, her tortures narratively identical to those of the precursor from whom her

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<sup>78</sup> MD I.29, p. 47.

<sup>79</sup> See MD I.29 in MH vol. 15, p. 142.

<sup>80</sup> MD I.29, p. 47.

<sup>81</sup> MD III.22, p. 140.

character derives: “When they were unable to persuade the unwilling T'aguhi, they bound her hands behind her back, dragged her by the hair, tore her face with cruel thorns from the forest thickets, and together they lacerated the body of the Saint; then they beheaded her with a sword.”<sup>82</sup> As applies to P'arandzem and Hrip'simē before her, T'aguhi's beauty receives no lyric detail as typically does male physical resplendence but is, rather, generically disclosed to the audience as credibly attractive. Her beauty, like that of her predecessors, must be concealed from the voyeuristic intrusion of literary setting so as not to profane her essential modesty. Finally, Movsēs makes explicit his intention to compare the two martyred beauties, directly citing the former in his testimony of the latter: “Her battle was like that of Saint Hr'ip'sime, and the great T'aguhi was also crowned with the divine and victorious crown of Christ.”<sup>83</sup>

Another female archetypal variation wrought early in the Armenian record emerges in the widow of the commander Sahak (Ishaq ibn Isma'il, d. 853), illustrated in the tenth century by T'ovma Artsruni.<sup>84</sup> Especially curious of this episode is the positivity with which T'ovma presents the woman considering that she is introduced not as a pious Armenian Christian but is, in fact, a Muslim. The aggrieved wife is portrayed not as a victim of Muslim incontinence but, contrastingly, as an injured party demanding remarriage to the caliph as restitution for her husband's murder and its deleterious sequelae (arising most immediately in matters of finance and status). Rather than avail himself of the opportunity to exploit once again the carnal profligacies of the occupying Muslim exogeneity, T'ovma Artsruni documents neutrally (albeit fancifully) the unusual

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<sup>82</sup> MD I.29, p. 47.

<sup>83</sup> MD I.29, p. 47.

<sup>84</sup> For the identification of this Sahak, see Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 30.

events surrounding the forcible remarriage of the widow to her husband's assassin, the Abbasid general Bugha—a figure infamous throughout Armenian texts for his brutality—and, subsequently, her third recorded marriage. By her own demand, this remedy weds her to the caliph Al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-861). T'ovma extends the additional courtesy of demonstrating Al-Mutawakkil to be a just and judicious ruler: as T'ovma records, Al-Mutawakkil orders a sentence of death upon Bugha to requite his indiscretion. T'ovma's account of this episode reads as follows:

When Sahak's wife heard that he had been captured, since she was a beautiful woman she hastened to appear before Bugha in the chance of being able to save her husband through her beauty and liberal treasures. But she became the cause of his death rather than of his salvation. Bugha ordered the executioners to cut off his head. His wife raised a shriek, saying: 'My lamentation will reach the caliph.' She went around the camp unveiled, which was not customary for the women of the Muslim people. But it was to no avail. Bugha had his head cut off and taken to court, and took the wife in marriage. The woman again shrieked: 'For my sake you killed my lord. I am not content to be your wife but the great caliph's [wife].' But Bugha kept her as his wife. Later he sent her to the caliph to be his wife. When the woman arrived, she told the caliph what had happened, of the complaint that she had raised and the evidence of witnesses that 'I am not content to be your wife, but the caliph's,' and of what occurred. This was the cause of Bugha's destruction....<sup>85</sup>

Noteworthy of this record is the renascent correlation of beauty to destruction.

T'ovma indicates the beauty of the widow, writing euphemistically of her feminine appeal and its persuasive capacity: "since she was a beautiful woman she hastened to appear before Bugha in the chance of being able to save her husband through her beauty and liberal treasures."<sup>86</sup> The chronicler then attributes her husband's execution directly to this very intervention, intimating that the murder of Sahak occurred in response to her

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<sup>85</sup> TA III.9, p. 239.

<sup>86</sup> TA III.9, p. 239.

outburst: “But she became the cause of his death rather than of his salvation.”<sup>87</sup>

Advancing the premise for the destructive potential of feminine beauty, T’ovma further implicates the woman in the secondary death of Bugha, citing her disclosure of these events to the caliph as “the cause of Bugha’s destruction.”<sup>88</sup> Unlike the narratives of Semiramis, Hrip’simē, and (more tenuously) P’arandzem, in which lust interacts with beauty as an agentive factor in one’s own (or another’s) destruction, the beauty of the widow is made explicitly causal to the demise of both her husband and the insolent general.

The remarriage of Sahak’s widow to the caliph (though fictitious it may be) activates multiple reminiscences of the remarriage of P’arandzem to King Arshak following the murder of her husband. Each of these women is desired by a lower-ranking interloper who transgresses against an established order in her pursuit, each widowed by her admirer before ultimately remarrying to the highest-ranking monarch in the land. Each of these women is noted for her exceptional beauty, and each assumes culpability for her husband’s murder at the hands of her admirer. The mournful exclamation of liability by the tenth-century widow of Sahak—““For my sake you killed my lord””—echoes that of P’arandzem in the fifth century: ““Hear ye all, my husband’s death was because of me, my husband was put to death because someone desired me!””<sup>89</sup> There does appear, however, a notable distinction between P’arandzem’s voluntary acceptance of culpability and T’ovma’s arbitrary assignment of guilt to the wife of Sahak, casting his judgment upon her as an objective and extrinsic narrator. T’ovma’s text evidences the

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<sup>87</sup> TA III.9, p. 239.

<sup>88</sup> TA III.9, p. 239.

<sup>89</sup> TA III.9, p. 239; BP IV.xv, p. 144.

survival of this literary trope across several centuries and a multiplicity of actors, and the transcriptions of Tirit' and Arshak to, respectively, Bugha and Al-Mutawakkil substantiate the endurance of these themes and characters in Armenian awareness. Despite T'ovma's portrayal of Al-Mutawakkil as a discerning and prudent leader, the author does, in a later chapter, construe the immoderacy—the most reviled of qualities by these Armenian historians—of the caliph: “We have indicated the details [of the story] of the wife of Sahak, a son of Ismael, the death of Sahak and his wife's public lamentation of the reason for her husband's murder, and her declaration to the leader of the Muslims, Jap'r. The latter, with his habitual licentious and foul insatiableness, waxed haughty and raged in an excess of ferocious poison.”<sup>90</sup>

That T'ovma adapts an event of such national significance as an episode from the biography of P'arandzem to sympathize a woman of such essentially foreign and oppositional extraction as a Muslim underscores both the importance of the narrative template itself and the evolving relations between Armenians and Muslims during his lifetime. Beyond reifying an archetype established at the incipience of Armenian literature, T'ovma's application of the widow's travail over a characterological model so internalized to the Armenian national consciousness discloses both an alterity that is explicitly masculine and a construction of femininity that suspends consideration of ethnoreligious exogeneity (as established in the previous chapter).

### Conclusion

Female (and male) archetypes have long been operationalized as didactic devices for accepted sexual behavior. Ancient and medieval cultures in the region reliably

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<sup>90</sup> TA III.15, pp. 273-274.



constructed archetypal personas so as to develop, modulate, and enforce gendered morality. Archetypal assemblages have been applied by scholars of such diverse ilk as Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell, each of whose archetypal systems replicates to some degree the primordial paragons—infinite and omnivalent, as both Jung and Campbell assert—projected by the medieval Armenian collective consciousness and mapped onto its national identity.

Unlike the Classical Greek paradigms that composed and dictated somatic theory both before Christianity and following its regional eclipse by Islam, the Armenians by visible contrast inject no such gendered distinctions into their moral circuitry. Armenian conceptualizations of the masculine/feminine gender binary apply with equal measure the standards of moral rectitude. Men and women alike are held indiscriminately responsible for public conformity to a national ethos of austerity. The Armenians, uniquely within the region, espoused no such gendered morality. Men and women were symmetrically accountable by their ethnoreligious precepts of continence, moderation, curtailed sensoriality, rejection of excess, and disciplined restraint of carnal impulses. In this way, the Armenians again establish their national dissimilitude—both of the body and of its behavior—from surrounding cultures. The circulation and persistence of these archetypes displays the requirement that Armenian bodies adhere to the standards that they epitomize, while foreign bodies exercise no such decorum and exhibit no such virtue. In this way, the Armenian tradition deploys these archetypes not only to regulate somatic conduct but to differentiate itself sexually from the appetencies of an inversely incontinent other. It is for this reason that these archetypes so regularly confront the

sexual volition of an exogenous aggressor whose opposition—both libidinal and ethnic, and often religious—defines the archetype, its cardinal narrative, and its essential virtue.

On many occasions documented in this chapter, a woman's physical beauty precipitates male aggression. While beauty emits destructive potential, however, it is more often the lust ignited by beauty that destroys. It is, in this way, not the beauty of Hrip'simē, Ara, or P'arandzem that is the operant destructive force, but the lust of their pursuers. Lust as a defect of moral character is so reviled, as an extension of carnal incontinence in all domains, that even sexual desire within licit marital confines is to be detested, as demonstrated by the narrative thread of marital separation that meanders intergenerationally through the Gregorid line across several centuries of Armenian literature. This Armenian aversion to lust and, indeed, all carnal impulses will be explored extensively in the following chapters.

## IV. Suzerains, Sex, and Law

### Introduction

Fornication is several times condemned in the Armenian laws, and is among the activities most immediately rebuked in an emergent Christian legal infrastructure. The centrality of fornication to Armenian legal morality manifests at the very incipience of the Armenian record. The Shahapivan Canons issued in 444—mere decades after the advent of Armenian script—accentuate the Armenians’ aversion to that which they considered sexually indecent. So focal is sexual continence to this formative Armenian legal code that its first three canons address the subject exclusively (among several other mentions sporadic across the corpus). Meticulously these canons announce the punishments appropriate for wanton conduct, issuing gradations of severity based upon the station of the offender in both church and state as well as his age and criminal history. Its penalties extend from defrocking to tax exaction to even corporal violence.<sup>1</sup> That such precision is expressed along so many factors of analysis illuminates not only the uniformity of sexual morality but the hierarchy along which it applied commensurate to the social position of the offender. The message herein conveyed is that the settlement of sin cannot be evaded (though mitigated it may be). Justice, the Canons promise, for all violations will be delivered, without exception, so as to reinforce Armenia’s recently adopted Christian morality.

These Armenian texts layered notions of the human body into architectures of identity that they consistently updated, adapted, and maintained over time and in response to a diversity of foreign enemies that the Armenians would encounter both militarily and

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<sup>1</sup> Hovhannessian, “The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan,” 78-81.

culturally. Their confrontations with these foreign identities they would cast as battles of both conflicting cultures and conflicting bodies. The human body itself then became the canvas upon which to map these conflicts. Central to the resultant system of somatic politics was the containment of carnal appetites. In these narratives, sensory indulgence was morally disqualifying along a value structure that privileged austerity of diet, sexuality, and emotion – those experiences which anchor the believer to his burdensome flesh. It is, then, that material flesh—and its spiritually corrosive instincts—that is so relentlessly legislated as a matter of communal and national necessity. These processes, which consciously invalidated the exogenous through the malignment of their corporality, reified themselves across several centuries and against numerous adversarial variants. Across this schematic, the espoused Armenian morality of restraint consistently prevails.

Further, the Armenian legal and literary traditions—which often synergically amplified one another—established as central to their national perpetuation the tenet of endogamy and condemned, accordingly, miscegenation and other interethnic relations. To this effect, narratives of romantic, sexual, and marital affairs between Armenian and exogenous agents are consistently portrayed as deleterious to both the offending Armenian party and to his or her immediate family, community, and—in some cases—even the Armenian nation writ large. These affairs are denounced of both male and female actors equally, as the literary parable of Semiramis (discussed in chapter III) exemplifies.

The reception of foreign sexual cultures further serves to delimit the boundaries of licit sexual behavior – the more deviant the sexuality, the brighter the contrast between

foreign and native bodies. In this way, unfamiliar sexualities serve to reinforce and recast, on a continual basis, the parameters of Armenian sexual culture. These attitudes, stratified across multiple domains, will serve to further dissimilate Armenia from her foreign suzerains, the most formidable among them Zoroastrian, Islamic, and Byzantine. Each of these will be subsequently attacked and othered, at its zenith of power, along constant criteria of projected sexual depravity, each scrutinized for deviation from native Armenian sexual values as transmitted by the authoring cleric-chroniclers. This chapter will examine the mechanics by which were constructed Armenian ethnocentric cultures of sexuality, situating its own—by design corporally restrictive and austere—in critical opposition to sexual alterities portrayed as execrably libertine and perverse. The chapter will address the medieval Armenian location of identity and alterity within the libidinal, analyzing the narratologies through which sexual activity—and active sexuality—advanced the political agenda of discursively distancing the Armenians from rival cultures. It will regard this process through the composition and application of legislation, both canonical and common, that regulated the Armenians’ interaction with, imitation of, and participation in foreign sexual customs.

### Adultery and Alterity

The vitriol expressed toward adultery in Armenian historical narratives duplicates that apparent in the canon law of the Armenian Church. As early as the fourth century, canon law prohibited both adultery and divorce, among other marital improprieties. The canon laws of St. Gregory (codified CE 303-325) impose a protracted duration of repentance and even temporary excommunication upon “members of the church who divorce their second wives and return back to their first wives,” decreeing that “Such members shall repent 7 years staying outside the church, and then for one more year

inside the church."<sup>2</sup> The specificity of the clause implies that return to a previous wife following a second marriage was a frequent enough occurrence to merit implementation of an official policy for such events. The same corpus contains provisions for men betrayed by adulterous wives to voluntarily dissolve their marriages as follows: "A man who divorces his wife for cause of adultery, may do so, and after one year is found clear [for re-marriage]."<sup>3</sup> Especially remarkable is the mandate that even the aggrieved (and presumably innocent) partner abstain from remarriage for a period of one year, suggesting that the very act of infidelity would contaminate all involved parties – even the passive spouse exposed involuntarily and indirectly to the sin through no indiscretion of his own. Contrastingly, this stipulation may serve a more utilitarian purpose: to verify the absence of pregnancy and, in the event of its presence, to ascertain paternity.<sup>4</sup> This provision may also indicate circumspection on the part of the Armenian Church regarding disease transmission, as sexual activity was by this time a confirmed vehicle for the communication of pathogens. A mandatory interval of abstinence, then, would provide ample time for incubation and thereby enable the containment of any infection contracted during the course of infidelity.

The canons issued at Shahapivan in 444 likewise condemn adulterous conduct, its first and second ordinances resolving that clerics discovered in fornication be defrocked and fined.<sup>5</sup> The second canon in particular determines that should the wife or daughter of a clergyman engage in fornication (adulterous or otherwise), "severe penance" is to be

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<sup>2</sup> Kanonagirk', 19.

<sup>3</sup> Kanonagirk', 19.

<sup>4</sup> For this thought I am grateful to my dissertation advisor, Dr. Nerina Rustomji.

<sup>5</sup> Hovhanessian, "The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan," 78-80.

imposed upon her up to and including removal from the family home.<sup>6</sup> The third canon stipulates that any adulterous man from among the laity be beaten, fined, and “removed from the church” for a fixed duration.<sup>7</sup> The canon further delineates degrees of punishment for this infraction to be mediated by such factors as the woman’s consent, the virginity of either party prior to the act, the status of betrothal, and the subsequent marriage of the offending couple.<sup>8</sup> Further mitigations apply in such cases where the offender ranks among the nobility, in which case corporal punishment is impermissible.<sup>9</sup>

Canons IV and V in equal measure censure men who commit adultery. Canon IV stipulates that should a wedded man pursue another woman sexually, absent any moral defect in his wife—implying that such a defect on the part of one’s wife may, in fact, legally moderate his indiscretion—he is to be fined.<sup>10</sup> Both the fourth and the fifth canons mandate that any woman who voluntarily weds the offending “wife-repudiator” within one year of the offense is to be held equally accountable, “For it is obvious that she was the reason for the man to leave his wife.”<sup>11</sup> The fifth canon concludes: “Whoever leaves his children’s mother ... without any reason of fornication or other immorality, the penalty for the man and the [other] woman is a fine and penance.”<sup>12</sup>

A decree established at the Council of Partaw, convened over three centuries later in 768, did not apply the same proscription as in the codes of St. Gregory to widows and widowers, though retains the mandated interval of penance: “For the second marriage,

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<sup>6</sup> Hovhanessian, “The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan,” 79.

<sup>7</sup> Hovhanessian, “The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan,” 80.

<sup>8</sup> Hovhanessian, “The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan,” 80-81.

<sup>9</sup> Hovhanessian, “The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan,” 80.

<sup>10</sup> Hovhanessian, “The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan,” 81.

<sup>11</sup> Hovhanessian, “The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan,” 82.

<sup>12</sup> Hovhanessian, “The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan,” 80-81.

following the death of the spouse, marriage is allowed after repentance.”<sup>13</sup> A duration for repentance is not specified, nor is any compounded condition upon the procedures that constitute repentance (though these precepts would likely have been commonly understood to the general population of Armenian laity, or possibly varied on a local or congregational basis, and likely transformed over time as historical circumstances demanded). Curiously, gendered applications are not specified, and so it appears these laws were imposed in equal measure upon both widows and widowers. Of the Armenian ecclesial position on serial remarriage, the historian Sebēos clarifies: “But the church does not accept those [married] for the third or fourth time; nor are they allowed to mention communion....”<sup>14</sup>

Two decades later, the Armenian Church adopted several resolutions—many of them effectively addenda to the provisions set down at Partaw—issued at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787. Irrespective of gender distinctions or reason for remarriage, thereby visibly advancing the legislative neutrality perhaps first instilled at Partaw, the Second Council of Nicaea decreed that “A second marriage is allowed after three years of interval.”<sup>15</sup> These conventions also determined, further, that sanctioned penalties for adultery must be meted congruously to both men and women, specifying: “If the wife is found in adultery, she should repent for 7 years, and only then be re-admitted to receive the Sacraments.”<sup>16</sup> They mandate likewise that “The same with the husband; if both are found in adultery, 7 years are required for them to repent before returning to receive the

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<sup>13</sup> Kanonagirk‘, 31.

<sup>14</sup> Sebēos 46, p. 128.

<sup>15</sup> Kanonagirk‘, 33.

<sup>16</sup> Kanonagirk‘, 33.



Sacraments of the church.”<sup>17</sup> For this reason, the conventions adopted at the Second Council of Nicaea prove startlingly progressive for the eighth century, their implementation by the Armenians signaling an apparent advancement toward an increased measure of gender equality (or, if not gender equality, certainly gender neutrality) across centuries even before the installation of the Bagratuni monarchy in 884. David Zakarian has persuasively argued just such a level of gender equity among the earliest Armenian Christians, citing specifically the Canons of Shahapivan.<sup>18</sup> Zakarian further hypothesizes that the relative gender equality inherent to Zoroastrian society profoundly influenced Armenian culture and its practice of Christianity, which consequently adopted a remarkably more gender-equal cosmology than the nearby Christianities of the Syriac and Greek traditions.<sup>19</sup> It is also arguable that these laws were not necessarily any more progressive than those already observed *de jure* but, rather, functioned to clarify principles and practices implicit to the Canon Laws of St. Gregory. Nevertheless, these emendations—ecumenical though they may be—do evince to some degree the Armenian clerical authorities’ resolve to express in writing, explicitly eliminating any textual ambiguities, the equal application of canon law to men and women.

The tenth-century *Universal History* of Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i refers briefly to the fifth-century Persian *hazarapet* Chihovr-Vshnasp, whose adulterous affairs with the wives of lower-ranking nobles incurs a sentence of death at the hands of the historically lionized commander Vardan Mamikonean: “He came and took possession of this land of

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<sup>17</sup> Kanonagirk‘, 33.

<sup>18</sup> Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 38.

<sup>19</sup> Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 66.

ours, greatly oppressing the Armenian nobles, because he committed adultery with the wives of the *azats*, not accepting a man as lord of his wife.”<sup>20</sup> No mention is made by Step‘anos of any penalty assessed to the adulterous wives of the *azats* for their participation in these dalliances, though the text renders unclear the degree of mutuality that they entailed. Step‘anos does not indicate whether these relations were carried out by force or conducted with the women’s voluntary consent. It is also possible that these particulars were omitted from the narrative by request of the ecclesial authorities to whom Step‘anos’s project was obliged so as not to scandalize the legacies of these noble houses even five centuries removed from these alleged events. As medieval Armenian writers enthusiastically availed themselves of opportunities to exaggerate the prurience of invading foreigners (especially their most potent and most omnipresent adversaries: coeval to Step‘anos the Arabs and, prior, the Persians), such barbarity would have been dramatically amplified had these affairs been coercive or otherwise nonconsensual. That this episode does not appear in any of the extant Armenian source texts to which Step‘anos may have had access in crafting his manuscript may also suggest that these events did not take place at the initiation of a fifth-century Persian actor, but an Arab one—disguised in literary transcription—more contemporary to the author.

Well documented is the tendency of latter medieval Armenian historians to translate Zoroastrian figures onto contemporaneous Muslim adversaries. Robert Thomson draws particular attention to T‘ovma Artsruni’s employment of this device, writing that T‘ovma “...depicts the caliphs and the minions in terms deliberately evocative of

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<sup>20</sup> ST II.2, p. 152.

Eghishe’s description of Shah Yazdagerd II and his attempt to crush Armenian liberties.”<sup>21</sup> On the same subject, Alison Vacca elaborates that T‘ovma

...calques large portions of Elišē’s history of the Armenian-Persian wars of 451 into an ‘Abbāsīd setting by changing the Sasanian emperor Yazdegerd and his vizier Mihrnerseh to the caliph al-Mutawakkil and his general Bughā. T‘ovma’s purpose is not to tell the story of Bughā’s campaign but to emplot this moment of Armenian history into a metanarrative of Christian minorities under imperial persecution, tapping into a storyline that was well known to an Armenian audience but completely absent in Arabic accounts.<sup>22</sup>

While the above scholarly discussions refer specifically to the historical text of T‘ovma Artsruni, parallels conspicuously abound between the narratives of Awarayr and the works of several Armenian historians following the arrival of the first Muslims to the Highland. Both Zoroastrian and Muslim aggressors are cast by Armenian historians as analogously barbaric, persecutorial, rapacious, and—most saliently for the present study—sexually perverse. Armenian traditors present these libidinous habituations of the exogenous in direct conflict with Armenian sexual moralities. Be these depravities of an incestuous, adulterous, or polygynous nature, each is accorded its own articulation of alterity consistently and uniformly salacious across depictions of both Zoroastrian and Islamic interlopers, the former often cast as metonyms for the latter.

The *History of the Anonymous Story-Teller*, which chronicles primarily the events of Armenia’s early caliphate period despite its inconclusive and likely protracted dating, recounts an otherwise unattested extramarital affair between Prince Derēn Artsruni of Vaspurakan, a sovereign vassal kingdom of the Abbasid Caliphate as of 908 CE, and the

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<sup>21</sup> Robert W. Thomson, “Armenian Literary Culture through the Eleventh Century,” in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times: Volume I: The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 229.

<sup>22</sup> Alison M. Vacca, “Conflict and Community in the Medieval Caucasus,” *Al-‘Uşūr al-Wuṣṭā* 25 (2017): 70.

daughter of a Muslim official. The chronicler introduces Derēn as “a womaniser.”<sup>23</sup> Derēn, according to the text, maintained a congenial relationship with the woman’s father, Apumsar, so as to continue their affair: “Derēn spent much money on that man, for he had a beautiful daughter whom Derēn loved. ... He brought Apumsar with him to Van. He spent many days in merry-making, gave him numerous gifts, and sent him back to Hēr. In this fashion he acted for a long time, abandoning his own wife whom he no longer loved.”<sup>24</sup> The detail that Derēn had discarded his wife, exiting the marital union spiritually, physically, and emotionally, carries significant weight for writers of the medieval Armenian tradition (though this particular text is in many ways an outlier amid the tradition itself). The abdication of marital commitment codes for Derēn’s impiety and, thus, his unworthiness of the mantle of Armenian masculinity, the obligations of which entail preservation of the nested domains of family, nation, church, and state. Derēn violates the marital contract the domestic order that it dictates, effectively voiding his eligibility to participate further in matters internal to the masculine dimension.

That Derēn extends his efforts to such a degree as purchasing the official’s complicity in his affair with the latter’s daughter, identified as K’ulinar of possible Arab or Persian extraction, demonstrates the magnitude of Derēn’s depravity to an Armenian audience conversant in the pietistic language and moral conventions of the tradition amid which this tale is situated. This Derēn is, according to the chronicler, married to Hranush, the sister of King Smbat. Distraught, Hranush appeals to her brother to intervene in the matter, writing to him as follows:

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<sup>23</sup> AST p. 217.

<sup>24</sup> AST p. 218.

“My husband Derēn has abandoned me; he loves some foreign women from Hēr, the daughter of Apumsar. He has become so arrogant and infatuated with the foreigner, that the whole year he goes and stays there, taking with him all the goods of Vaspurakan. He prepares for them food, and also takes garments, treasures, horses and mules for that foreign women. So besottedly does he love her that he regards out children as nothing, and disregards them. So, my imperial brother, of whom all kings, princes, and nobles of the earth are terrified, do not allow him to despise me, for I am your sister and I have no other protector.”<sup>25</sup>

The identification amid Hranush’s missive of K‘ulinar as a “foreigner” provides valuable insight into medieval Armenian adherence to endogamy as an instrument of demographic preservation and a compelling disdain for inter-ethnic assimilation. The extramarital relations of Derēn are, thus, doubly offensive to an Armenian social sensibility, being both licentious and exoteric.<sup>26</sup> In so comporting himself he not only violates the sacred marital contract, enacting a dereliction of his familial and national responsibilities, but he does so having failed to contain his sexual desires for a woman of foreign origin – libidinal incontinence, especially that which deviates beyond the native ethnos, considered an impairment indicating extreme moral defect (as previously discussed). King Smbat, in his written communication to Derēn, chastises him accordingly: “Why do you commit this crime? For it is not right that you abandon my sister Hranuš – than whom among women there is none so beautiful, modest and attractive – and go after a foreigner.”<sup>27</sup> Armenian-Muslim miscegenation will be similarly derided by a continuator to T‘ovma Artsruni as “mixing milk with their blood.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> AST p. 218.

<sup>26</sup> For the integration of oral tradition into the Anonymous Chronicle, see Robert W. Thomson’s introduction to the text (AST 171-181).

<sup>27</sup> AST p. 219.

<sup>28</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 2] IV.12, p. 385.

The petition of Hranush on behalf of her children additionally marks her as a wronged and injured victim of her husband's impiety, and as a respectable mother in compliance with her feminine, maternal, and necessarily national obligations. This representation is affirmed by the text's description of her (via Smbat) as "beautiful, modest and attractive," the medieval Armenian correlation of moral virtue to aesthetic beauty having been extensively established in chapters I – III of the present study.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps most appalling of his above enumerated actions, Derēn answers the reproachful dispatch of his brother-in-law—the sovereign king of the collective Armenian territories (however tenuously consolidated under caliphal administration)—with the following display of brazen arrogance: "...Who are you to speak like that with me? I am the master of my own house and of my own wishes. What I like, that I do. ..."<sup>30</sup> That Derēn responds to the exposure of his indiscretions in such a manner encapsulates for the lettered custodians of Armenian literature (and those influenced by their artifacts and the monastic culture that informed them) the most vile primordialities of carnal instinct unrefined by the civilizing program of ascetic morality – prescribed, inferably, so as to avert such calamities as those occasioned by Derēn upon both himself and his house. Derēn's hubris, disported at the expense of his inclusion in the dynastic order, represents the ultimate manifestation of sensory excess and its myriad moral dangers. Derēn abdicates the commitments of the marital covenant, and relinquishes by extension his privileged position in the apparatus of nation, for gratification in his hedonic impulses. The compiler in this way fashions of Derēn a caution of the hazards that ensnare the incontinent, the arrogant, and the insolent. Derēn's dereliction of his patriarchal

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<sup>29</sup> AST p. 219.

<sup>30</sup> AST p. 219.

obligations, then, by default marks him irretrievably for death, which King Smbat delivers in response to his sister's entreaty.<sup>31</sup>

### Sex and the Zoroastrian Other

Among Armenian depictions of the sexually incontinent other, the Zoroastrian Persians are caricatured as especially depraved. Of the sexual and somatological opposition of the two religious traditions, David Zakarian qualifies: "...virginity as the ideal Christian state of life was in discord with the principles of Zoroastrian religion that sees fertility as a divine grace bestowed upon humans."<sup>32</sup> Eznik Koghbat's'i, writing in the fifth century, cites the corporeal procreative activities of the deity Zurvan in characterizing him as "...not an immortal god, but an ordinary man, who engaged in ordinary relations and experienced ordinary carnal desire, which his followers have enshrined in their religion."<sup>33</sup> In drawing this conclusion, Eznik decries the sexual depravities of the Zoroastrians and diminishes their very cosmology as inherently polluted by the sin of carnal incontinence. Eznik continues, elevating the purity of Armenian theological morality above that of the Zoroastrians by specifying that "... it is not appropriate for true gods to create and procreate as a result of ordinary, contingent sexual relations."<sup>34</sup> In effect, Eznik here contends that while ethnoreligious rivals will experience carnal and temporal impulses by default of their spiritual fallibility, the Armenians, as spiritual and corporal superiors, are impervious to such compulsions.

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<sup>31</sup> AST p. 221.

<sup>32</sup> Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 82.

<sup>33</sup> Eznik Koghbat's'i, *Refutation of the Sects*, trans. Thomas Samuelian (New York: St. Vartan Press, 1986) [Henceforth: Eznik] 2.3, p. 39.

<sup>34</sup> Eznik 2.3, p. 39.

There is no place, Eznik propounds, for such improprieties in Armenian cosmology; these inhabit exclusively the territory of the heathen inferior.

Armenian clerics of the pre-Islamic period consistently cast their Persian suzerains as unsanitary in matters both ritual and routine, frequently citing as unhygienic their mundane habits and dietary customs. More disdained by this authorial cohort than any other characteristic are the sexual behaviors of the Persians, who are depicted in these manuscripts to embrace such perversions as polygamy and even incest (both of which the Armenians themselves practiced prior to their national conversion to Christianity).<sup>35</sup> The newly Christian Armenians, in response, position themselves vociferously against such practices, contrasting their sexual austerity against the conjured libertinism of the incestuous Persians. Incest, then, becomes the hallmark of the Zoroastrian exogeneity. To differentiate nationally from their Persian suzerains following their religious estrangement, the Armenians audaciously trumpet their endorsement of asceticism in defiance of and opposition to Persian sexual conventions, as well as their contempt for the practices of polygyny and incest in which they themselves participated under Zoroastrian dominion.<sup>36</sup>

Armenian censures of incest commence with the canons issued at the Council of Shahapivan in 444, several of which explicitly denounce the practice. Canon XII delineates prohibitions against—and punishments for—acts of fornication by a son with the wife of his father (no genetic relation implied) and by a father with the wife of his son.<sup>37</sup> Each is to be anathematized and remit a fine. These penalties apply equally “If a

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<sup>35</sup> Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 171-176.

<sup>36</sup> Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 174.

<sup>37</sup> Hovhanessian, “The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan,” 85-86.



father knows his son's wife or a brother his brother's...."<sup>38</sup> The canon elaborates: "Thus, let no one have the wife of a close relative [*ǰerm harazat*] or of the next to kin [*azgakan*] as a wife or to fornicate with her. However, if the fornication is by the will of the wife, let her bear the penalty, the fine, and the anathema."<sup>39</sup> Canon XIII supplementarily rebukes any "who takes a relative as a wife."<sup>40</sup> The text continues in ostensible reference to the impinging Zoroastrians and their customs: "...let no one mix with his bodily relative according to the habits of the heathens and the ungodly impious nations."<sup>41</sup> Further, the canon specifies that Christians are forbidden to "...touch a sister or a sister's daughter or a brother's daughter or an aunt or whoever belongs to his people, until the fourth degree and take her as a wife, so as not to tear the holy faith into pieces."<sup>42</sup> Finally, laity are prohibited from even attending such ceremonies, as are clerics likewise forbidden to preside over them. Penalties await those who defy these ordinances: "If someone blesses the marriage of such people or goes to the wedding, he becomes a participant in their evil works and must be removed from the order of the clerks."<sup>43</sup> The sequential appearance of these two canons (and the precedence of the twelfth above the thirteenth) intimates a posture that relations between affines approximated or perhaps equaled in severity those between cognates. This notion will again appear in the eleventh-century text of Aristakēs Lastiverts'i (to be explored below).

Excoriating their Persian aggressors, the historian Eghishē, whose sole surviving text chronicles the Battle of Awarayr, transcribes a proclamation imposed upon the

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<sup>38</sup> Hovhanessian, "The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan," 85.

<sup>39</sup> Hovhanessian, "The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan," 85.

<sup>40</sup> Hovhanessian, "The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan," 86.

<sup>41</sup> Hovhanessian, "The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan," 86.

<sup>42</sup> Hovhanessian, "The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan," 86.

<sup>43</sup> Hovhanessian, "The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan," 87.

Armenians by their Zoroastrian suzerains. The purported directive highlights the Persians' antipathy toward Armenian asceticism – an orientation likely received from Syriac Christianity.<sup>44</sup> According to Eghishē, the Persians instruct their Armenian subjects to desist from the ascetic practices already firmly impressed into their rapidly developing Christian institution. Specifically, they command the Armenians to refrain from ascetic dietary practices such as vegetarianism (which had experienced a precipitous rise in popularity among the Armenians immediately following their Christianization) and monastic commitments to celibacy – a practice severely condemned in Zoroastrian cosmology. A purported correspondence from the Persian vizier Mihrnerseh admonishes the Armenians for their Christian faith and its inherited habituation toward asceticism:

Do not believe your leaders ... for they are very deceitful. What they teach in words they do not practice in deeds. 'To eat meat,' they say, 'is not a sin,' yet they themselves do not like to eat meat. 'It is right to marry,' but they themselves do not wish even to look at a woman. ... They dishonor the births of men and praise childlessness. And if people were to listen to them and not approach their wives, the end of the world would soon arrive. ...<sup>45</sup>

This notion is later reinforced by the reproach of King H̄azkert to the assembled Armenian *nakharars*: "And what is worst, you do not regularly approach your wives. The demons have great joy when you disregard and do not observe all the institutions of the magi."<sup>46</sup> This implication that demonic figures approve of Armenian celibacy is positioned within a larger discourse concerning demonic agency in the Armenians' sexual behavior, particularly one that develops as the Armenians transition from a

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<sup>44</sup> Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 106.

<sup>45</sup> Eghishē II, p. 80.

<sup>46</sup> Eghishē II, p. 98.

Zoroastrian to a Christian moral infrastructure, which will be discussed at length in a chapter to follow.

Eghishē further derides not only Zoroastrian customs and practices, but additionally the ancestry of the Zoroastrian pantheon. The provenance of its deities Eghishē introduces as intrinsically incestuous. This he accomplishes through the pretense of a purportedly interpolated (rather than originally composed) correspondence from the bishop Hovsep to the Persian vizier Mihrnerseh: ““And there is something else still more laughable than this: the god Mihr is born from a woman, as if anyone would have intercourse with his own parent.””<sup>47</sup> In a subsequent passage, the chronicler summarizes the edicts instated over the Armenians upon the resumption of Persian authority, which explicitly mandate the surrender of recently adopted Christian customs and reversion to the Zoroastrian conventions. Eghishē maligns these edicts as obscene, sacrilegious, and sexually perverse. He commences his polemic citing Hazzkert’s decree that the ascetics abandon their commitments to austerity and rejoin the civic sphere of the material: ““...the believers in Christ, men and women who dwell each in their own monasteries, shall change their garments for secular attire...””<sup>48</sup> Eghishē continues his reduction of the Persian dictates, first inciting outrage at the indoctrination of the wives and—most flagrantly—children of the nobility, then further inflaming his audience against the Persians’ newly enacted marital doctrine:

‘Furthermore the wives of the princes shall receive the magi’s instruction. Sons and daughters of the nobility and peasantry shall study the precepts of these same magi. The laws of holy matrimony which they received from their forefathers according to Christian ritual shall be abrogated and abolished; instead of one wife they shall take many, so that

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<sup>47</sup> Eghishē II, p. 85.

<sup>48</sup> Eghishē II, p. 103.

the Armenian nation may increase and multiply. Daughters shall be [wives] for fathers, and sisters for brothers. Mothers shall not withdraw from sons, and grandchildren shall ascend the couch of grandparents. ...<sup>49</sup>

Eghishē's indication that the new Persian edicts will compel incestuous relations between Armenian kin is intended both to provoke indignation and to satirize the Persians, crystallizing their vulgarity into the Armenian historical record. The implication of polygamy, however, is a curious anomaly. Polygyny was at this time a common practice for the Armenians, certainly among the aristocracy if not among the common class as well. References to polygyny among the royals (and, to a lesser extent, nobles) of Armenia abound in the source texts, and marriage to several wives—who would comprise a ranked hierarchy arranged by such factors as beauty, piety, and political value—had solidified into standard marital protocol by the time of Armenia's Christianization. There survives no textual evidence of any limitation to the number of wives permissible for a king or nobleman to accumulate. References to polygamy in Armenian practice both predate and coincide with the production of Eghishē's text, and it is unlikely that the author would have been ignorant of this practice or its ubiquity among the royals and nobles of Armenia. Documentation of polygyny among the Armenians evaporates from their historical record after the fifth century, suggesting that the practice experienced a precipitous decline in popularity (or from political endorsement) in the centuries immediately following conversion. Eghishē here endeavors, in all likelihood, to distort the practice as a relic of Persian dominion so as to negate any Armenian impropriety and displace culpability for the convention, instead, onto their Persian

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<sup>49</sup> Eghishē II, pp. 103-104.

suzerains. It does appear that the practice of polygyny, like concubinage, plummeted in popularity among the Armenians by the time of the Islamic conquests, as it is scarcely mentioned thereafter and, at that, exclusively in reference to the exogenous or to local events of centuries prior.

The canon laws issued at Partaw in CE 768 reflect a parallel disdain for incest, possibly owing more to its implications as a Persian imposition than to any inherent revulsion at the practice itself. One such decree issued at the Council in opposition to incestuous unions reads as follows: “Marriage laws prohibited the union of relatives closer than the fourth generation; otherwise, priests who shall bless such marriages shall be suspended and defrocked.”<sup>50</sup> This injunction appears also to echo the precepts set down in the fourth century by St. Nersēs as recorded in the *Buzandaran*, according to which the patriarch cautions: “...and above all to refrain from incestuous marriages with close family relations within the clan, especially from intimacy with daughters-in-law or anything of the kind, as had once been [the custom].”<sup>51</sup>

Similar imagery of the savagely unrefined other will permeate the historical text attributed to Movsēs Daskhurants‘i. A passage dated to the seventh or eighth century portrays the invading Huns as follows: “Since they have completely undisciplined minds, they practise every kind of error: beating drums, whistling over corpses, bloodying [themselves] by cutting their cheeks and limbs with swords and daggers, and holding naked swordfights.”<sup>52</sup> A subsequent passage associates Hunnic customs with occultic heathenry and uncivilized rituality: “The witches (*kaxardk'*), sorcerers (*k'awdeayk'*),

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<sup>50</sup> Kanonagirk‘, 31.

<sup>51</sup> BP IV.iv, p. 114.

<sup>52</sup> MD II.40, p. 107.

wizards (*vhukk'*) pagan priests (*k'rmapetk'*), and the common folk tore their garments and loudly shouted their protest to the prince of the Huns and to the grandees of the land.”<sup>53</sup>

The auteur’s disdain for the bereavement rituals of the Huns reflects his disposition toward Nersēsian law (though an aversion to excessive mourning had, by this time, come to characterize the eschatologies of numerous belief systems now established in the region, including various Christian sects and, more recently, Islam). The text of Movsēs Daskhurants’i more generally communicates, across its constituent segments, an opposition to corporal mutilation that may perhaps correlate more directly to Islamic somatology. The awareness of such customs in practice by these exogeneities that Movsēs evinces throughout his text may—quite controversially—indicate a single author of all known components, as this attitude consistently presents across the totality of the surviving text. Conversely, however, it is also possible that the *History*’s tenth-century continuator adopted his predecessor’s contempt for such customs and, accordingly, interpolated this attitude into his own product regarding the more recently arrived Islamic entity. The text continues of these foreigners: “Moreover, they were sexually incontinent and in accordance with their savage pagan customs, they married their father's wife, shared one wife between two brothers, and had several women.”<sup>54</sup> Beyond reifying an aversion to the ethnoreligious other and a preoccupation with sexual continence as a moral virtue, the passage substantiates the extinction of polygamy in Armenia between the fifth century and the time of Movsēs’s literary enterprise. Further, it corroborates a continued rejection of incest by the Armenians—originally taken up so as to dissimilate the newly Christian polity from its Zoroastrian environment—due to its association with

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<sup>53</sup> MD II.41, p. 109.

<sup>54</sup> MD II.40, p. 107.

foreign domination even long after the Zoroastrian threat to Armenian sovereignty had subsided.

Following the supplantation of the Zoroastrian enemy with an Islamic one, mention of incest effectively vanishes from Armenian historical registers. This aligns with the recently imported Islamic sexual morality which disapproved of incest and, like the Christianized Armenians, associated the practice with heresy.<sup>55</sup> A passage of the *History* attributed to Movsēs Daskhurants‘i penned in the tenth century refers in brief (though imprecisely) to the punishment that befell the incestuous nobility of the Aghuans for the offense of marriage between kin as far removed as “the third degree [of consanguinity].”<sup>56</sup> The practice is, otherwise, scarcely mentioned after the sixth century, documented only twice in the eleventh and sporadically by Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i in the early twelfth. Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i condenses the iniquities of Smbat Bagratuni, identifying as his most egregious infraction an incestuous act: “The third evil is even more appalling: he had sexual intercourse with his niece.”<sup>57</sup> Later that century, Aristakēs Lastiverts‘i includes in his *History* a scandalous parable relating the downfall of a young prince who surrenders to his carnal instincts when tempted by a pair of seductress sisters.<sup>58</sup> Aristakēs introduces the reader, in preamble, to a fallen cleric identified as an “adulterous monk named Kuncik” who “...had within him the ferment of impurity.”<sup>59</sup> In

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<sup>55</sup> El Cheikh, *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity*, 69-70.

<sup>56</sup> MD III.24, p. 144.

<sup>57</sup> ST III.29, p. 292.

<sup>58</sup> Nina Garsoïan identifies this episode as a sensationalized invective against the recently insurgent Tondrakian heresy, and a number of its actors as followers thereof – see Nina Garsoïan, “The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia,” in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times: Volume I: The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 173-174.

<sup>59</sup> AL XXIII, p. 150.

the first of many circuitous turns, Aristakēs refers to Kuntsik’s unnamed mentor as “satan's first-born son” and then to a female accomplice who, in turn, enlists two female associates to effect chaos:

Now this Kuncik, satan's diligent servant, gave instruction to a certain woman named Hranoysh who belonged to a principal and fine line, mistress of field(s) and [Kuncik's] neighbor. Once infected by that death-bringing poison, [Hranoysh], dissatisfied with her own perdition, prepared many others as accomplices for their heresy. First and foremost were two women, her clanswomen who were named Axni and Kamara (truly the willing accomplices (*kamarar*) of satan). These two were actual sisters, infected with that outrageous dissolute disease which is typical of their fold, and by the art of sorcery they became satan's *vardapets*, and the father of all evil made them strong.<sup>60</sup>

The appellation “Satan’s *vardapets*” is of itself unusual, *vardapet* being a title reserved, by definition, exclusively for male clerics – and one that demands definitional celibacy. The expression implies clerically modeled service to Satan that, unlike that of the requisitely abstemious male *vardapet*, necessarily entails the activation of feminine sexuality and, more generically, the exploitation of femininity itself. That the narrated conspiracy is orchestrated by women merits perspicacious attention, as the author intimates an innate female inclination to entice men to such ruin through the exercise of feminine sexual allure. The overt sexuality of the Satanical female “*vardapets*” mirrors the condition of celibacy essential to the office. Thus, the sisters reverse the paradigm in both gender and sexuality as well as in moral alignment. In antithesis to the more correctly male and obediently continent *vardapet*, Aristakēs conjures an analogue conversely female and assertively sexual. The sisters thus invert the esteemed office in its

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<sup>60</sup> AL XXIII, p. 150.



every property. Expounding upon the sisters' tactic of targeting "the hearts of the religious," Aristakēs elaborates:

They struck and mortally wounded many innocent souls. [These two sisters] possessed two villages from their patrimonial inheritance which they turned into dwellings and dens for that crafty dragon-snake. [Yakobos] nested therein and violently spewed forth his bile. [The sisters collected the poison] and, serving as cup-bearers, gave it to the folk living about them to drink themselves to ruin.<sup>61</sup>

Aristakēs then introduces the fallen prince whose ruin supplies the central axis of the story:

There was a certain prince named Vrverh who became the willing brother to these sorceresses. Previously he had been correct in the faith, and forward in pious deeds, to the point that he had had constructed a clerical retreat on his patrimonial lands and assembled ascetic brothers therein. ... He proved himself more forward than many when it came to charity for the poor and in showing submission to the priests' wishes. The devil ensnared him by means of those women who indiscriminately copulated with him, those diseased prostitutes, thinking nothing about consanguinity.<sup>62</sup>

The acknowledgment by Aristakēs of the sisters' consanguinity appears somewhat extraneous to the narrative's primary purpose. That Aristakēs refers to the fallen Vrverh as "the willing brother"—the term subtly fluctuating between its genealogical and monastic connotations—of these sisters may serve to reinforce the latent theme of incestuous activity that circulates through his narration. The text does not specify whether these sex acts took place concurrently, and so it is not immediately clear whether Vrverh conducted relations with each of the sisters consecutively or with both simultaneously. In either case, the identification of "consanguinity" implies an indecency

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<sup>61</sup> AL XXIII, p. 151; "Yakobos" here refers to the heretical bishop Yakobos of the Tondrak movement, first mentioned by Aristakēs in chapter XXII, p. 141.

<sup>62</sup> AL XXIII, pp. 151-152; "consanguinity" is rendered from "*quarhluūn vliḡḡaiḡḡḡḡḡḡḡḡ*," lit. "the proximity of blood."

beyond their generalized concupiscence. If referring to a collective sexual act between the three, a characterization of the act as incestuous implies some extent of sexual contact between the sisters – if not directly so, then certainly through the communion of fluids. If, however, Aristakēs refers to singular and sequential sex acts with each sister in isolation of one another, a more puritanical posture is exposed: that to engage in sexual relations with two individuals united by blood, even if sequentially, constitutes an act to be regarded, to some degree, incestuous. This echoes the extremism of the twelfth canon of Shahapivan, which forbade marital and sexual relations with the spouses of kin (supplementing Canon XIII, which explicitly forbade those between blood relatives).<sup>63</sup> Further, it illustrates the actuation of these moral values as they developed between Zoroastrian Armenia—a sphere that observed agnatic kinship systems—and the supplanting Christian culture that the Armenians expeditiously implanted by abandoning, among other extirpations, the incestuous customs of their recently rejected suzerains.<sup>64</sup>

Despite its ambiguities, the inclusion of this detail by Aristakēs offers an unusual perspective. The canons that forbade incestuous marriages remain salient features within the genre of Armenian historical writing well into the eleventh century, as the repulsion expressed at the mere suggestion of communed bodily fluids between sisters reveals in Aristakēs’s text. The author concludes this account somewhat ominously, cautioning his readers of the fate that befell the prince who succumbed to this sexual temptation: “Trapped by them, that lamentable Vrverh lost his prudence and fell from the faith, becoming the enemy of God and His saints. ... He forgot the divine covenant, and

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<sup>63</sup> Hovhanessian, “The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan,” 85-87.

<sup>64</sup> For agnatic marital custom in pre-Christian Armenia, see Zakarian, “P’aranjem and Her Husbands,” 75-88.

withdrew from communion with the ascetic orders. ... What do you suppose happened next? The wretched man went and joined up with those diabolical women.”<sup>65</sup> The failure of Vrvverh to contain his carnal appetites when challenged results directly in his withdrawal (albeit ostensibly voluntary) from his Christian faith and, implicitly, from the Armenian nation scaffolded around it – in summary, his social and spiritual destruction.

Curiously, the Armenian historical record does not apply these accusations of incest—which they emphatically level at their Zoroastrian opponents—to their eventual Islamic suzerains, suggesting an Armenian awareness of Islamic aversion to incestuous relations by contrast to the Zoroastrian endorsement thereof. Muslims, contrarily, are characterized in Armenian construal not as incestuous but, rather, as otherwise licentious and distastefully vulnerable to their sensual proclivities. Islam and its prophet are first attested by the Armenians in the *History* of the seventh-century chronicler Sebēos. In this initial introduction of the Muslim faith to an Armenian audience, Sebēos pronounces not its sexual deviancy but, rather, its parallel in piety to Armenian Christianity: “So Mahmet legislated for them: not to eat carrion, not to drink wine, not to speak falsely, and not to engage in fornication.”<sup>66</sup> This mutual respect, however, by the following century has deteriorated into animosity, which the Armenian cleric-historians communicate with the dramatized salacity of their Muslim aggressors. The prophet Muhammad in Armenian abstraction, as Seta Dadoyan remarks, “...became a shortcut, a convenient vehicle and a tool to understand, present and most importantly, to refute Islam. ... As an alternative

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<sup>65</sup> AL XXIII, pp. 152-153.

<sup>66</sup> Sebēos 42, p. 96.

faith and moral system, it was dismissed as ‘unprophetic’, ‘heretical’ and unworthy of consideration.”<sup>67</sup>

### Sex and the Islamic Other

Basim Musallam remarks that medieval Christianity exhibits “an obsession with sex in Islam,” observing further that “...their interest in the sexual life of the Prophet was boundless.”<sup>68</sup> Continuing, Musallam deems credible the medieval appreciation of sexual and marital divergence as the premier domain of conflict between Christian and Islamic cosmologies.<sup>69</sup> This evaluation certainly represents the mentality reflected in contemporaneous Armenian texts. The eighth-century *History of the vardapet Ghewond* contains a purported epistolary exchange between the Byzantine emperor Leo III and the Umayyad caliph ‘Umar II – one structurally, thematically, and polemically reminiscent of (and perhaps referentially modeled after) that alleged between Mihrnerseh and the Armenian bishop Hovsep by Eghishē in the sixth century. A focal subject of theological discourse between the two is the mechanics of the eternal and the properties by which the sensory body is situated therein (to be discussed at length in a forthcoming chapter). Following this, Leo transitions his moral critique into the temporal realm: “I will allow myself to say a word about the abominable authorization given you by your legislator to have an affair with your wives which he has compared, I am ashamed to say, to the tilling of fields. As consequence of this, some of you acquired the habit of having affair [sic] with women, as if it were a matter of tilling fields.”<sup>70</sup> The procedure under Leo’s censure

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<sup>67</sup> Dadoyan, *Islam in Armenian Literary Culture*, 4-5.

<sup>68</sup> Basim Musallam, *Sex and Society in Islam: Birth Control before the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 11.

<sup>69</sup> Musallam, *Sex and Society in Islam*, 11.

<sup>70</sup> Ghewond 14, p. 101.

appears to be the Islamic custom of temporary marriage, a contractual arrangement stipulating a fixed term of marital union, citing it as the “disgusting law among your people.”<sup>71</sup> Leila Ahmed writes of the ubiquity of temporary marriage in medieval Islamic society, noting that it was an option availed primarily to widowers and others seeking nonbinding sexual companionship as well as domestic assistance.<sup>72</sup> David Zakarian likewise notes the prevalence of temporary marriage in Zoroastrian Iran, making veritably certain Armenian awareness of the practice centuries before the arrival of Islam to the Caucasus.<sup>73</sup> This remark by Leo additionally testifies to a decline in acceptance of polygyny among the Armenians by the time of the first Islamic invasions. It is likely, then, that the Armenians’ pre-existing familiarity with the custom and association thereof to Zoroastrian suzerainty (and its persistent religious persecutions) predisposed them to revile the practice as an echo of this oppression. Their newly integrated orientation toward monogamy likely provoked the Armenians to resist all the more vehemently such practices, thereby even further dissimilating themselves from the polygamous culture of an Islamic suzerain as they did its Zoroastrian precursor. Any contravention to the newly installed civic order organized around the monogamous domestic unit now represented both ethnic and religious alterity to be ostracized, derided, and rejected. Ghewond’s record of the correspondence between the two authorities elucidates Armenian misperceptions of Islam in such a way that foregrounds, through unforgiving contrast, Armenian cultures of marriage and sexuality.

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<sup>71</sup> Ghewond 14, p. 101.

<sup>72</sup> Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 20.

<sup>73</sup> Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 53.

In addition to the bizarre allegation of uxoricide upon one's death, explored in the following chapter, the text then presents the scandalous conjuration (of equally indeterminate origin) that Muslim men engage in ritual cuckoldry:

In the Gospel God has commanded the husband not to divorce the wife save for the cause of adultery, but you act quite otherwise: when you are tired of your wives, as of some kind of nourishment, you abandon them at your fancy. I would prefer not to say anything, were it possible, about the shamelessness with which you remarry: before retaking your wives you make them sleep in the bed of another.<sup>74</sup>

This appears likewise to refer to temporary marriage, however distorted, and further reveals a perception of Islamic sexual libertinage. Moreover, in so doing, it illuminates a contrasting abhorrence of such permissive sensualities and, by extension, a strict adherence to monogamy mobilized to differentiate the Armenians all the more tangibly from exogenous customs.

Leo resumes his harangue to admonish the seduction of Zainab, wife of Zaid, by the prophet Muhammad as a representative act of moral corruption.<sup>75</sup> That this episode was known to the Armenians, even if only by proxy of a reproduced epistolary exchange, evidences intricate knowledge by the Armenians of Islamic tradition, perhaps much more extensive than has yet been discovered. Armenian literature will again reveal its impression of Quranic and hadith tradition somewhat more fancifully in the tenth-century text of Movsēs Daskhurants'i, who invents an episode in which the prophet Muhammad engages in exactly such behavior as Ghewond conjures:

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<sup>74</sup> Ghewond 14, p. 101.

<sup>75</sup> Bernadette Martin-Hisard here disentangles a scholarly confusion regarding the identity of Zainab (rendered in Armenian as *զԶնդայ Կհնջի*, lit. "the wife of Zaid"), citing Jeffery and Ter-Levondyan. See n. 119 in Lewond Vardapet, *Discours Historique*, trans. Bernadette Martin-Hisard (Paris: ACHCByz, 2015), 428-429. I am grateful to my colleague Alison Vacca for providing me this text.

A certain Arab named Talb had a beautiful wife. [Muhammad] therefore sent him a message, saying: ‘God has commanded you to leave your wife.’ Talb took that wife of his and brought her to the market-place where he swore before witnesses and repudiated her and released her from him. Muhammad took the woman for himself, fulfilled his lecherous lust on her and then sent her back to Talb, saying: ‘God has ordered you to take her back again.’ And so he introduced this disgusting law among their people that if a man repudiates his wife and she goes and sleeps with someone else, he may take her back again.<sup>76</sup>

This episode is likely a variation on the Islamic story of Zaid and Zainab, the character of Talb substituted perhaps from the author’s known associates and surroundings or from his (evidently deficient) knowledge of Islamic scripture.<sup>77</sup>

By the eighth century, the lust of the Muslims for the Armenians, both men and women, is especially visible as a literary trope, and first appears in Ghewond’s text. Of the initial invasions by Muslim Arabs, specifying their behavior toward an apparently defenseless crowd of Armenian women, Ghewond records: “Then, in complete negligence, they began to mix with women in the most detestable and obscene manner.”<sup>78</sup> Ghewond later quotes the reproach of the local king Chenbakur to the Arab military commander Muhammad; Chenbakur specifically remarks on the desire of the Arab troops for the women native to his region, taunting that their “wretched lust” for his “pretty maids” has ensnared Muhammad’s soldiers into revealing their strategic positions and, thus, occasioned their own defeat. Ghewond elaborates further on the appetency of the amassed Muslim combatants for the local women, narrating that the commander Muhammad had attempted to extort Chenbakur for thirty thousand women from among his populace in exchange for disengagement: “Muhammad wrote once again to

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<sup>76</sup> MD III.1, p. 122.

<sup>77</sup> For this connection I am grateful to my dissertation advisor, Dr. Nerina Rustomji.

<sup>78</sup> Ghewond 3, p. 52.

Chenbakur and said: ‘Give me thirty thousand maidens and I shall withdraw from your frontiers peacefully. Otherwise I shall have to wage war against you.’...<sup>79</sup> Chenbakur cunningly exploits this opportunity – he dissembles an accord with the Muslim commander, sending instead a cavalry of “forty thousand horsemen” to attack the Arab platoon.<sup>80</sup> Of this deceptive tactic, Ghewond further explicates:

Chenbakur himself with few of his warriors camped nearby ... and sent [a message] to commander Muhammad, saying: ‘Come, I have selected the requested thirty thousand maidens from all my realm for your noblemen. Therefore, bring with you the same number of nobles from your troops as my maidens, cross over to this side of the river, and I shall hand over the maidens to you by casting lots, lest fighting should break out among your troops.’<sup>81</sup>

The episode is reiterated in the tenth-century *Universal History* of Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i: “And again Muḥammad said, ‘Give me’, he said, ‘30,000 girls and I will leave you’; for he had coveted the beauty of the attractive maidens of the Čenk‘.”<sup>82</sup> Step‘anos continues the account, replicating precisely the details reported by Ghewond. Of Chenbakur he recounts: “He himself was situated some little distance from the wagons, and he said to Muḥammad, ‘Gather up your honourable men equivalent to the number of my girls, 30,000, and cross to this side of the river, so that we may divide the girls by lot and so that your forces do not come to blows.’”<sup>83</sup> The tale is again duplicated in near-identical detail by the Anonymous Story-Teller, who adds the enticing detail that the requested handmaidens were “very beautiful.”<sup>84</sup> Step‘anos additionally incorporates

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<sup>79</sup> Ghewond 11, p. 68.

<sup>80</sup> Ghewond 11, p. 68.

<sup>81</sup> Ghewond 11, p. 68.

<sup>82</sup> ST II.4, p. 189.

<sup>83</sup> ST II.4, pp. 189-190.

<sup>84</sup> AST pp. 191-192.



in this chapter an account of the siege of Damascus by the caliph Marwan, noting that the Islamic army “led away into captivity” the “young women” of the besieged Armenian villages and further remarking on the sexual and material appetites of the Muslim soldiers: “Being sick in mind and understanding, they carried out the deadly deeds, murder and desire for possessions and sexual desire....”<sup>85</sup>

Muslims are again indicted as unassailably libidinous in the *Anonymous*

*Chronicle* amid a sensationalized report concerning the caliph ‘Ali:

Ali, son of Apusaylēp, ruled over the land of Persia. He was a haughty and lecherous man, who had subjected many countries. It was his custom that when he entered a Persian city he had procuring women go around from house to house; and wherever they saw a beautiful woman they came and told the caliph Ali, and he had her brought. So he had intercourse with many wives of rich and of poor (people).<sup>86</sup>

These “procuring women” suggest a medieval sex trafficking network under the command of the caliph. Even if fabricated by the author, that such a concept occurs to him indicates his awareness of these activities, which likely operated in his immediate vicinity under the direction of powerful actors. These female agents through whom the caliph procures his revolving harem appear to wield considerable political influence, as the author suggests: “Those women were his counsellors, and he had no occasion to summon his magnates before him.”<sup>87</sup>

Arriving in the Persian city of Sraw, one of ‘Ali’s female agents identifies a young woman of “incomparable beauty.”<sup>88</sup> The *Chronicle* reports as follows the caliph’s

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<sup>85</sup> ST II.4, p. 192: this refers to the fourteenth Umayyad caliph, Marwan II, d. 750.

<sup>86</sup> AST p. 224.

<sup>87</sup> AST p. 224.

<sup>88</sup> AST p. 225.

subsequent actions: “Then the caliph sent to the girl’s mother and said: ‘Give your daughter to be my handmaid.’”<sup>89</sup> The young woman’s mother refuses, citing that the girl is daughter to a wealthy nobleman and proposing, alternatively, that the caliph instead marry the eligible maiden. Incensed at the suggestion, the caliph retaliates by ordering that the girl’s father be financially ruined, the totality of his wealth confiscated and liquidated by the caliphate. The following year, the caliph returns to the city, whereupon (just as he anticipates and, in fact, by his own orchestration) the young woman’s mother—destitute and unable to further provide for the girl—implores the caliph to reinstate his previous proposition and receive her daughter into “the house of his handmaids.”<sup>90</sup>

The caliph gleefully accepts the girl, having engineered this very turn of events through financial manipulation of her family’s assets. Though this ‘Ali is most probably a figment of literary sensationalism, it is possible that the chronicler intends the fourth Rashidun caliph, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (r. 656-661). This, if true, would implicate infiltration of Umayyad propaganda into Armenian political awareness—the Umayyads having notoriously vilified ‘Ali—by the assembly (albeit protracted) of the *Anonymous Chronicle*.<sup>91</sup>

While the passage functions, to the author’s agenda, as a supplemental opportunity to feature the libidinal alterities (as well as the calculated cruelty) of a

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<sup>89</sup> AST p. 225.

<sup>90</sup> AST p. 225.

<sup>91</sup> For Umayyad malignment of ‘Ali, see Nebil Husayn, *Opposing the Imam: The Legacy of the Nawasib in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 15-39. For the connection of this tale to Umayyad propaganda I am grateful to my colleague Dr. Seyfeddin Kara, who alerted my attention to this during our shared panel at the annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association (November 29, 2021); I am grateful to him also for recommending to me the cited monograph by Nebil Husayn.

Muslim opponent, it also does so against the context of Smbat's exhortation that Derēn seek sexual companionship outside of his marriage so as to avoid intermingling with foreign women. The infidelity, the chronicler intimates, offends only secondarily to the interethnic contamination of an Armenian marriage bed (and, by extension, potentially its genetic integrity). It seems, then, that the *Anonymous Chronicle* as a collection exhibits a less inhibitory attitude toward extramarital and other illicit sexual relations than conveyed previously in the genre (though this composition departs dramatically from its predecessors in ways too numerous to account for in the present study). The chronicler's report that the caliph would, at his discretion, demand the sexual availability of selected women resembles in its depravity the thrice-reported episode of a Muslim commander demanding an exaction of thirty thousand young women for his decampment. Additionally reinforced in this episode is the notion, first introduced to an Armenian audience in Ghewond's eighth-century *History* and repeated in the tenth-century text of Movsēs Daskhurants'i, that Islamic sovereigns (beginning with their inaugural caliph, Muhammad) may at their will command the sexual services of another's lawful wife. Each of these passages in its turn illustrates the repulsion with which Armenian cleric-traditors regard Islamic sexual habits.

### Sex and the Christian Other

Armenian somatic morality, as communicated by these medieval historians, does not consider exclusive to foreign faiths the sexual impurity of the religious other; often the sectarian rival presents equally pernicious an adversary. Armenian writers come to associate the competing Greek Orthodox Christianity—state religion of the incursive Byzantine Empire—as comparably debauched to the Zoroastrian and Islamic encroacher. This mirrors the evaluation of Byzantine morality evident in contemporaneous Islamic

sources, which express apprehension and even revulsion toward permissive Byzantine gender dynamics.<sup>92</sup> The Armenian textual tradition shares with its Islamic complement a trepidation toward Byzantine culture, particularly as regarded the delicate social infrastructures of gender, power, and sexuality. That Byzantine culture appeared to institutionalize a sexual climate in which women could candidly wield their sexual power to manipulate political affairs provided exceptionally fertile ground for Armenian aspersion.

By the mid-tenth century, the Byzantines had commenced a series of aggressive reconquest campaigns of the Armenian territories previously ceded to the caliphates (whether militarily or through political cooperation with vassal Armenian princes coronated as sovereigns under Arab authority). As a result, the Armenian historians came to perceive Byzantium and its formidable Greek Orthodox tradition as a threat to their newfound political autonomy under the Bagratuni Dynasty, whose sovereignty was conferred by Abbasid authority c. 884. The available somatological evidence suggests that the Armenians grew more favorably disposed toward their Abbasid suzerains than toward their Byzantine coreligionists, as the Arabs permitted the Armenians to practice their Christian faith—and to preserve its unique ecclesial and doctrinal divergencies—without interruption or intervention. The Abbasids required of the Armenians, in exchange for these liberties, only a standardized remittance of tax. The resurgent Byzantines, by contrast, sought to enforce the authority of the Greek Orthodox Church upon the Armenians, whose own autocephalous church had defected from Eastern Orthodoxy in 451. The trait incontinence exhibited by foreign invaders is, then, projected

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<sup>92</sup> El Cheikh, *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity*, 78.

onto the newly revived Byzantine antagonist just as had it once been upon the invading religious other of the Zoroastrian and Islamic intrusions. The Byzantines of Greek Orthodox persuasion are then portrayed with the same zeal and fervor of carnal abandon as were once the Zoroastrians and Muslims as a literary device by which to articulate their malevolence.

Aristakēs Lastiverts‘i captures this disdain in the following passage from his eleventh-century *History*, in which he derides the Byzantine emperor Monomachus as “constantly preoccupied with eating and drinking.”<sup>93</sup> In activating such language, Aristakēs likens Monomachus to the Islamic enemy typified by sensory excesses—gluttony, immoderation, and surrender to sensual indulgences—in the works of preceding Armenian historians. Aristakēs continues of Monomachus:

He elevated filthy people, and as for those taxes which he collected from all lands, which he should have spent on the needs of the cavalry ... those accumulated treasures [Monomachus] squandered on whores, and was in no way troubled by the ruin of the land. For so much did he love harlots and whores that [all] the women of Constantinople could not satiate him. No, he had women brought in from afar, and occupied himself with them every day. ... Having led such a [dissolute] life, [Monomachus] died after a reign of thirteen years [1042-1055], accomplishing nothing worthy of remembrance.<sup>94</sup>

The passage recalls King (then Prince) Pap’s paraphilic preoccupations as portrayed in the *Buzandaran*.

In a previous chapter, Aristakēs introduces the Byzantine emperor Michael, who the historian alleges ascended to royal authority through neither birthright nor merit but, rather, by manipulating the sexual inflammations of a libidinous empress (for whom

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<sup>93</sup> AL XVII, p. 108.

<sup>94</sup> AL XVII, p. 108.

Aristakēs unambiguously expresses his contempt): “The queen had lusted after him with a prostitute's diseased passion, and had her own husband drowned on [Michael's] account. ... Shortly thereafter, she brought forth this Michael, enthroned him and then married him—at which the matter became clear to all.”<sup>95</sup> Aristakēs attributes Michael's ascent to power to the contracted services of a witch through whose sorcery he attracts the empress. It was, as the chronicler has previously explicated, the sexual incontinence of this empress that enabled Michael's enthronement. Aristakēs further posits that Michael's receptivity to the occult has rendered him ultimately vulnerable to demonic possession:

[Michael] himself was wickedly afflicted by a *dew*, even while he went to the churches and the resting-places of the saints. However, I do not know ... whether [Michael] was naturally possessed. They say ... that because the kingdom was not properly his, he would go to the city of the Thessalonians to a certain woman witch giving himself in service to the father of all evil, just as in ancient times, ... a youth had done [similar] things by means of a witch. [And they say] that through a demon of prostitution he had inflamed the queen with love for himself, and that she had set him up as emperor of the lands. Now after this deed had been done, [Michael] in accordance with royal custom was obliged to go to church on the Lord's feast-days. But the wicked *dew* was unable to abide this, thinking that [Michael] was rebelling from him. People who say this confirm it [by the fact that] the emperor was in Thessalonica frequently, probably with the witch. In any case, until his death, [the demon] which tormented [Michael] did not leave him.<sup>96</sup>

In the following chapter, Aristakēs expounds upon the promiscuity and concupiscence of the empress, writing of her incapacity to moderate or restrain her sexual appetites following the deposition of her companion, Michael. The empress, then, impulsively replaces her fallen paramour both sexually and politically:

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<sup>95</sup> AL IX, pp. 37-38.

<sup>96</sup> AL IX, pp. 38-39.

Following the incomplete reign of the Caesar, the lioness [the queen] was roaring in her den for a companion. For she was greatly troubled that none of her own people were worthy of the realm; and as for the one she had adopted and made lord and emperor of the lands, she was requited by him as we described above. So what did she do? Going outside the canonical stipulations, she called forth this man [Constantine] and made him her husband, and enthroned him on the throne of the kingdom. Many thought that he was her lover.<sup>97</sup>

The fusion of female sexual agency and mismanaged authority—corruption at once both sexual and political—conveys a somatic axiology transmitted intact across several centuries of Armenian historical writing. The female body, as the integument of emotional and sexual impulses assumed to govern women’s behavior, is an imperfect vessel – one incapable of containing its volatile contents. It must, then, be regulated by the supremely more rational mechanism of masculinity. For Aristakēs as for the scandalized Abbasids, Byzantine hypersexuality exemplifies the hazards of uninhibited female potency.

The disdain of Aristakēs for theological encroachment into the dogmatic and ritual spaces of Armenian spirituality is not exclusive to the Byzantine imperials of the Greek Orthodox rite. Islamic customs, despite their pervasion of four centuries into Armenian awareness by the time of his literary enterprise, do not escape the ire of Aristakēs, who chastises Armenian converts to Islam: “Those clerics who could be seen at the [church] doors, books in hand, singing Davidic psalms, dance before the doors of those dew-infested lairs called mosques learning the sayings of Islam (*mahmetawand*).”<sup>98</sup> Aristakēs then follows Ghewond and T‘ovma Artsruni in citing the propensity of Islamic culture to engender moral corruption and promote marital deviance: “Modest, prudent

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<sup>97</sup> AL X, pp. 45-46.

<sup>98</sup> AL XVII, p. 114.

women who had been legally married, taking large dowries from their men today have learned dissolute, licentious adultery.”<sup>99</sup> The accusation, in particular, that Islam impels married couples to violate the sanctified nuptial contract is especially reviled by the Armenian monastic institution whose veneration of marriage has been previously evaluated by the study in progress.

### Intermarriage and Communal Pollution

An aversion to interethnic sexual relations, including intermarriage, will endure in Armenian texts across the Middle Ages, its persistence especially palpable in the *Penitential* of Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i. Dawit‘’s text discloses that intermarriage between Armenians and their Muslim conquerors was not isolated to political arrangements among the aristocracy, but as a practice filtered into the customs of the common class as well and was apparently widespread among the *ramik* well into the early twelfth century. Dawit‘ exposes the pervasiveness of Armenian-Muslim exogamy in issuing his condemnations of interethnic relations and recommendations for the purification of such unions and those involved. These remedies often entail conversion to Christianity—and, specifically, induction into the Armenian Church—by the Muslim party. Though fornication has long constituted a violation of Christian conduct both in and beyond Armenia, Dawit‘ contends that the act compounds in gravity if committed with a Muslim – especially so if the transgressor is a woman: “If a woman fornicates (*šnay*) with a Kurd [or] with a Sodomite, if it be by her own inclination, she shall doubly repent of her sodomitic fornication...”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> AL XVII, p. 114.

<sup>100</sup> David of Ganjak, *The Penitential*, trans. C.J.F. Dowsett (Louvain: Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1961) [Henceforth: DG] 18, p. 17; For context on the usage of the word “Sodomite” and the Classical Armenian *սոդոմիտ* from which it is rendered, see the following chapter. For the reasons



The text delineates in meticulous detail several scenarios in which an Armenian woman must repent of a relationship with a Muslim (identified most consistently by Dawit' with Kurds – the two terms he frequently interchanges). One such entry reads as follows:

If an Armenian woman, being a Christian, lives with a Kurd and will not separate from him for the sake of Christianity, let no priest or layman commune with her, let no priest hear her confession or baptise her children or administer the sacraments so at the hour of her death or perform a mass after her death or accept her gifts. ... But after her conversion and repentance, it is proper to receive her and all hers [her children] into the church and for all to commune with her without discrimination.<sup>101</sup>

That a woman in violation of these conventions is ejected from the congregation, denied the sacraments, and permitted return contingent exclusively upon her “conversion” illuminates a posture that to cohabit with a Muslim (in any capacity – the legal status of the relationship left perhaps intentionally ambiguous so as to accommodate a variety of circumstances) nullifies one’s fellowship in the Christian community, which must be voluntarily and actively reclaimed through renunciation of the offending union.

Dawit' will again insist that such a woman voluntarily separate from her Muslim partner, in a subsequent item promoting the dissolution of such unions in pursuit of consecrated marriage to a Christian suitor selected from within the contained community:

Concerning a woman who has been with a Kurd, if in life or at death she repents and leaves him and becomes the wife of an Armenian: if previously she has not been the wife of any lawful person, or if she has been such and thereafter dwelt with a Kurd, she is considered to be outside the law, for that is held to be fornication. If thereafter she mends her ways

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provided therein, this dissertation submits that the cited passage does not refer, neither explicitly nor implicitly, to anal penetration. Rather, the translated term likely refers more to an ethnoreligious exogeneity as the cited Kurd in this item of counsel—one from so wicked a locality as the Biblical city of Sodom—than to any specified penetrative act. For providing me with the Armenian text of this edition I am grateful to my friend and colleague Dr. Jesse Siragan Arlen.

<sup>101</sup> DG 16, p. 17.

and becomes zealous for purity, it is proper to marry her and not to reject her on account of the previous unclean life she led with infidels.<sup>102</sup>

Such a woman, Dawit‘ explains, may be unconditionally received by the congregation, her error corrected by the substitution of an unacceptable Muslim partner with a lawfully sanctioned Christian spouse. Only by abandoning her illicit relationship with her Muslim intimate—an external actor regarded with suspicion and hostility by her ethnoreligious community—can she redeem herself and restore her public decency.

Only once does Dawit‘ explicitly address matters of legal matrimony between Armenians and Muslims, all other rebukes in his text reserved for interfaith partnerships of an illicit nature. It appears Dawit‘ treats all such unions with equal disdain, irrespective of legal status, and condemns even the legal unions of Armenian Christian women to Muslim husbands as innately illegitimate: “There are Christians who voluntarily give their daughters as wives to infidels for the sake of the life of the body. Likewise [there are those] who sell their children into unbelief and corruption. May such be cursed in life and death and unworthy of extreme unction.”<sup>103</sup> This passage elicits several questions, foremost among them: in what sanctuaries would these ceremonies have taken place, and under whose officiation? It appears, from Dawit‘’s text, unlikely that any Armenian priest would consecrate such marriages, if not due to his own moral objections then certainly under pressure from ecclesial authorities (assuming the cohesive presence of an ecclesial infrastructure in such remote village settings as Dawit‘’s – especially following the seismic political and demographic transformations effected by Seljuq conquest of the

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<sup>102</sup> DG 17, p. 17.

<sup>103</sup> DG 19, p. 17.

region). These couples, then, perhaps married in mosques under Islamic auspices, resulting in the expulsion of these women from the Armenian community (the church having become institutionally synonymous therewith over several centuries of its administrative development, this conflation now amplified opposite the onslaught of Islamic invasions).

Equally viable is that the unions to which Dawit' refers were never consecrated at all, but assumed informally absent local integration into ecclesial jurisdiction (especially plausible in rural villages). Precedent for such practices exists among the Armenians; David Zakarian confirms Armenians of lower sociopolitical station locally assuming such informal unions before and shortly after the arrival of Christianity in Armenia.<sup>104</sup> Alison Vacca notes the political expediency of Armenian-Islamic intermarriages among royals, nobles, and other influential personages of both Armenian and Muslim extraction, and the potential of such unions to mutually benefit both parties by casting and solidifying alliances.<sup>105</sup> While it is likely these political marriages were canonically sanctioned under the auspices of Armenian ecclesial structures—the *nakharar* families known in many cases to retain their own internal clerics—Armenian-Islamic intermarriages granted ecclesial sanctity were likely confined to the aristocracy for extenuating diplomatic considerations.

Notably, the same standard is not made explicit for men, whose activities with Muslim women Dawit' does not address. This may suggest that intermarriage between Armenian women and Muslim men occurred with greater frequency than the reverse and

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<sup>104</sup> Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 157-160.

<sup>105</sup> Vacca, "Conflict and Community," 66-112.

was, thus, deemed a more exigent priority for the twelfth-century cleric (likely constrained by a limited supply of ink, paper, and attention). These values echo Movsēs Daskhurants‘i’s disdain for “race-polluting marriages” and the previously cited caveats of Aristakēs Lastiverts‘i to avoid intimate entanglements with foreigners – though Aristakēs directs his admonitions to men, whom he may assess (consistent with his abundant misogyny) as the sex more capable of such restraint, rather than to women as does Dawit‘.<sup>106</sup> This disagreement likely arises not from any discrepancy in values between the two but, rather, in the intended audience for each text. Aristakēs produces his text for the learned, his intent being to both record historical events and to moralize of their tragedy. Dawit‘, in contrast, directs his rhetoric not at the dynasts who perpetuate the Armenian nation(s) but at the common class, disconnected from the affairs and concerns of the aristocracy, by proxy of the local pastors to whom he delegates the enforcement of these regulations and the applications of their remedy. Dawit‘, unlike his predecessors, deploys his text not for the preservation of top-down Armenian national Christianity, which has by this time amassed sufficient momentum to self-sustain, but for the ground-level maintenance of Armenian Christendom. He writes with a frenetic awareness of the recent heterogeneity that now endangers the Armenian presence in its indigenous terrain. Dawit‘, then, defends his nation on a microcosmic front: in the theater of Armenian churches rather than from the abstract platform of The Armenian Church.

### Conclusion

The Armenians present as sexually perverse each of the invading religious traditions that threatens to extinguish their Christian faith: The Zoroastrians, who are

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<sup>106</sup> MD III.24, p. 144; AL XXIII, p. 152.

vituperated for their incestuous marital customs and aversion to celibacy; The Muslims, whose sexual behaviors the Armenians characterize as adulterous and licentious; And even the Greek Orthodox sect of Christianity practiced by the intermittently hostile Byzantine Empire, which the Armenians regard throughout much of the Middle Ages as heretical. The canon laws adopted throughout these centuries reflect, in tandem with the historical circumstances that inspire them, a morality that reflexively adjusts and adapts to a battery of unpredictable threats. Though the opposition may assume multifarious forms, the response thereto remains constant, as does the moral paradigm from which the Armenians confront each new adversary – that of an explicitly corporealized schema. It is around sexuality and expressions of the libidinal that this schema organizes itself to convey the corporeal defects of the invasive other.

Most effective of these didactic techniques is the narrative setting of interethnic relations between Armenian and foreign actors – a trope that invariably resolves in destruction to both the Armenian actor involved and the social units in which he or she is nested. Episodes that exemplify this template include the amour between Derēn Artsruni and the Muslim woman K‘ulinar and the spiritual demise of the vulnerable prince Vrverh by the “*vardapets*” of Satan – heretical women who entice him away from the path of rectitude through the exercise of their sexual allure. These cautionary tales, however, need not necessarily entail the participation of a native Armenian actor. To the contrary, such anecdotes frequently achieve their allegorical objective through the illustration of exogenous carnality operating unimpeded in its own native domain.

In particular, the imagery of a foreign authority selecting virginal young women for his sexual predilections is deployed in a variety of medieval Armenian texts. The

Anonymous Story-Teller writes of a lecherous caliph who annually summons young maidens for his pleasures, including one whose family he brings to financial ruin so as to extort their surrender of the girl to his service. Movsēs Daskhurants‘i narrates the Islamic prophet counseling a follower to temporarily repudiate his wife, whose physical beauty has aroused the carnal passions of the prophet, so that Muhammad himself can exploit his authority to bed the woman. Upon fulfillment of his sexual pursuits and having slaked his lust, Muhammad counsels the man to return to his wife. Along the same motif, Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i fabricates a previously unattested account of the Persian *hazarapet* Chihovr-Vshnasp and his indiscretions with the wives of lower-ranking noblemen. Each of these is emblematic of a polemical metanarrative in which alterity is coded as lecherous, its quintessence embodied in authority (such as that of a prophet, caliph, or bureaucrat) even more acutely so.

As foreigners become vilified through associations to misconduct of the body, carnality becomes increasingly externalized onto the ethnoreligious adversary. In this way, the Armenian characters in these texts—and their audiences—evade ownership of such base impulses. The projection of perversity onto the exogenous shields the Armenians, in literary abstraction, from the reprehensible sexuality inherent even to their own bodies – a temporal condition which they expressly revile and of which they fervidly (and often creatively) seek to divest themselves. Alterity then becomes a proxy for sin which the Armenians can comfortably observe from a distance rather than identify in oneself or within, more despicably yet, the national self. These particularities of Armenian sexual consciousness will be further explored in the following chapter.

## V. Lived (and Afterlived) Sexualities

### Introduction

Medieval Armenian approaches to sexuality draw substantively from an established orientation toward asceticism and austerity – an approach that abhors indulgence in appetites not only sexual but, as well, those for food, drink, physical comforts, and other temporal pleasures. Lust, like all sensory immoderacies, is exclusively the behavioral and spiritual domain of a narrowly selected assortment of subversives and social exiles, most frequently: foreigners, apostates, and those otherwise in violation of the collective religious and social customs that comprise *awrēnk*.<sup>1</sup> Virtue is contrasted against lust by the continence exhibited by the righteous: chastity, moderation, and the containment of carnal instincts. Sexual desire, even that within a licit marital context, is necessarily conveyed through the discursive vehicles of social discouragement, dishonor, and disgrace.

An Armenian objection to human sexuality and a categorical rejection of its organicity suffuses Armenian somatic culture from the very incipience of its literature. Among the earliest iterations of this mentality appears in a fifth-century text—a scathing invective against the heretical movements that challenged the authority of the Armenian Church—by Eznik Koghbats‘i. While he concedes with palpable reluctance the necessity of the conjugal act for procreative purposes, he adamantly clarifies his position, nevertheless, against any sensual gratification therein, insisting that instead the coital union be regarded as a contemptible obligation of the marital arrangement and ideally avoided beyond the circumstance of its absolute necessity: “Consider also that actions in

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<sup>1</sup> For Armenian customary law (*awrēnk*) and its gendered applications, see Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 55-57.

themselves are often not immoral if performed within proper bounds; for example, having sex to create a family, striking someone in self-defense, or killing in retribution for the murder of innocents. The intentions which we ourselves conceive and act upon determine whether these actions are moral or immoral.”<sup>2</sup> That Eznik likens the conjugal act to so unpleasant an analogue as defensive or retributive violence epitomizes the sexual culture that informed his moral orientation, and would continue to pulsate influence across sequential generations of Armenian traditors.

The Armenian tradition integrates lust as a categorically destructive aspect of the human experience; so malevolent is the state that it is entirely absent from the Armenian vision of Heaven, excised completely from its sensory ontology. This, among other elements, sets the Armenian celestial apart from—and in opposition to—a newly introduced Islamic eschatology that embraces extratemporal sexuality, which comes to comprise a crucial interreligious conflict following caliphal expansion into Armenian territory. The potential of sexual desire to destroy presents in the Armenian literature as gender-neutral and applies congruently across gender. Armenian writings overwhelmingly hold to account the lust of the beholder as opposed to the allure of the beheld (though this tendency on the part of the lettered Armenian clergy arises not without exception). In consequence, as investigated in the previous chapter, lust and the behaviors that it impels when uncontained were aggressively legislated in Armenian canon law. The containment of carnal desire was further moderated through scripting mechanisms deployed in literary narratives across the dynastic period. Carnal intemperance as a causative agent of perdition is, for the textual products under

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<sup>2</sup> Eznik I.10, p. 25.



examination, the most destructive of spiritual forces. This phenomenology, however, was not limited in Armenian texts to the temporal, the somaticized morality of which followed believers into the eternal. This chapter will examine the fluidity that conduced that inter-dimensional mobility; it will explore the elements of lived—and afterlived—sexuality, the mundane and the eternal, to illustrate the mechanisms through which sexuality was manipulated to reify medieval Armenian cognitions of alterity.

While the previous chapter addressed Armenian legislative campaigns to sexually isolate the Armenians from the foreign, the present will scrutinize the differentials, as depicted in medieval Armenian textual sources, between Armenian and foreign experiences of sexuality. This chapter submits that it is to these distinctions that medieval Armenian chroniclers so desperately cleave so as to assert a unique national identity when existentially threatened with total subsumption (and, thereby, extinction) by the exoteric. It will examine articulations of sexuality tempered by cosmological dimensionality, and in so doing will illustrate the processes by which the Armenian literary institution harnessed eschatological imagery so as to legitimize their sexual and somatic moralities as expressions of ethnic identity and axes of differentiation. The chapter will identify the properties by which Armenian conceptualizations of sexuality, in both theory and practice, reinforced dichotomies of immaculate endogeneity and corrupt alterity, further scaffolding notions of identity within the parameters of a novel Abrahamic morality. To this effect, a developing Armenian self-consciousness fixed the ethnoreligious other as morally polluted and therefore spiritually inferior, diagnosing these necessarily foreign qualities as those which externalize as sexual depravity and other carnal immoderacies. In this way, impressions of sexual experientiality in both the

temporal and eternal were harnessed and mobilized to preserve Armenian identity across its transition between Zoroastrian and Islamic suzerainties.

### Concubinage

Though it appears to decline precipitously, extinguished likely by the rapid assimilation of a Christian marital morality, the Armenians practiced concubinage at multiple levels of society before the sixth century. The earliest internal reference to concubinage in Armenia appears in the *Shahapivan Canons*, the second of which forbids a priest to accommodate “a fornicating servant or slave” in his home.<sup>3</sup> Further, Canon VI of the same corpus permits a man to remand into servitude a woman whom he has purchased, which may be interpreted as a concubinary arrangement (to be discussed further below in the present chapter).<sup>4</sup> This is followed chronologically by a previously discussed episode in the *Buzandaran* – the compiler’s brief and singular mention of an unnamed concubine belonging to Pap of the Gregorid line functions only to illustrate his debauchery and the illegitimacy of his child.<sup>5</sup> Following this, concubinage again appears in the *History* of Movsēs Khorenats‘i. Relating the challenges experienced by King Trdat in converting “the greatest princes, and at the same time all the mass of the common people” to Christianity, Movsēs complains of Trdat’s fractious subjects: “by nature presumptuous and perverse, they opposed the king’s will concerning the Christian religion, following the will of their wives and concubines.”<sup>6</sup> He seems here to disclose that concubinage was not uncommon prior to the Christianization of Armenia, nor was it particularly maligned, and was indeed an arrangement practiced across the Armenian

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<sup>3</sup> Hovhanessian, “The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan,” 80 (see n. 24).

<sup>4</sup> Hovhanessian, “The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan,” 82.

<sup>5</sup> BP III.xix, p. 94.

<sup>6</sup> MX II.92, p. 247.

sociopolitical spectrum – certainly, according to Movsēs, by the nobility, and inferably by the *ramik* class as well per the text.

A number of individual concubines are explicitly named throughout the medieval literature, including one identified as Mandu belonging to the Arshakuni house. Movsēs Khorenats‘i writes of King Artashēs’s demand that his son Argam “bring his concubine called Mandu, who was very remarkable for her beauty and carriage, as a concubine for Artashēs. Two years later he further weakened [Argam] and ordered him to give up his possessions with the exception of the concubine.”<sup>7</sup> Movsēs later writes of a dispute between King Arshak and his brother Tirit‘, the former “being jealous of his brother over a young concubine.”<sup>8</sup> It is not clear whether the royal brothers quarreled over the same concubine referenced prior by Movsēs. Most likely, were Mandu the concubine in question, Movsēs would have explicitly named her, as he did previously, to maintain narrative continuity. Irrespective of the concubine’s identity, jealousy over concubines appears a frequent topological stimulus for animosity between kinsmen – particularly, as a reading of Movsēs would communicate, those of the Arshakuni house. It is possible that Movsēs, a loyal Bagratuni partisan, incorporates these details so as to slander its incumbent dynastic rival. A more likely explanation, however, is deduced from simple chronology. The Arshakuni house prevailed through the formative decades of Armenian Christianity and presided over its national conversion, after which concubinage was eliminated from the land by a newly established Christian mentality – one that sought to

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<sup>7</sup> MX II.51, pp. 190-191.

<sup>8</sup> MX III.25, pp. 276-277.

distinguish itself from the more sexually permissive Zoroastrian morality it had recently rejected in forging a novel Abrahamic identity.

Textual evidence also suggests that these concubines, perhaps even cultivated for such careers as were the female musicians of contemporaneous Islamicate society (within which the Armenians would be ultimately absorbed) received specialized training in courtly skills. Both the *Buzandaran* and the *History* of Movsēs Khorenats‘i allude to women as entertainers skilled in singing, dancing, and playing musical instruments. The episode of debauchery at Ashtishat recorded in the *Buzandaran* depicts the sons of Ḥusik fraternizing with “harlots, singing girls, *gusans*, and buffoons,” suggesting that female entertainers of early medieval Armenia proffered a variety of amusements, sexual and otherwise.<sup>9</sup> Zaroui Pogossian posits that these women exerted measurable authority over the transmission of bardic tradition in early Christian Armenia.<sup>10</sup> In agreement with this concept, Nadia El Cheikh observes a parallel capacity for cultural influence by Islamic mourning women.<sup>11</sup> Lisa Nielson identifies similar functions of female musicians at Islamicate courts, noting the extraordinary agency through which they exerted influence upon courtly, civic, and even political operations.<sup>12</sup>

Movsēs Khorenats‘i writes in his text of “a woman who was very beautiful and was playing [an instrument]; her name was Nazinik.”<sup>13</sup> He later refers to King Arshak’s enjoyment of “the songs of dancing girls.”<sup>14</sup> Translator Robert Thomson observes that the

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<sup>9</sup> BP III.xix, pp. 93-94.

<sup>10</sup> Pogossian, “Women at the Beginning,” 370-372.

<sup>11</sup> El Cheikh, *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity*, 56.

<sup>12</sup> Lisa Nielson, *Music and Musicians in the Medieval Islamicate World: A Social History* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2021), 59.

<sup>13</sup> MX II.63, p. 203.

<sup>14</sup> MX III.19, p. 270.

term *vardzakats*‘ is applied identically to both Nazinik and the “dancing girls” who capture King Arshak’s attention.<sup>15</sup> Movsēs elaborates upon the sexual desire of the Bagratuni nobleman Trdat for the musician-concubine Nazinik and the outrageous actions to which his lust incited him at the court of Bakur, prince of Siwnik‘, who evidently possessed the woman. Movsēs writes of Trdat: “He was enamored of her and said to Bakur: ‘Give me this singer.’ He replied: ‘No, for she is my concubine.’ But Trdat seized the woman by force, drew her to himself on the couch, and passionately worked his lust like an incontinent and ardent young man. Bakur, mad with jealousy, rose to pull him from her.”<sup>16</sup> Trdat then absconds with the woman, abducting her on horseback to his territory at Sper. Movsēs adds: “It is superfluous for us to say more about the prowess of this lascivious man.”<sup>17</sup>

This passage confirms that nobles of princely rank did indeed engage in concubinage, as indicated by the objection of the prince of Siwnik‘: “‘No, for she is my concubine.’”<sup>18</sup> Movsēs’s indication that the concubine Nazinik performed both vocal and instrumental music at this banquet further elucidates the courtly functions of these women, and substantiates that artistic as well as sexual services were expected of them. Movsēs later describes similar behavior of Khosrov Gardmanats‘i, who, “drunk with wine in the presence of Shapuh, showed a lustful passion for a woman playing the lyre with skillful fingers.”<sup>19</sup> The account is later reproduced by Movsēs Daskhurants‘i, who reports that Khosrov became “drunk with wine” and “behaved lewdly toward a certain

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<sup>15</sup> MX III.19, p. 270 (see n. 117).

<sup>16</sup> MX II.63, pp. 203-204.

<sup>17</sup> MX II.63, p. 204.

<sup>18</sup> MX II.63, p. 203.

<sup>19</sup> MX III.55, p. 320.

woman.”<sup>20</sup> Movsēs Daskhurants‘i dispenses with the particulars of the encounter—as well as any pertaining to the woman at issue—supplied by Movsēs Khorenats‘i, suggesting a diminution of the woman’s occupation in importance to the tenth-century annalist, or perhaps that her profession had diminished to extinction in the centuries intervening between the two texts.

Significantly, mention of female musical skill appears only when accompanied by male sexual desire, as if to couple sensory delights and spectacle with an expectation of intimacy. These women, then, exist exclusively (as far as the texts provide) for male consumption both sensual and sexual. Such references to female singers, dancers, and instrumentalists suggest that women—though perhaps only those of an isolated stratum, being that such skills are never imputed to noblewomen in the Armenian texts—could access, to some degree, specialized training in the musical and other performing arts. This would further substantiate the notion that these aesthetic skills were cultivated exclusively by women of a distinct courtesan class, voluntarily or not (to this no indication is provided in the surviving textual sources), and prepared specifically to the vocation. In a recent volume, Matthew S. Gordon explores this very phenomenon in an Abbasid context, concluding that these courtesans not only provided an important courtly function but, indeed, were able to advance socially through their participation in the institution.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> MD II.3, p. 55.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew S. Gordon, “Abbasid Courtesans and the Question of Social Mobility,” in *Concubines and Courtesans: Women and Slavery in Islamic History*, eds. Matthew S. Gordon and Kathryn A. Hain (New York: Oxford University Press 2017), 27-43.

It is likely that the practice of concubinage, however pervasive it had once been, began to decline shortly after the Christianization of Armenia. Textual references to the practice among the Armenians abruptly cease after the fifth century. Pertinently, David Zakarian observes the coeval extinction of polygamy in Armenian society; the concomitance of these parallel extinctions within a broader modulation of marital attitudes advanced Armenia's eventual (and resolute) orientation toward monogamy.<sup>22</sup> Curiously, concubinage is not alluded to even by later historians recapitulating the events of centuries past, even when transparently citing their fifth-century sources, suggesting that the practice had acquired so ignominious a connotation that it was expunged retroactively by annalists seeking to purify the histories of their nation's extant noble families.

Little else is known of the habits and activities of sub-noble women. Dawit' Gandzakets'i will admonish in the early twelfth century that women must not participate in game hunting, suggesting that such behaviors occurred with sufficient frequency to merit a clause devoted to its censure.<sup>23</sup> Such activities were likely taken up by women of the common class in the absence of sufficient male numbers, the harnessing of female labor being perhaps indispensable in underpopulated villages (likely those depopulated of men by extensive military campaigns and/or foreign invasions) to a productive hunt. Concubinage does not again appear in an Armenian text until after the arrival of Islam, the first of these instances contained in a brief (and perhaps satirical) report of the ground forces of Umayyad general Maslama ibn 'Abd al-Malik (d. 738), which Movsēs

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<sup>22</sup> Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 175.

<sup>23</sup> DG 8, p. 13.

Daskhurants'i portrays as so ineffectual as to necessitate the deployment of "his concubines as his rearguard."<sup>24</sup> An acknowledgment of concubinage will again appear amid the alleged communications (controversy over which will be discussed in a section to follow) exchanged between Emperor Leo III and Caliph 'Umar II preserved in the eighth century by Ghewond: "And what shall I say of the execrable debauchery which you commit with your concubines? For you are prodigal with them of all your fortune, and then, when you are tired of them, you sell them like cattle."<sup>25</sup>

Significantly, each of these subsequent references appears in connection with Islam, revealing that the Armenians had, by the first Arab incursions, come to associate the practice with Islamic custom. These associations may suggest some level of Armenian acquaintance with Quranic law, which permitted both concubinage and limited polygamy. Also possible, however, is an incidental Armenian awareness of this permission that developed as their exposure to Islamic culture and its practitioners elapsed. The inclusion by Ghewond of this item, irrespective of its origin, renders plausible an Armenian awareness of Muslim sexual protocols by the late eighth century.<sup>26</sup> The practice of concubinage, of which Leo—according to Ghewond's reproduction of the exchange—accuses Muslims by proxy of 'Umar, has since its fifth-century introduction dramatically transformed in Armenian literary approach. No longer is concubinage considered a practical reproductive utility; rather, it has descended to a habit of perversity

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<sup>24</sup> MD III.17, p. 131 – though, as previously explored, medieval Muslim women were known to have engaged in military activity alongside men.

<sup>25</sup> Ghewond 14, p. 101.

<sup>26</sup> Though Tim Greenwood alerts readers to the possibility that this series of exchanges was inserted into the text not by Ghewond himself but perhaps by a copyist at a later date – see Tim Greenwood, "A Reassessment of the *History of Lewond*" *Le Muséon: Revue d'Études Orientales* 125, nos. 1-2 (2012): 161.



morally akin to adultery. The insult is among the first of many leveled at the Islamic faith in medieval Armenian texts targeting specifically its sexual culture.

Alternatively, the practice of concubinage and/or derivative variations of extramarital congress may well have continued surreptitiously among the Armenian nobility following the ossification of Christianity. Acknowledgement of such incidences, to be addressed further in the present chapter, was perhaps expunged from the Armenian record of latter centuries through pietistic agenda so as to protect the reputations of its illustrious patrons as spiritually and corporeally immaculate by contrast to a prurient and uncivilized rival. It remains also plausible that concubinage did, as the intervening texts suggest, descend from favor among the Armenians by the time of the first Islamic intrusions only to be subsequently reintroduced, however tacitly, thereafter. This possibility will be explored further below.

### Prostitution

Despite its prominence and erstwhile acceptance among the royals and nobles of medieval Armenia, concubinage was not the exclusive avenue toward illicit sex (though it was almost certainly the most socially tolerated, owing perhaps to its well-documented procreative utility). Textual references abound to sexual relations of a decidedly (and consistently) more contemptible nature: prostitution. This alternative platform for illicit sexual relations appears prominently in the *History of the Anonymous Story-Teller*, the novelty and singularity of which may suggest a later date of composition for the text (or for the particular passage under present analysis).<sup>27</sup> The text contains two references to

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<sup>27</sup> Seta Dadoyan posits the work a “near-contemporary” of Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i’s *Universal History*, dating its assembly to “...somewhere in the three decades 990 and 1020.” See Dadoyan, *Islam in Armenian Literary Culture*, 52.

what appears to be prostitution, not attested in any previous Armenian text excepting an exegetical context.<sup>28</sup> The first of these references appears amid the previously analyzed account of Derēn Artsruni's (otherwise unattested and likely fabricated) extramarital affair with the Muslim woman K'ulinar. In defense of his sister Hranush—the wife whom Derēn has betrayed—King Smbat messengers a stern admonition to Derēn which includes the following: ““If you have any need for fornication, there are many women in the land of Vaspurakan. I have further heard that you have debauched all the wives of your nobles.””<sup>29</sup> Smbat's suggestion that Derēn fornicate with native rather than foreign women implies that the more egregious of Derēn's transgressions was to conduct an interethnic relationship rather than to commit the mortal sin of adultery. The suggestion that a man—especially a man of noble status, and one attached by marriage to Armenian royalty—manage his sexual urges not by virtuously containing them (as would a text more conventional to the genre have instructed), but by releasing them through such channels as marital infidelity, flagrantly contravenes medieval Armenian sexual ethics. This additionally suggests that, according to Smbat's narrated expectation, women in the Kingdom of Vaspurakan (perhaps even those married to other noblemen of various rank) may have been receptive to extramarital sexual advances, or that it had become to some degree common for a high-ranking nobleman to expect the sexual availability of local women irrespective of marital or social status. This would then depict of the Kingdom a sexual landscape at astonishing variance from that portrayed in comparable Armenian texts, perhaps even divulging tangible realities otherwise concealed by a puritanical

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<sup>28</sup> Sacred prostitution in pre-Christian Armenia, however, is attested by Strabo – see Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 61-62.

<sup>29</sup> AST p. 219.

propaganda apparatus under the sponsorship of invested dynasts and the religious authorities internal thereto who depended upon aristocratic patronage. Perhaps the *Chronicle*'s conjured Smbat alludes to the services of prostitutes, or to a local system (potentially a disorganized one) of sex trafficking.

Transactional exchange of sexual service is first acknowledged in the Armenian record in the canon laws issued at Shahapivan in 444, wherein Canon VI specifies procedures for restoring absconded wives to the custody of their husbands. The Canon cautions of distinctions in application between women purchased for marriage and those “for fornication” (*pnquwpun*).<sup>30</sup> The persistence of prostitution in the Armenian Highland will be later confirmed by Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i, who in his *Penitential* rebukes the profession of sex work and those who engage in it. Dawit‘ assigns a penalty of doubled penance to “those who fornicate in a brothel,” corroborating the operation of bordellos and the activity of prostitutes in the Highland by the early twelfth century.<sup>31</sup> Dawit‘ will acknowledge the presence of informal prostitution as a peer-to-peer enterprise not entailing the intermediary of a brothel or agent, though he alludes to the occasional brokerage of the transaction by a spouse: “And there are [others] who on account of their

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<sup>30</sup> Hovhanessian, “The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan,” 82. Ramzy A. Hovhanessian translates *pnquwpun* as the equally plausible “for prostitution,” as the word “fornication” is usually rendered in Armenian as *սրռնկույթիւն*. A derivative of this latter term, *սրռնիկ*, appears subsequently in the same canon, suggesting a functional distinction between the two. The prefix *pnq-* creates ambiguity, as it denotes both prostitution and general promiscuity. The translation of “prostitution,” however, remains feasible in light of the canon’s full text, which addresses the potential for sale or personal remandment of the woman into slavery (which could, in fact, imply sexual servitude more akin to concubinage than to prostitution). This indicates some degree of transactionality between sexual activity and monetary exchange irrespective of whether the term is translated as “prostitution” or “fornication.” See Ramzy A. Hovhanessian, “The Armenian Council of Shahabivan: Translation, Introduction & Commentary” (MA thesis, St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, 1989): 40; 64. For providing me this text by Ramzy A. Hovhanessian I am grateful to my dear friend Andrew Kayaian,

<sup>31</sup> DG 53, p. 41.

poverty and adversity negotiate with strangers as pimps for their wives.”<sup>32</sup> Those who profit from the sale of their wives’ virginity, as well as those who mischievously “... give their virgin wives to tempt strangers” are punished in equal measure.<sup>33</sup> Dawit‘ further condemns “unmarried prostitutes who take drugs to prevent pregnancy,” the sin of prophylaxis classifying them “...among those who kill their child in the womb.”<sup>34</sup>

If such a practice existed in Vaspurakan or other Armenian localities during the caliphate period, it is not attested in any surviving Armenian text antecedent to the *History of the Anonymous Story-Teller*. To assume, however, that so universal a phenomenon as prostitution was in actuality (rather than solely in rhetoric) eradicated from the Armenian Highland—a theoretic testament to their spiritual immaculacy and somatic superiority as a nation, as the sources conspire relentlessly to convey—is irrational. Central to a consideration of medieval Armenia’s sexual landscape is that the corpus of texts that captures it was produced by an elite class of monastically edified traditors devoutly invested in generating and solidifying an image of Armenian national piety. That the Armenian source texts authored by so transparently biased a cohort remain silent on the subject of prostitution more reasonably indicates an injunction against the written acknowledgment of such sexual improprieties (consistent with its proscription, posited in chapter I, against documenting even in subtle language female physical beauty) than to an actual absence of prostitution – which would itself, if true, present an extraordinary historical anomaly.

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<sup>32</sup> DG 75, p. 53.

<sup>33</sup> DG 75, p. 53.

<sup>34</sup> DG 53, p. 41.

The episode does, however, recall fifth-century accounts of concubinage as a privilege enjoyed by men of royal and noble status (if not by a gamut of men across socioeconomic demographics) in the Armenian territories. The chronicler was likely aware of the fifth- and sixth-century practice via oral transmission of these tales if not through direct acquaintance with their written annals – indeed Derēn appears to evoke the imperious entitlement of the polygynous noblemen of old. Alternatively, the chronicler’s character of Smbat may in actuality intimate that to continue such adulteries even with married Armenian women is an optimal alternative to conducting an illicit interethnic affair with a woman of foreign extraction. This accords with the sexual values expressed in these texts from across the Middle Ages, which consistently (as this study contends) map identity and alterity upon the native and foreign body respectively, accentuating and exaggerating contrasts in sexual morality and corporal caliber in so doing. The author may also, to the contrary, project the sexual customs of his own setting onto a historicized Vaspurakan, likely one in which no such sexual profligacies were tolerated. Smbat’s latter clause is reminiscent of Step’anos Tarōnets’i’s account of serial infidelity among the wives of the *azats* with the Persian *hazarapet* Chihovr-Vshnasp, and may substantiate that the Zoroastrian figure identified by Step’anos as Chihovr-Vshnasp was in fact modelled after a more recent actor – perhaps the same individual conflated by the Anonymous Story-Teller with Derēn. Of note to this point, translator Robert Thomson discerns that no other account mentioning this Derēn Artsruni corroborates his extramarital affair, and Thomson deems the episode a fanciful invention by a creative fabulist.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> AST p. 179; p. 218 (see n. 197); p. 219 (see n. 205).

### Sex after Death

The eighth-century historian Ghewond duplicates in his text a series of letters purportedly exchanged between the Byzantine emperor Leo III (r. 717-741) and Umayyad caliph ‘Umar II (‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, r. 717-720). Through the mouthpiece of Ghewond, Leo, as a representative of Christianity in text, vigorously assails Islamic sexual and marital values. He does so in part by rending asunder the two Abrahamic faiths along the seismic fissure of eschatology. In the polemic that ensues, Leo dismantles piecemeal the infrastructure of the Islamic afterworld, brandishing throughout dislodged fragments of the verbal wreckage as evidence of Islamic sexual depravity.<sup>36</sup> These he contrasts with correspondingly chaste exhibits of the Christian hereafter to propound the moral superiority of Christian sexual ethics. He does so in pursuit of constructing distinct geographies of Christian and Muslim eschatologies – a dichotomy whose Armenian aspect is characterized by, secondarily to unity with Christ, carnal immaculacy. This manifests not as disciplined resistance of carnal instinct (as these texts define all temporal sensoriality) but indeed the total absence of all sexuality and sensuality in Armenian eschatological space, rendering obsolete the exercise of discipline. The Armenian Christian hereafter in essence replicates moral orientation in the temporal in its aspiration toward ascetic purity and rejection of the carnal; the Armenians’ temporal values thus transcend into the eternal. The Islamic *Jannah* is in contrast projected as debauched, sexually profligate, and endemically iniquitous. While these texts map their uniquely conceived iteration of the Kingdom—one that centers

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<sup>36</sup> I am here borrowing Nerina Rustomji’s term “afterworld” to define the Islamic hereafter, which Rustomji distinguishes from Christian eschatological models by its construction as an extratemporal geography rather than, as most Christian eschatologies furnish, a dimensional experience to sequentially follow Earthly death. See Nerina Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), xvi-xviii.

Armenian national identity—over an infrastructure of sensory sterility, the afterworld of Islamic eschatology is replete with luxurious sensualities.<sup>37</sup> This contrast may derive perhaps from an essential oppositionality between creation narratives, the Quranic attesting divine intentionality in engineering humankind for terrestrial habitation, with its profuse sensory and physical delights, by contrast to a Christian Genesis which portrays humanity relegated to an inferior temporality in punishment of sin. Perhaps most significant of the following passages is their disclosure of medieval Armenian fluency with Islamic eschatological culture.

Though scholars currently believe the version of these correspondences preserved by Ghewond a translation of a now-lost Greek original, in the absence of that original these sources will be examined with two possibilities under consideration.<sup>38</sup> The first of these possibilities is that, because the particular passages addressing the body reflect and correspond to notions of corporality entrenched deeply within Armenian textual artifacts of the genre, they may be in fact authorial inventions by Ghewond to insert the distinctive ethnoreligious values that he cultivated under monastic instruction. These literary accents, then, inject his own interpretation of Islam into the discourse of the correspondents whom he quotes. Indeed Timothy Greenwood notes the reluctance of modern scholars—and the problems that have arisen therefrom—to treat this exchange as an integrated component of Ghewond’s text rather than as an intrusive and extrinsic interpolation.<sup>39</sup> The second possibility with which this study will engage is that even were

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<sup>37</sup> For medieval Christian perceptions of Islamic perversity, see Rustomji, *The Beauty of the Houris*, 38-39.

<sup>38</sup> Greenwood, “A Reassessment,” 157-158; Seonyoung Kim similarly notes in her 2017 dissertation the intricacies of untangling translations – see Seonyoung Kim, “The Arabic Letters of the Byzantine Emperor Leo III to the Caliph ‘Umar Ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz: An Edition, Translation and Commentary” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2017).

<sup>39</sup> Greenwood, “A Reassessment,” 154-155.

these passages that so visibly reflect the somatic attitudes promoted by the *vardapet* elite original to Ghewond's non-Armenian source, his conscious and deliberate inclusion thereof in his text (at the expense of valuable ink and paper, as well as hours of labor) evinces that the values therein advocated reinforced his own as an eighth-century Armenian cleric. As Seta Dadoyan pronounces, "The figure of 'Umar II is a dramatic creation by a Christian author."<sup>40</sup> In the event that the contents under current investigation prove to have been produced independent any Armenian influence or ethos, it is aspired that the analyses provided herein will contribute nevertheless to the advancement of study of these texts and their respective traditions. Scholarly engagement with these texts and their transmission histories remains active and will continue to advance with the publication of forthcoming volumes.

Leo's denunciation of Islam commences with an attack on its marital morality in the eschatological dimension: he introduces an interpretation of the Islamic afterworld that permits successfully raptured Muslims to embrace not liberation from desire, as defines the ideal eternal portrayed consistently in Armenian texts including Ghewond's, but, conversely, indulgence therein as reward for their worldly comportment. Leo's operant (and perhaps erroneous) intimation is that Muslims enter into Earthly marriages as necessarily temporal—and temporary—arrangements confined to the terrestrial and immediately terminated upon entry into the Islamic afterworld. To such monastic sensibilities as Ghewond's, this disrespect for the marital covenant constitutes, excepted only in the extenuating circumstance of the Gregorid patriarchate (as discussed in chapter III), a venal infraction. In relief against his estimation of the Islamic afterworld, Ghewond

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<sup>40</sup> Dadoyan, *Islam in Armenian Literary Culture*, 37.



(by literary proxy of Leo) reinforces that Christianity regards marriage a sacrament preserved beyond mundane corporality and into the discarnate celestial. It is from this position, among others, that Ghewond elevates the Armenians as both an ethnic and religious community, as well as the Armenian eternal as a unique destination with its own distinct moral geography which he locates above that of the recently arrived Muslim extraneity.

Ghewond's rendering of the emperor Leo continues to attack the marital and sexual tenets of the Islamic afterworld, introducing one of the earliest known exo-Islamic records of the idea that Muslims, liberated from the tyrannical constriction of temporal marriage, are awaited in the afterworld by ethereal virgins to deflower in recompense for corporeal piety. Leo, via Ghewond, chastises: "There we do not expect to enjoy contact with women who remain for ever virgin, and to have children by them, for we put no faith in such silly tales caused by extreme ignorance and paganism."<sup>41</sup> The paradisaal companions to whom Ghewond alludes are the *houris* of Islamic eschatology, evincing an Armenian acquaintance with these figures—as well as other foundational elements of Islamic eschatology and sexual aesthetics—as early as the eighth century. Smith and Haddad submit that the *houris* are "rewards for the virtuous deeds of their appointed husbands."<sup>42</sup> Nerina Rustomji elaborates: "In the Qur'an, houris are marked by large eyes and purity by virtue of being untouched. Hadiths develop their description. Their white limbs are so fair and fine that their bones can be seen through them. Their white gauzy garments flow in the breeze. When they walk in the marketplace, they have a scent that

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<sup>41</sup> Ghewond 14, p. 104.

<sup>42</sup> Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Y. Haddad, "Women in the Afterlife," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43, no. 1 (March 1975): 48.

wafts for miles. Composed of saffron, the houri is adorned with jewels.”<sup>43</sup> Augmenting their desirability, *houris* do not excrete, menstruate, or secrete bodily fluids of any kind (other than saliva, which, amplifying their celestial perfection, reputedly “smells more pleasant than anything in the world”).<sup>44</sup> Rustomji notes the contradiction inherent to this condition of a being created (perhaps) for explicitly sexual purposes: “Interestingly, the purity of not having to experience any bodily fluids does not invalidate sexual activity and satisfaction.”<sup>45</sup>

Of the allegedly Islamic idea that the righteous may expect to earn sexual contact with beautiful virgin women in the afterworld as remuneration for temporal rectitude, Ghewond attributes to Leo the following response:

These unclean spirits appear to you there sometimes in the form of serpents, and sometimes they seem to indulge in evil relations with women, according to their custom, giving the appearance of making marriages. You, deceived by the illusion, and imprudently following them, make yourselves equals to them here on earth and in the world to come. You seem not to understand that in the other world they are forbidden to have such intercourse according to the Gospel of the Savior.<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps most astounding of this comment is the contained suggestion that sexual intercourse is prohibited in or even conceptually absent from the Kingdom, rendering it to Leo’s (or, more likely, Ghewond’s) cosmology a toilsome Earthly obligation as suggested in the accounts of marriage and divorce among the Gregorid men (previously examined in chapter III) rather than a sensory delight as in the Islamic conception – an asymmetry of which Ghewond-via-Leo is acutely aware. This vision of the Kingdom as a

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<sup>43</sup> Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, 96.

<sup>44</sup> Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, 96; Rustomji, *The Beauty of the Houri*, 108.

<sup>45</sup> Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, 96.

<sup>46</sup> Ghewond 14, p. 100.

realm unfettered by the incarnate yoke of sensuality conforms to the ascetic orientation continually espoused in medieval Armenian texts. Interestingly, the presence of temptation incapable of gratification comes to characterize *al-Nar*, the Islamic rendering of Hell. Nerina Rustomji notes a hadith collection attributed to Muslim that describes a vision of *al-Nar* “where women, whose piled hair on their heads resemble camel humps, roam the compartments to tempt men sexually.”<sup>47</sup> It appears then that both conceptualizations of the eternal offer liberation from temptation – the Islamic by its fulfillment, and the Armenian-Christian by its removal.

Evidence suggests an expectation that the *houris* of Islamic cosmology, like mortal women in Armenian abstraction, conduct themselves with restraint and modesty – a curious commonality between the two otherwise incompatible conceptions of feminine ontology.<sup>48</sup> Irrespective of Ghewond's source for these exchanges, this idea is nevertheless representative of one that suffused Armenian sexual culture indelibly throughout the dynastic period. The assessment of the Islamic afterworld as one “defined by and detailed through luxurious objects” is evidently agreed upon by both Islamic and Armenian traditors.<sup>49</sup> The Armenians, through means explored in the previous chapter, consistently situate their morality in opposition to this sensoriality – their own afterworld becomes, contrarily, a space of austerity, modesty, and minimalism. The afterworld assembled in these texts is defined not by the liberty to enjoy sensory pleasures—as in the Islamic *Jannah*—but by total liberation from desiring them. The Kingdom in Armenian cognition is thus a locus of deliverance from—and not to, as in the Islamic

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<sup>47</sup> Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, 80.

<sup>48</sup> Rustomji, *The Beauty of the Houri*, 103-104.

<sup>49</sup> Rustomji, *The Beauty of the Houri*, 108.

model—sensuality. Serpents will again appear as proxies for illicit sex in medieval Armenian literature, to be examined in forthcoming chapters.

The sensory excesses—including the *houris*—of Islamic eschatology are again referenced in the tenth century by T‘ovma Artsruni, who writes:

The heavenly gifts which the Lord has promised for the future, the ineffable and angelic renewal, he said were vast quantities of food and drink; should one wish to eat insatiably one would find them ready. And there would be continual and insatiable intercourse with women who remained virgins. It is too long to repeat all his impure sayings, for they are very many and opposed to God. And all this he affirmed and set down for his nation, calling it the Quran.<sup>50</sup>

T‘ovma’s acquaintance with these phenomena may, in fact, derive from exposure to the text of his predecessor Ghewond. This transmission, however, remains a matter of scholarly debate, as Seonyoung Kim carefully reviews.<sup>51</sup> It appears that the *houris* represents for the Armenians, as for perhaps their Muslim counterparts, an eschatological circumvention for “...extending the practice of polygamy into the afterlife.”<sup>52</sup> As such, *Jannah* both titillates and terrifies the medieval Armenian sensibility. It is, for the Armenians, the ultimate inversion of their moral hierarchy: the domain of the temporally forbidden made eternally abundant. The Islamic afterworld is, thusly, made phantasmic in the Armenian imagination by the profusion of sensory pleasures that abound there.

Ghewond’s Leo, whether in his authentic words or as a literary invention, continues to enumerate his misperceptions of Islam, specifically with respect to its marital customs. He proceeds to project sensational accusations at the caliph: “But you

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<sup>50</sup> TA II.4, p. 169.

<sup>51</sup> Kim, “Arabic Letters,” 28-29.

<sup>52</sup> Rustomji, *The Beauty of the Houris*, 162.

are more venomous than the serpent ... and not being able to satisfy your unleashed passions while still alive, at the hour of your death you violently put your wives to death, following the inspiration of the evil spirit.”<sup>53</sup> The operant assumption underlying this accusation is an inborn carnal incontinence beyond the control of Muslims to restrain. So irascible is their appetite for the erotic that not even in death can they forego sexual satisfaction – they must forcibly intern their wives to sexually serve them in the afterworld. By contrast, Ghewond’s Leo demonstrates, the Armenians carry no such appetency to the celestial dimension, where upon entry, they anticipate blissful relief from such carnal proclivities rather than indulgent contentment therein (as they perceive of their Muslim counterparts inhabiting their own eschatological geography – one spatially segregated from that of Armenian Christendom). An alternate reading of this passage could yield a more misogynistic than lascivious interpretation – that a woman’s value abruptly terminates upon the death of her husband and the consequent cessation of her wifely tenure. This, too, would contravene Armenian marital values, as demonstrated in chapter II of the present study. Also possible is an Armenian conflation of Earthly wives with Heavenly *houris*, generating the assumption that men’s female companions accompany them to the afterworld—as would occur in the event of uxoricide—rather than receiving them upon entry as would a *houri* fabricated for his celestial pleasure.

While moral rectitude for the Armenians equates to moderation of carnal desire, this exchange implies, Leo insists that the Islamic aspiration toward Heaven is incentivized by the pursuit not of purity but of sanctioned concupiscence—sexual frivolities such as an allotment of virgins to deflower and liberation from cumbersome

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<sup>53</sup> Ghewond 14, pp. 101-102.

nuptial fetters—rendering their faith null in its misdirection: “For you who are given over to carnal vices, and who have never put limit to your lustful pleasures, you who prefer your pleasures to any good, it is precisely for that reason that you consider the kingdom of heaven of no account if it is not peopled with [women].”<sup>54</sup> Ghewond’s text reveals the astonishing perception that the Islamic afterworld, unlike that of the Armenians, is by design a place not of effortless purity but one of uninhibited sin and debauchery.

Armenian Christianity, in contrast, projects a Kingdom defined by liberation from carnal temptation and the total cessation of corporal desire. It is not, to Ghewond’s eschatological position as an Armenian Christian, the absence of temptations that defines the Kingdom, but the condition itself of invulnerability thereto: the release from an embodied materiality into a blissfully discarnate ethereal. If the Islamic afterworld is a space replete with sensual pleasures and opulent luxuries—the aesthetic, the sensory, and the libidinal—its Armenian analogue is constructed in opposition to these values. It is a realm uncontaminated by vile aesthetic sensualities and devoid of burdensome flesh (literally, that which is carnal) and its myriad inconveniences: its polluting urges, its fetid impurities, the noisome requirements of its maintenance, and its obstinate insistence toward sin.

### Destructive Appetites

Following the inclusion of letters collected between Leo and ‘Umar, Ghewond continues to malign Islamic sensory excess. He records an episode involving the caliph al-Walid, whom he has previously described as superfluously masculine and athletic (discussed in chapter I). Of al-Walid, Ghewond relates: “In addition, there were no limits

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<sup>54</sup> Ghewond 14, p. 104.

to his drinking and lustful behavior with women. When the kinsmen of the caliphate became aware of the deeds of their caliph who was prostituting himself in impurity, they asked the trustworthy men of their religion, whom they called the *kura* (the readers of the Qur'an), what they thought about him."<sup>55</sup> The *kura* then render a judgment of death upon the disgraced caliph as penalty for his misconduct. "Upon this order given by the *kuras*, [the kinsmen of the caliphate] entered the royal palace, found him [al-Walid] in a drunken stupor, and slew him by the sword."<sup>56</sup> Significantly of this passage, the Armenians here find common ground with their Muslim counterparts in their equivalent disdain for intoxication and its ensuing mental impairment, Ghewond here elevating for literary display this example of consonance between the two otherwise contraposed cultures. Ghewond thereby calls to attention the caliph's failure to contain not only his sexual appetites but, as well, that to imbibe (which, as Ghewond specifies, ultimately precipitates the caliph's destruction). Interestingly, this episode recalls another incident recorded periodically throughout medieval Armenian literature – one involving not an Islamic or other external monarch but, rather, a native one.

The first iteration of the episode appears in the fifth-century *History of Movsēs Khorenats'i*: "Artashir, the king of Armenia, began to plunge without restraint into licentious pleasures to the extent that all the princes became disgusted with him."<sup>57</sup> Appalled by the king's failure to contain his sensory impulses, a convocation of local princes tenders a grievance to the *katholikos* Sahak—the final patriarch of the Gregorid line—and requests his support in deposing the incontinent king. Unlike the account of al-

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<sup>55</sup> Ghewond 23, p. 115.

<sup>56</sup> Ghewond 23, p. 115.

<sup>57</sup> MX III.63, p. 334.

Walid's demise, however, Sahak does not acquiesce, rebuking the seditious nobles: "..."For he has been sealed by baptism, even though he is licentious. He is a fornicator, yet he is a Christian. He is dissolute of body, yet not unbelieving of spirit. He is impure of life, but not a fire worshipper. He is weak with women, but he does not serve the elements."<sup>58</sup> The reproach of Sahak foregrounds the Armenian conviction, contemporary to the text, that to be a Christian in a perpetual state of sin was far preferable to betraying the Armenian nation in capitulation to Zoroastrianism – the chief threat to Armenian Christianity before the arrival of Islam.

The episode is repeated the following century by Ghazar P'arpets'i, who includes a virtually identical synopsis of the debacle to that of Movsēs Khorenats'i:

Artašēs was a young and lascivious man, and he ruled the country in a very debauched fashion. The Armenian princes, unable to endure these lewd and vicious habits of king Artašēs, gathered together in the presence of the great patriarch of Armenia, saint Sahak ... and said to him: 'We are unable to bear such lawless and impure deeds of the king. For we think it better to die than continually to see and hear such obscene deeds. ...'<sup>59</sup>

As in Movsēs's telling, Ghazar's conjuring of Sahak replies: "..."For although he might be a fornicator, yet he bears on himself the seal of Christ's flock. He is polluted in body, yet is not an unbeliever and a pagan. He is debauched, but not a fire-worshipper. He has a weakness for women, but he does not serve the elements. He is afflicted by one vice, but he is not tainted with all vices like the impious."<sup>60</sup>

Early in the tenth century, T'ovma Artsruni recounts the same incident:

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<sup>58</sup> MX III.63, pp. 334-335.

<sup>59</sup> Ghazar I.13, pp. 53-54.

<sup>60</sup> Ghazar I.13, p. 57.



But Artashir, haughtily and without shame, pursued a course of shameful lasciviousness, ... and lust for women—not only at night but also during the daytime in the light of the sun without distinction he worked his desires... . Exasperated by him, the Armenian nobles were nauseated at his impure conduct and decided that Artashir would no longer reign over Armenia. They approached Saint Sahak to inform him of their plan to turn to the Persian king. This indeed they carried out.<sup>61</sup>

T'ovma's text, strangely, departs from its predecessors in its omission of St. Sahak's reprimand. By the account of T'ovma, the nobles execute their coup after informing the *katholikos* of their intent, rather than seeking his authorization in advance and irrespective of his response.

A final version of this event appears in the *History* of Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts'i, who characterizes Artashir as "...always wantonly engaged in lascivious licentiousness, which provided the *naxarars* with the excuse to bring accusations against him and to show their annoyance at him."<sup>62</sup> Sahak, conforming to the accounts of Movsēs Khorenats'i and Ghazar P'arpets'i, responds to the *nakharars* as follows: "Although he is prodigal, he is confirmed with holy baptism; he is a prostitute, but a Christian; he is debauched in body, but not an infidel in spirit; he is wanton in conduct, but not a fire-worshipper."<sup>63</sup> Despite the recent substitution of the Zoroastrian adversary with an Islamic one, the contempt for fire worship is retained intact in the

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<sup>61</sup> TA I.11, pp. 137-138 – Thomson here translates *q̄h̄gn̄īp̄t̄kūl̄* as "homosexuality," which I have redacted with ellipses due to its inaccuracy; the word does not connote homosexuality but, rather, generalized libidinousness often associated (though not necessarily so) with onanism. I have also redacted a reference to "bestiality," which Thomson translates from *q̄ul̄n̄ūn̄īūl̄ȳūn̄*; Thomson's translation implies sexual relations with animals, but a somatological reassessment of the text finds that it was not *with* animals that the concupiscent king copulated but, rather, in an animalistic manner. I have therefore omitted this item from Thomson's translation as well. I am grateful to my friend and colleague Dr. Jesse Siragan Arlen for his generous help with this passage.

<sup>62</sup> YD XIV, p. 88.

<sup>63</sup> YD XIV, p. 89.

episode's tenth-century treatment, disclosing the continuity of Zoroastrian ritual as a narrative proxy for generalized alterity across five centuries of its reproduction.

As previously explored, themes that depicted the former Zoroastrian threat had, in the works that followed those of Ghazar and Eghishē, been adapted in the Armenian histories—exhibiting such adaptations as the ethnoreligious transposition of hostile actors—to accommodate the recent Islamic incursions. Textual coding of a Zoroastrian enemy to reflect the more recently arrived Muslims accrued popular momentum as a literary topos; these Zoroastrian combatants were often allegorical parallels of Muslim figures whose identities or actions were likely inferential knowledge to a contemporaneous audience. While many accounts of foreign invaders had been transposed onto the template of Awarayr, which had become fixed as the standard literary model for historical writing after the sixth century, this particular story was replicated intact over several centuries, its religious casting unchanged. This suggests an active decision to privilege these individual details above the narrative device as it had evolved over the four intervening centuries. The Armenian acknowledgment that the lascivious al-Walid was punished for his immoderacy by his coreligionists reflects, however, that even in Armenian clerical awareness the *Umma* was generally intolerant of sensory excess, exhibiting an orientation toward modesty similar to that pronounced in Armenian texts, and approached such behaviors with comparable condemnation.

Despite the resistance to Islamic sexual culture by Armenian historians of the early caliphate period, its influence does appear to have implanted by the time of Aristakēs Lastiverts'i in the late eleventh century. Specifically, Armenian attitudes toward marital intimacy—initially denounced as an inappropriate expression of amorous

eroticism and emotional excess—appear to soften under exposure to Islamic celebrations of romantic affection. Of marital unions interrupted by Seljuq advancement, Aristakēs writes: “The newly-wed woman could not recall her love for her bridegroom, nor did the man think to caress the wife he longed for.”<sup>64</sup> In effect, Aristakēs endorses the intimate marital affections of an explicitly tactile and emotive quality, an appreciation for which being perhaps imported by Muslim Arabs who introduce early in their communications with the Armenians a novel ardor for such sensualities (marriage being, throughout much of early Armenian literature, an exclusively political arrangement).<sup>65</sup> This appears to be the only positive characterization of the conjugal relationship in the entirety of the period under analysis, with the arguable exception of a passage in the seventh-century text of Sebēos, who writes contemporaneously to the initial Muslim incursions into Armenia. Of the canon laws regarding sacramental marriage, Sebēos writes:

For we have universal canons for rites and sacraments for men and women, that those who have married as virgins may freely participate in the Lord’s body according to the saying: ‘Marriage is altogether honourable, and beds are pure.’ But as for those [married] a second time, even if one is a virgin and the other [married] for the second time, the [canon] enjoins both to repent together for three years, and then to participate in the sacrament.<sup>66</sup>

Sebēos’s validation of the purity innate to marital intercourse may evidence as early as the seventh century an Armenian progression toward a more receptive approach to sex within the nuptial context.

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<sup>64</sup> AL XI, p. 74.

<sup>65</sup> For Islamic cultures of love and romantic affection, see Lois Anita Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre* (London: University of London Press, 1973).

<sup>66</sup> Sebēos 46, p. 128.

Containment of carnal appetites is praised in the Armenian sources as early as the fifth-century text of Agat'angeghos, who does not limit his praise of the continent to their sexual restraint. The admiration for abstention from corporeal indulgence extends visibly to the moderation of appetites for food and drink as well. A passage in the *Buzandaran* quotes St. Nersēs's esteem for the dietarily moderate: "...And they reject and avoid the unnecessary to such a degree that they even scorn the daily portion [*ročik*] of food, let alone the consumption of meat and wine that loosens the belly and wraps the kidneys in thick fat, whence arise myriads of varied and countless transgressions. Those who give themselves up to such things love them and act according to their own will."<sup>67</sup>

Notably amid this trope, vegetarians occupy elevated status among the ascetics.

The first known record of the Gayianeank' introduces the thirty-three martyrs with endorsement of their vegetarian diet, which is coded as virtuously modest and controlled:

Then they came and found in the city of Rome a convent of nuns, living solitary hermetic lives, eating vegetables, sober, modest, and pure women of the Christian faith, who day and night and the whole time by praising and blessing were worthy to raise to God in the heights their perfect prayers. Their abbess was called Gaianē, and her protegee, who was one of the daughters of a pious man and of royal lineage, was called Rhipsimē.<sup>68</sup>

Agat'angeghos, toward the end of his historical text, similarly praises the dietary and sensory austerity of Aristakēs, the celibate son of St. Gregory:

He had entered the religious life of hermits in the mountains, and had undertaken many and various austerities according to the gospel with all diligence, and had given himself entirely to spiritual affairs—to solitude, dwelling in the mountains, hunger and thirst and living off vegetables, being shut up without light, wearing a hair shirt, using the ground

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<sup>67</sup> BP IV.v, p. 120.

<sup>68</sup> Agat'angeghos § 138, pp. 147-149.

as a bed, often spending the sweet repose of night—the need of sleep—in wakeful vigils on his feet.<sup>69</sup>

The acknowledgment that Aristakēs wore a “hair shirt” as an undergarment further exhibits his capacity to endure physical discomfort in demonstration of spiritual virtue – a sartorial gesture previously examined by the present study. Contemporaneously to Agat’angeghos, Movsēs Khorenats’i will praise the nobleman Erakhnawu Andzawats’i as “...moderate in all regards, and temperate even in the desires of the flesh.”<sup>70</sup>

Veneration for a moderated diet pervades Armenian literature for several centuries, emerging especially robust in the tenth century. The Pseudo-Ḥovhannēs refers briefly to “...four men who were both ascetics and vegetarians and who had separated themselves from all human pleasures...”<sup>71</sup> Ḥovhannēs Draskhanakertts’i praises as follows the katholikos Mashtots’: “He not only denied himself indulgence in gluttony, but also refused to partake of an ordinary diet of bread and water. In his frugality he satisfied his needs only by means of vegetables.”<sup>72</sup> The same figure is in like manner extolled by the historian Step’anos Tarōnets’i, who writes of the ninth-century patriarch: “From childhood he lived on a diet of grass as a hermit.”<sup>73</sup> Step’anos later clarifies of Armenian dietary protocols: “There was by tradition an irregularity in this country of Armenia which derived from the gluttony of princes and *azats*—to pollute the set days for fasting from meat, Wednesdays, Fridays, and the Sabbath, with dairy foods instead.”<sup>74</sup> According to this account, selective vegetarianism emerged in response to hedonic excess

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<sup>69</sup> Agat’angeghos § 859, p. 393.

<sup>70</sup> MX II.62, p. 202.

<sup>71</sup> Ps.Y. V, p. 106.

<sup>72</sup> YD XXXVI, p. 150.

<sup>73</sup> ST III.3, p. 213.

<sup>74</sup> ST III.17, p. 248.

by the nobility. Step‘anos cites the restraint of King Abas of Kars as an exemplar of mastery over one’s carnal impulses: “Setting an example to these in person; he did not eat any dairy products or fish and spent those days prescribed by the canon eating bread and vegetables.”<sup>75</sup> Such caustic approaches to consumptive excess will be consistently—and strategically—deployed by the producers of early Armenian literature. A passage of the historical text attributed to Movsēs Daskhurants‘i, dating from the seventh or eighth century, praises the nobleman Juanshir for his restraint and sensory continence: “...time was not wasted with improper speech, in drunkenness, or in [performing] comedies (*katakergut'iwnk'*), rather [they enjoyed] discreet entertainments. ... All day long [Juanshir] occupied himself with national problems, not with licentious pleasures.”<sup>76</sup>

Ghewond refers to a mass immoderacy that precedes the Umayyad destruction of Damascus, inculcating the decadence and depravity of its population in the ultimate (and, as Ghewond alludes, condign) demise of their city: “It seems to me that the city of the transgressors was full of abundant malice, since [the inhabitants] were sick mentally, sensually, and within their hearts they developed pangs of death, affecting their minds and their senses, resulting in an abundance of killings, iniquity of properties, and lustful desires.”<sup>77</sup> An eleventh-century indictment by Aristakēs Lastiverts‘i of the Byzantines’ failure to moderate their appetites for intoxicants and carnal pleasures reads: “The Byzantine troops, benumbed by wine and by their licentious activities, were unable to take care of themselves.”<sup>78</sup> The twelfth-century *Penitential* of Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i reflects the instantiation and conduction of these values beyond the orbit of the nobility

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<sup>75</sup> ST III.17, p. 248.

<sup>76</sup> MD II.21, p. 84.

<sup>77</sup> Ghewond 24, p. 117.

<sup>78</sup> AL IX, p. 40.

into the conventions of the common class in surveying the impropriety of various bodily functions: “If a priest should eructate . . . because of food or drink, he shall remain 8 days outside the holy sacrament and shall not read the gospel for 7 days; . . . If it happens because of drunkenness, he shall remain 30 days outside holiness.”<sup>79</sup> Dawit‘ permits exceptions for spontaneous eructation “on account of a drug or the severity of a pain which seizes him,” though the same function if induced by gluttony is to be penalized.<sup>80</sup>

Dawit‘ elaborates on the potential of any such excess to divest one of his very humanity, especially that pertaining to inebriation: “If he should fearlessly and habitually vomit 2 or 3 times, he shall be excluded from the celebration of mass to Christ, for the drunkard is to be counted as a wild beast.”<sup>81</sup> Dawit‘ will, later in his text, address the emission of bodily fluids upon the altar and the corrective actions necessary for its subsequent purification. In totality, these items reflect a consistent sensitivity to carnal excess—be it an excess of food, drink, emotion, or sex—that will not only pervade Armenian somatic culture across the Middle Ages but, in fact, augment as centuries elapse and incursions into the Highland increase. These reflect an acute Armenian awareness of the moralities of surrounding localities and the destructions wrought by their moral inadequacies, which Armenian historians consistently emphasize, condemn, and assail as indicators of ethnoreligious inferiority. The carnal appetite—and the virtuous moderation thereof—then becomes a critical metric by which the Armenians judge the morality of bodies native and foreign in both the temporal and the eternal.

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<sup>79</sup> DG 29, p. 24.

<sup>80</sup> DG 29, p. 24.

<sup>81</sup> DG 29, p. 24.

## Paraphilias

Medieval Armenian texts—particularly those produced in removal from the sanitizing agendas imposed by ecclesial and dynastic apparatuses—divulge a number of illicit carnal habits in practice by its population at all demographic levels. With unanticipated salience emerges bestiality among the paraphilias reprehended of the Armenian public across the Highland, first documented in the *Buzandaran* in reference to King Pap, who the compiler attests occasionally “copulated with animals.”<sup>82</sup> The *Penitential* of Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i exposes the pervasiveness of sexual attraction to, arousal by, and even copulation with animals among the common laity who, absent the financial resources to escape to Cilicia where those of means—dynasts, aristocrats, and professionals retained by the nobility—fled to refuge, remained in the Armenian Highland after the Seljuq conquest. Of the behaviors and predilections confessed by this demographic to their various village pastors, Dawit‘ reveals numerous crimes of a bestial nature. Common among these was sexual arousal in response to intentional voyeurism of animal copulation. Dawit‘ prescribes bespoke penances to men, women, and children; he declaims that, of these, women are especially susceptible to such depravities “on account of their weakmindedness.”<sup>83</sup> He illuminates: “To observe the coupling of animals is forbidden by the canons of the saints for men, women and children, and particularly for women, on account of the weakness of their flesh, for they are more easily affected than men.”<sup>84</sup> He elaborates that increased penalties will accrue should a man “become polluted at the sight” (that is: discharge any volume of semen).<sup>85</sup> His text will then betray the

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<sup>82</sup> BP V.xxii, p. 203.

<sup>83</sup> DG 65, p. 46.

<sup>84</sup> DG 65, p. 46.

<sup>85</sup> DG 65, p. 46.



apparently popular habit among the locals of inducing copulation between animals for erotic purposes by “...binding the female of the animal and bringing the male to mount her.”<sup>86</sup> This reproductive interference he condemns as a violation of natural procreation and summarily forbids: “Let no one do this; if any dare, he shall doubly repent.”<sup>87</sup>

In another passage, Dawit‘ pairs bestiality with sodomy as sins coequal in gravity, and offers a catalogue of penalties for their expiation adjusting primarily for the age of the offender. He issues the stunning clarification that sodomy committed consanguineously constitutes no more egregious a violation than that with “strangers”—including, he specifies, “the infidel and the Kurd”—both considered mortal transgressions of equal severity.<sup>88</sup> To couple sexually with an ethnoreligious outsider, then, offends his somatic sensibilities commensurably to so nefarious a crime as incest – the sexual signet of the oppressive Zoroastrian externality. He then issues guidelines for the destruction of the polluted animal and any utensils used to consume of it (both meat and milk) as well as for repentance of the act.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> DG 65, p. 46.

<sup>87</sup> DG 65, p. 46.

<sup>88</sup> DG 56, pp. 42-43; Dowsett translates “sodomy” from *սրոնսզհոնսզ*, lit. “knowledge of man” – this word is unrelated to the more general *սոմոնսլիսն* which relates specifically to the Biblical city of Sodom (though is also variously employed in reference to acts of sodomy in medieval Armenian texts). This passage supplies one of only two usages by Dawit‘ of this particular term to denote sodomy (the other appearing in Canon 94 amid a litany of moral misdeeds to be reviled) – for all other such references (including those to the city itself), Dawit‘ selects the more general *սոմոնսլ-* and its derivatives. This suggests that *սոմոնսլ-*, like the Greek from which it derives, did not refer to any particular act (though may have come to acquire across centuries a connotation to anal intercourse as did its English cognate) while the more precise *սրոնսզհոնսլթիւն* denoted specifically rectal penetration or, more generally, homosexual congress between men. Still, there appears no etymological reason to infer that the word itself specifies interaction with the anus or with any particular anatomical site. Unfortunately, no linguistic evidence suggests that either *սոմոնսլ-* or *սրոնսզհոնսլթիւն* explicitly refers to anal penetration. Its implication thereof, however, appears obvious in Classical Armenian as it does in English. One need only confer with the far earlier fifth-century text of the *Buzandaran*, which applies *սրոնսզհոնսլթիւն* to illustrate the sexual activities of King Pap, and does not confuse its audience with the more ambiguous *սոմոնսլ-* and its derivatives.

<sup>89</sup> DG 56, Dowsett p. 43.

Another particularly eccentric episode appears in the *Anonymous Chronicle*, this one recounting the scandalizing commission of a sexual assault. More incendiary yet, the perpetrator is no modest plebeian but a celebrated cleric born of high-ranking nobility: the son of Sahak Artsruni and Smbatuhi of the Bagratuni.<sup>90</sup> According to the *Chronicle*, the offense took place at the monastery of Ashat in which the young noble, identified by the author as Derēn Artsruni, was enrolled.<sup>91</sup> The author narrates these events as follows: “Now in that monastery there was a beautiful girl, the niece of father Grigor, and he had vested her in the garment of a nun. It happened one day that the young Derēn and the youthful nun were gathering lentils outside the monastery. Derēn became passionately desirous of the maiden; he suddenly seized her and forced her to do his will.”<sup>92</sup>

In response to this offense, the abbot reprimands Derēn with the incongruously neutered punishment of expulsion from the monastery, the offending youth’s station and network likely deterring the abbot from imposing more appropriately severe discipline. The abbot explains to Derēn’s father, Ashot Artsruni: ““He cannot live in the monastery, for lambs of the church cannot resist young lions. He has ravaged the lamb of the church which I raised with much labour.””<sup>93</sup> The author invokes the Christian imagery of the lamb as innocent—the victim of Derēn’s assault not only a virgin, but a committed ascetic—weaving it into an account otherwise sterilized of such religious rhetoric.<sup>94</sup> The

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<sup>90</sup> AST pp. 202-203.

<sup>91</sup> Translator Robert Thomson notes that no such historical person can be identified, though theorizes that Grigor Deranik Bagratuni (d. 886) was intended. Thomson also clarifies that this Derēn differs from that narrated to have conducted a scandalous interethnic love affair with the Muslim woman K’ulinar. See Thomson’s introduction to the text, pp. 177-179.

<sup>92</sup> AST p. 203.

<sup>93</sup> AST p. 203.

<sup>94</sup> For the development of female asceticism in Armenia through the sixth century, see Zaroui Pogossian, “Female Asceticism,” 169-213. Though little is known of female monasticism after this period, it appears the anonymous author of this passage was familiar enough with the concept to have conjured it without qualification to accent Derēn’s lasciviousness.

author notes that following this incident, Derēn married, by family arrangement, a Siwni princess. No further penalty is attested for his transgression. That so lenient a punishment is applied to so egregious an infraction—certainly by contemporaneous Armenian standards which exalted sexual continence to such moral magnitude, and its forfeiture as so abjectly dehumanizing—is extraordinarily unusual for the genre, irrespective of the account’s veracity. That such events would be reported in this way elicits astonishment in consideration of the larger culture in which this episode is situated.

That the author would defy literary decorum to record so inflammatory an incident of Armenia’s presiding dynasts, revered *de jure* if not in collective memory (dependent upon its presently indeterminate date of composition), may illuminate crucial data regarding the author of this particular passage. He labored, evidently, independent the moralizing agenda of dynastic politics, else his text could not contain so damning an episode. Nor does he evince the same regard for endorsing the narrative, sacred to Armenian traditors laboring under noble patronage, of unwavering piety and libidinal continence so dutifully observed by the Armenians. More eccentric is the author’s apparent dismissal of the event as qualitatively minor and inconsequential – were an earlier text to have documented such a scandal, much greater detail would likely have embellished the account in order to reinforce the priority of carnal containment and the indignity associated with failure to contain one’s carnal appetites. That the author deploys none of these evinces a radical departure from the somatic ethics that characterized previous Armenian texts.

Derēn’s sexual assault of the unnamed ascetic perhaps captures a pattern of coercive sexual violence in the Armenian Highland. Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i enumerates a

variety of criminal sex acts, his early-twelfth-century *Penitential* standing unique as the only medieval Armenian text to describe in explicit anatomical detail the sexual offenses that require atonement (and, further, establishing the respective penances for each infraction he cites). It appears these acts occurred with sufficient frequency to merit official redress. Dawit' addresses in his text a miscellany of offenses that may void one's eligibility to the priesthood, each of them contingent to some degree upon the presence and (if applicable) surfaces contacted by semen expelled in consequence to the act. Dawit' cites in particular childhood abuse by a sexual predator, and determines that a child victimized by such an offender may be denied promotion to clerical office. The discharge of semen upon the child's person by his abuser will factor into the child's career – Dawit' decrees that the contact of ejaculate with the exterior of the child will not prohibit him from entering the priesthood; in so stipulating, he indirectly implies that an emission of semen internal to the body of the child may in fact contaminate the victim so profoundly as to render him ineligible for clerical office: "If during childhood anyone is subjected to evil acts, he is to be rejected. But if the act is not performed, but the seed of the evildoer flow upon [his victim] outside, he is not to be rejected."<sup>95</sup> Dawit' will commensurately condemn sexual abuse by women of young girls, as well as that against their handmaidens and other social subordinates, offering further insight into the gender dynamics of penance in medieval Armenia: "But if women who use the *zupay* do so with smaller girls or their maidservants against their will, the penance is less severe [for the latter]; but those who perform this evil knowingly come under the rule governing homosexuals, and for them zealous penance [is prescribed] if they are to be worthy of the

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<sup>95</sup> DG 32, p. 26.

viaticum.”<sup>96</sup> Noteworthy is Dawit’s commandment that even the abused repent—which applies to victims both male and female—illuminating that exposure to such pollution renders even the victim sullied, necessitating a cleansing of the sin imposed even coercively upon the exploited.

Dawit’s text is not consistently equitable regarding proportionality of sentences rendered to men and women or exacted for the abuse of boys and girls. Rather, it demonstrates selective condemnation of women and men dependent upon: the magnitude of the offense, the age of the offender and the aggrieved, degrees of consanguinity, and numerous physiological considerations. To infer from these passages that Dawit’ accords equal punishment irrespective of gender would be erroneous, as the penances he recommends fluctuate so unpredictably across multiple factors of analysis. Dawit’ in some cases punishes women more severely, attributing their indiscretion to a natural propensity toward sin intrinsic to their gender. In other circumstances, such as the above, infractions are retributed irrespective of gender dynamics.

The presence or absence of ejaculate will also determine the prospects of aspiring clerics who commit unauthorized sex acts of their own volition in adulthood:

If two adults perform this with each other, to the point of ejaculation without the [sexual] act, such are despicable in the sight of the Lord; if one should ejaculate, he shall be rejected; and the one who is not harmed may by the grace of God be called [to the priesthood], and the scholars may do as they will. [If any should] embrace so one another, or a woman, or lay hands on [each other] and are polluted, or approach the place of the act of women or each other and do not perform it and do not ejaculate, they may be called after repentance.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> DG 49, p. 38.

<sup>97</sup> DG 32, pp. 26-27.

Dawit‘ applies no distinction between the sex act performed between two men and that performed within a heterosexual coupling – his conflict is with indulgence in the carnal act itself, his primary concern the production of so polluting a substance as semen, rather than with the orientation of the transgressors.<sup>98</sup> This may indicate a substantial departure from the standards of contemporaneous Christian cultures; nevertheless, it elides compatibly with the values espoused by preceding Armenian narrators dating to the incipience of Armenian literature (as discussed previously). More remarkable than the Armenians’ deviation on heteronormative morality from lateral Christian traditions is their internal continuity on the matter across several intervening centuries. In the twelfth century as in the fifth, failure to contain one’s sexual instincts disregards the orientation of the coupling in question. Dawit‘ further qualifies that should couples (conspicuously omitting gender as a determinant factor) who experience sexual attraction to one another “...take each other's person in their hand once or twice and are polluted,” provided the emission is discharged in ignorance, the offending man (or men) may be eligible to the priesthood after a four-year interval of repentance.<sup>99</sup>

Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i consistently denounces sexual behavior intended for erotic stimulation, assuming with no ambiguity the position of his predecessors that coitus must occur exclusively toward the objective of procreation. Sensual pleasures experienced amid the act must be limited narrowly to the extent that they instantiate conception, all other erotic sensations to be eschewed vehemently. Dawit‘, then, sets down remedies “concerning the tongue and the fingers and the *zupay* of women...”<sup>100</sup> He twice

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<sup>98</sup> The somatological politics of semen will be addressed at length in a chapter to follow.

<sup>99</sup> DG 32, p. 27.

<sup>100</sup> DG 49, p. 38.

condemns impassioned kissing, assigning equal obscenity to that with one's own spouse as to that with an illicit partner: "If anyone inserts his tongue into the mouth of his spouse or a strange woman, this most lewd action is counted fornication by the tongue. The prescription concerning adultery, homosexuality and incest is applicable."<sup>101</sup> Dawit' then issues the judgment that this activity even confined to the marital compact surpasses adultery in moral gravity. Dawit' expands the purview of this prohibition to conclude that such behavior is disqualifying to clerical ordination: "If youths (*mankunk'*) should approach their mouth to each other's ... passionately, they shall not be called to the priesthood...."<sup>102</sup>

Dawit' further justifies his analysis of these myriad sins and their proportionality to one another by proposing that such vulgar behavior as sensuous kissing will engender yet more reprehensible conduct, functioning as portal between the expiably innocuous and the irretrievably corruptive. Fortunately for Dawit's congregants and associates, he specifies the particular activities he fears such preludes will incite: "If they unrepentantly stoop to this unworthy deed, they [may come to] insert their fingers into each other's anus and into the woman's genital parts."<sup>103</sup> This passage delivers one of two references by Dawit' to digital penetration of the vagina—which he here contextualizes with erotic stimulation (unlike his subsequent mention of the act)—and one of only three to rectal penetration in the medieval Armenian record, the first two dating to the fifth century (to be discussed in chapter VIII). This item is the first known citation in Armenian of digital

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<sup>101</sup> DG 49, p. 38 – "homosexuality" in this canon is rendered from *արուսդիւնայձեւն*, "knowledge of man," elsewhere problematically translated by Dowsett as "sodomy." While an early-twentieth-century mentality may regard these as interchangeable, they certainly are not. See Dowsett's Armenian edition, p. 45.

<sup>102</sup> DG 32, p. 27.

<sup>103</sup> DG 49, p. 38.

stimulation of the rectum – a disclosure that suggests heretofore abiding awareness of the habit in the Armenian Highland. Dawit’s text also contains the first Armenian reference of sexual activity between two women, excepting Aristakēs Lastiverts’i’s ambiguous reference to the sisters Akhni and Kamara (the simultaneity of whose sexual exploits the author leaves uncertain). Dawit’ describes lesbian sexual activity as follows, providing Armenian literature’s first attestation of vaginal stimulation via phallic prosthesis:

“Women also, taught by Satan and contrary to nature, fabricate an alien instrument of some material, bind it round their loins and couple with their companions like men.”<sup>104</sup>

The device described by Dawit’ is, more crudely stated, a single- or perhaps double-pronged dildo—possibly more, as this particularity is indeterminable from the text—to be affixed to the participant(s) by a harness of unspecified construction. Most interesting of the passage is that the word translated by Dowsett as “alien”—*ււնւն*—may be more reliably translated as “foreign,” plausibly suggesting that Dawit’ and his contemporaries associated this practice with foreign populations and their customs.<sup>105</sup>

Dawit’s judgment of fornication is modulated additionally by the erstwhile purity of the offending parties: “If a virgin fornicates with a virgin, what is the penalty? ... If prior to marriage a virgin fornicates with a virgin, they shall repent for 3 years outside and 2 inside, and then shall be married to each other without the imposition of the crown, for they have destroyed their virginity.”<sup>106</sup> He elaborates that “It is not lawful to give a virgin to one who has been married,” though be the circumstance “unavoidable,” only the virgin partner among them shall receive the crown traditionally bestowed during the

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<sup>104</sup> DG 49, p. 38.

<sup>105</sup> DG 49 [Armenian text], p. 45.

<sup>106</sup> DG 50, p. 39.



Armenian nuptial rite – which, Dawit‘ reminds his audience, signifies premarital purity.<sup>107</sup> This reflects the values previously codified into canon law by Armenian ecclesial authorities, which similarly require intervening durations of repentance between marriages. Dawit‘ forbids the marital union between a virgin and one “contaminated by sin,” and further prescribes identical atonement rites to both the widowed and the wedded who participate in “fornication.”<sup>108</sup> Dawit‘ then ascribes various degrees of severity to the commission of incest, applying commensurate differentials to the remedy of incestuous relations with maternal aunts, paternal aunts, underage siblings, siblings of age, half-siblings, and in-laws.<sup>109</sup>

Dawit‘ appears to endorse the idea that virginity remains intact until rupture of the hymen, and that the membrane indicates the state of virginity itself. Assuming, as did many of his predecessors and contemporaries, that the consummative destruction of virginity entails necessarily the rupture of the hymen, and that this process is to elicit bleeding, Dawit‘ observes the frequency with which congregants attempt to engineer this process digitally—or by foreign object—where phallic penetration proves insufficient to effect the desired blood-flow indicative of defloration: “There are some who, incapable of taking the virginity of their wife [naturally], take it with the finger of the hand or another object; such are anathema and after confession shall repent for 5 years.”<sup>110</sup> Dawit‘ here exposes his impression that the hymen constitutes a biological barrier to unacceptable sexual activity, and a structure ubiquitous to female anatomy, that remains

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<sup>107</sup> DG 50, p. 39.

<sup>108</sup> DG 50, p. 39.

<sup>109</sup> DG 50, pp. 39-40.

<sup>110</sup> DG 76, p. 53.

intact until broken upon sexual intercourse – the exclusive mechanism by which the condition of virginity can be permissively extinguished.

From a cursory inspection of these passages, one may deduce that a radical transformation occurred in the sexual morality of the Armenians subsequent to the dissolution of the Bagratuni state and the order that it imposed. It is unlikely, however, that the sexual behaviors illuminated in Dawit‘’s text—composed not long after the Seljuq conquest of Manazkert—evidence an influx of sexual novelties among the Armenian laity following emigration *en masse* from the Highland (and extrinsic migration thereto). More likely, the text divulges sexual practices already habitual among the masses in the region over many decades if not centuries. The readiness with which Dawit‘ prepares these advisements, and the extensive detail contained therein for so diverse a multiplicity of infractions, suggests a comfortable (albeit contemptuous) familiarity with these violations as common confessions of congregants. A penitential in genre, Dawit‘’s text is one designed for general reference and intended for an audience not of illustrious patrons but of local pastors who interfaced directly with the population itself. This text was intended not for august posterity in the personal repositories of noble estates but, rather, for the practical utility of the village priest in immediate need of guidance from an authoritative source. Dawit‘’s text is one that need not extol the virtues of a patron or propagandize the exploits of a sponsor. It is, alternatively, more concerned with the enforcement of public morality and, when necessary, the expeditious absolution of the transgressor. As such, it demonstrates intimate familiarity with the requirements, predilections, and vulnerabilities of the common people.

## Conclusion

Permutations of illicit sex in both the temporal and the eternal reinforce notions of sexual incontinence as an inherently foreign defect. Concubinage comes to connote the sexual libertinism and carnal impropriety of the other following the post-conversion decline of the practice into obsolescence when it becomes exclusively associated with Muslim sexual excess. Prostitution, adultery, and other avenues toward sexual indecency, though disfavored, are preferable if committed with a compatriot rather than with a foreigner, as the *Anonymous Chronicle* elucidates, demonstrating the consolidation of Armenian somatic priorities around identity preservation in opposition to the encroaching exogenous. These mechanisms manifest not only in the temporal but, as well, in the Armenian impression of sexuality in the eternal – a dimension devoid of the carnal pleasures that characterize the sensuous afterworld of the Islamic other. It is this corporal immoderacy, whether in the temporal or the eternal, that comes to characterize the physicalized incarnation of alterity, to which Armenian writers construct their cultural and somatic identity in opposition. Curiously, these eschatologies of difference apply only in Armenian discourse to the Islamic other and are not invoked against a Zoroastrian opponent, which suggests that eschatological dimensionality as a stratum of cultural identity entered Armenian consciousness only after its confrontation with Islamic cosmology. Thus, discourse on sexual experience in both the temporal and the eternal was literarily harnessed and mobilized to preserve Armenian identity across the transition from Zoroastrian to Islamic suzerainties.

As previously discussed, sex and sexuality in medieval Armenian histories are intricately entangled with notions of identity, alterity, and national preservation. Further, sexuality converges on several frontiers with abstractions of morality, corporality, and

purity both ritual and routine. Between Zoroastrianism and Islam, extramarital sexual institutions—prostitution and concubinage, in their various iterations—are legislated into obscurity, the newfound opposition to them apparent in the historical texts that bear witness to these transformations. Sexual desire is regarded in these manuscripts as so deplorable a sin, and so insufferable a blight of the temporal-carnal experience, that it is summarily expelled from the Kingdom of Heaven, as evidenced in Ghewond's reproduction of Emperor Leo's exchange with the caliph 'Umar – a position that Ghewond almost certainly endorses through its inclusion in his text. The multivariant actuations of human sexuality are aggressively regulated by Dawit' Gandzakets'i in the early twelfth century as they were previously in the fifth. In this transition between Zoroastrian and Islamic suzerainties emerges clearly an Armenian campaign both literary and cultural to maintain its dissimulation from the ethnoreligious other. Armenian somatology first constructs itself in opposition to a Zoroastrian suzerain, later adapting this constructed oppositionality to preserve its identity from Islamic assimilation. This is accomplished through corporal means, the Armenians meticulously crafting an individuation of the physical body both personal and national. Through this apparatus, Armenian identity is located somatically and in contrast to the bodies of its prospective usurpers. This chapter has explored, in particular, the mechanics of sexuality and sexual experience in elaborating that contrivance.

## VI. Somatic Anxieties

### Introduction

Medieval Armenian somatology, as this study asserts, assessed the incarnate body against a complex nexus of aesthetic, sensorial, and behavioral virtues: through their acted righteousness and the optical beauty that reflects it, Armenian bodies perform national virtue in motion. By propagandistic contrivance, Armenian corporeality exudes piety, purity, and aesthetic beauty. Most crucial to these metrics is perhaps not the purported perfection of the Armenian body but, contrarily, its confounding imperfection. This particular facet of medieval Armenian temporal experientiality is characterized by a precarious and pervasive vulnerability to all manner of attack, most saliently: acquired mutilation, pathogenic affliction, and even demonic possession. In turn, gender negotiates the experience of this imperfection by both its bearer and his or her observers.

Medieval Armenian textual culture depicts the physical body as the primary site of contact between the Armenian and the exoteric and projects somatic geographies of ethnic differentiation. This chapter will explore Armenian self-consciousness of the body as insufferably fragile and vulnerable to degradation by external forces, human and otherwise. Moreover, the chapter will bring into context medieval Armenian conceptualizations of the body with the optics of gendered morality established in the preceding chapters. Finally, the chapter will support the larger argument of the dissertation by examining the physical body as a locus of negotiation between the native and the exogenous, exposing in the process a pervasive anxiety across Armenian literary culture regarding not only spiritual but physical exposure to attack by foreign adversary. It is in the disclosure of these anxieties that emerges a paradigm of embodiment that situates the Armenian body in moral opposition to the exogenous body.

### Corporal Integrity

Medieval Armenian somatology exhibits a persistent bias against the disfigured, maimed, and otherwise corporally compromised. James Russell attributes to Zoroastrian influence the Armenian aversion to the deformed and disfigured: "...in Armenia it was believed that any person with a physical deformity is dangerous, as evil has entered him; this belief is in accord with the Zoroastrian doctrine that all pain and injury comes from Ahriman or the demons, but never from God."<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, or perhaps supplementarily, this attitude may derive from a Judaic eschatology which anticipates bodies resurrected in their carnal integuments and in the temporal geography made eternal. The Armenian sources refer on numerous occasions to a prohibition of amputees and the disfigured from ordination to the priesthood, which has filtered into a general distrust, disregard, and suspicion of those mutilated through violent confrontation or persecution (congenital defects are, curiously, never attested).<sup>2</sup> The state of bodily integrity registers as so focal a component to spiritual functionality that even those deprived of limbs and other constitutive elements through persecution are restituted those lost components, which spontaneously regenerate upon detachment. Several Armenian martyrs are recorded dismembered or deprived (through severing, crushing, or resection) of the hands, feet, skin, internal organs, and/or eyes (in at least one case, even half of the face). Virtually none survives the fragmentation of the material body, and these tortures transpire almost exclusively in prelude to execution (generally by the indisputable finality of beheading). No Armenian record attests amputees or survivors of mutilation. Their resultant death, where not made explicit, is generally implied, and maimed individuals

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<sup>1</sup> Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*, 449-450.

<sup>2</sup> With the tenuous exception of the (likely fictitious) one-eyed woman of a parable in the *Buzandaran*, whose moralizing deformity is never explained (see BP V.xxvii).

who survive the trauma of their disfigurement are almost never recorded (with few exceptions such as those who experience survivable persecutions such as blinding – an injury which often serves an allegorical purpose).

Movsēs Khorenats‘i, likely following the Roman historian Josephus as extensively observed by Robert Thomson, notes the retributive cropping of King Hyrcanus. Movsēs follows the fanciful contention by Josephus that Antigonus Mattathias personally performed the procedure “...with his teeth, so that ... it would be impossible for him to hold the high priesthood, for the law stipulates that [only] those whole of limb are to be appointed priests.”<sup>3</sup> Movsēs will later attribute the name conferred upon the newly ennobled Dimak‘sean house to the acquired facial deformity of its progenitor. The historian commemorates the valiant sacrifice of the Armenian nobleman Gisak in defense of the Arshakuni prince Artashēs amid fomenting rebellion: “But Gisak ... intervened on foot and slew them, thereby having half of his face cut off by a sword. He gained the victory but died as a consequence.”<sup>4</sup> In recognition of Gisak’s heroism, the newly-coronated King Artashēs elevates and titles the house of Gisak’s descendants: “And Nersēs, son of Gisak, ... he raised to princely rank and named Dimak‘sean after the heroic exploits of his father. For as we have said, half of his face was cut off by a sword for the cause of Artashēs.”<sup>5</sup> Robert Thomson repeatedly observes the propensity of Movsēs to attribute imaginative derivations to the appellations of noble houses.<sup>6</sup> Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i will, centuries later, aver that the Church “cannot suffer a defective person

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<sup>3</sup> MX II.19, p. 154.

<sup>4</sup> MX II.46, p. 183; “Gisak” translates literally to “halfie,” referring almost certainly to the halving of his face in combat.

<sup>5</sup> MX II.47, p. 185.

<sup>6</sup> See Thomson’s commentary to the text (*passim*).

to minister to its ineffable mystery.”<sup>7</sup> Dawit‘ proceeds to enumerate specific mutilations that render one ineligible for clerical office – apparently those occurring with sufficient frequency to stipulate these injuries disqualifying:

Now, there are accidents to the body which are abominable and others which are not. If any is defective in the fingers or toes or the lobe of the ear is cut off, or if any squints or is crooked of eye, such things are not abominations as regards the priesthood. But those without feet or hands, the deaf and the blind, the noseless and the lipless, the spotted and the leprous, are to be rejected from the orders of priesthood....<sup>8</sup>

A century to follow, Eghishē relates the travails of a cohort of Armenian martyrs under Zoroastrian persecution. The chief executioner among them commands his followers to crop the ears of the captive Armenians: “For each of them six of the executioners took turns. And while they were lying half-dead on the ground, he ordered the ears of them both to be cut off close; and they hacked them off as if they had never been there.”<sup>9</sup> Miraculously, the ears of the martyrs instantly regenerate. Aspiring to the privilege of martyrdom, the Armenian detainees implore their Persian captors to honor them therewith.

‘... For behold our ears have received a heavenly healing and our noses are still in place during these tortures. Do not deprive us of half that heavenly blessing. Sanctify our bodies by dragging them and our ears by cutting them off; sanctify also our noses by removing them. For as much as you render us ugly in an earthly fashion, the more beautiful you make us in a heavenly fashion.’<sup>10</sup>

Eghishē here conveys that mutilations incurred during confession of Christian faith are invalid and incapable of effecting any sustainable damage, the severed structures

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<sup>7</sup> DG 32, p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> DG 32, p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> Eghishē VII, p. 232.

<sup>10</sup> Eghishē VII, p. 232.



supernaturally restored through faith in Christ. Perplexingly, the very mutilations that disqualify one from achieving clerical office are those most commonly acquired during the course of martyrdom. This may reflect an attitude that to suffer these persecutions is to die in confession, and that to survive such injuries is unnatural, effecting somewhat of an interrupted martyrdom – of which the confessor is inauspiciously deprived the opportunity to complete. These particular methods of persecution may have been deliberately issued so as to ensure the survival of victims whose resultant appearance would then serve to caution their countrymen of the dangers of confession, returning to their villages not martyred but mutilated. The poor vasculature of cartilaginous tissue which primarily composes the nose and ears would preclude exsanguination and virtually guarantee victims' survival. Secondary exposure to bacterial infection notwithstanding, this procedure would have entailed a negligible mortality rate. Their defiance of exogenous suzerainty was, thus, somaticized – their punishment an optical representation of ethnoreligious conflict.

Perhaps the only contravention to this trope appears in the text of T'ovma Artsruni, who opines that disfigurement and amputation do not extinguish the substance of the individual. In so explicating, T'ovma likens the foreign annexation of Armenian lands to a body gradually deprived of its appendages, able to sustain animacy against the loss of several extremities before cessation as a cohesive entity:

And just as someone might cut into pieces all the limbs of a body until the form of the living man, that is the nature of his composition, has disappeared—whereas, if one of the limbs is lost, it is an accidental deprivation but the [whole] living person is not destroyed—in such manner was the unity of this country gradually destroyed, as each individual plotted evil against his neighbour and his brother.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> TA III.1, pp. 189-190.

T'ovma's contention that the holistic body prevails despite fragmentation of its constituent segments appears to refute the conventional Armenian emphasis on corporal integrity. This perhaps evidences—especially in consideration alongside the miraculously restored martyrs of Eghishē—a unique position that corporal imperfections cannot dictate, deny, or compromise the spiritual intactness of the individual or his capacity for faith. Nevertheless, Armenian literary culture overwhelmingly exhibits a mistrust and suspicion of—in some cases even an aversion to—the corporally compromised. In effect, the corporally compromised body contrasts against the ideally intact Armenian body, unblemished by and impervious to the attacks of the corporeally inferior other.

### Demons and the Human Body

Medieval Armenian cosmology applies several distinct characteristics to demonic entities. Common among their representations across the surveyed period is the testimony that they inhabit “waterless places,” an idea derived likely from Matthew 12:43.<sup>12</sup> That malevolent creatures would populate areas inaccessible to water accords to the practical sensibilities of the earliest Christian cultures, which emerged in desert climates where the scarcity of potable water rendered arid environments especially perilous. Demons in medieval Armenian textual sources exhibit a miscellany of unique metaphysical properties. They can evanesce from visibility and thereby evade human detection, assume human form and in so doing deceive others, and even engage in human activities such as attiring oneself in human apparel, participation in theurgy, and equestrianism. Dawit' Gandzakets'i cautions that demons will appear to humans “in manifestation [sic] and

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<sup>12</sup> See Ghewond 14, p. 100, which explicitly quotes the passage.

visions,” and will falsely present themselves as agents of God.<sup>13</sup> Demonic entities, Dawit‘ will continue, wield even the capacity to disguise themselves as angels: “For the *devs* of darkness assume the shape of angels and delude the witless.”<sup>14</sup>

Most disturbingly, demons manifest consistently across medieval Armenian literature a profound capacity to penetrate the dimensions of human experience and to manipulate human activity. Their intellectual aptitude is attributed by Eznik Koghbat’s in the fifth century to their status—shared exclusively with humans and angels—as “the only rational, thinking creatures.”<sup>15</sup> Eznik will, in the same passage, posit that only the unrighteous or unstable of faith are vulnerable to the assaults of demons, likening spiritual fortitude in defense against demonic influence to that of the Biblical Daniel.<sup>16</sup> As in other traditions, demons of Armenian conception notoriously possess human hosts, who thereupon “...become dwellings for the *devs* from which they will never depart.”<sup>17</sup> Beyond a propensity to occupy mortal vessels and act out terrestrial malice through the conduits of human bodies, demons are also documented to influence the otherwise virtuous to erratic or even malignant behavior. They instantiate moral corruption, uncharacteristic betrayals, and even hallucinations (among other psychoses). Eghishē testifies in the sixth century to the notoriety of demons for the enticement of “...some to sorcery, some to fornication, and others to innumerable other impure acts.”<sup>18</sup> Among this panoply of transgressions are heresy, apostasy, murder, betrayal of kin and country, sexual deviancy, and—at the extreme—such destructive behaviors as autosarcophagy.

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<sup>13</sup> DG 95, p. 67.

<sup>14</sup> DG 95, p. 67.

<sup>15</sup> Eznik I.20-26, p. 34.

<sup>16</sup> Eznik I.20-26, p. 34.

<sup>17</sup> DG 95, p. 67.

<sup>18</sup> Eghishē II, p. 90.

One especially potent demon exhibits the capacity to transmute the species of its victim, reflecting inveterate anxieties about the potential for evil to dehumanize and, in turn, a presupposition that faith itself is that very essence which confers humanity. Demons of Armenian literary construction do not exhibit gender, and are documented to select their human objects indiscriminately thereof, men and women being equally susceptible to demonic attack. Demons likewise compel humans to harm not only themselves but others, including members of their communities and even their own families, creating of demons an enemy of the most insidious and dangerous nature: one that will arbitrarily and unpredictably attack even the righteous from a multitude of undetectable manifestations ranging from the mundane to the ethereal, and cause irreversible damage to individual, family unit (*tun*), and nation. There emerges, in addition, an undeniable association between women, sex, and the demonic, which appears in various permutations.

The idea of demonic possession operates conspicuously in the conversion narrative of Armenia to Christianity. This malady befalls King Trdat following the murder, at his own direction, of the martyr Hrip‘simē. Agat‘angeghos relates that in consequence to his crime against the virgin—the inclusion of which functions to the text as both retributive and moralizing mechanism—the king has become vulnerable to demonic possession: “But when the king, having mounted his chariot, was about to leave the city, then suddenly there fell on him punishment from the Lord. An impure demon struck the king and knocked him down from his chariot. Then he began to rave and to eat his own flesh.”<sup>19</sup> This demon appears to afflict the entire population of pagan Armenia,

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<sup>19</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 212, p. 217.

who successively exhibit these behaviors apparently symptomatic of possession by this particular demon: “Likewise all the populace in the city went mad through similar demon-possession. . . . All the king’s household, including slaves and servants, were afflicted with torments.”<sup>20</sup> It is perhaps noteworthy that the demon does not limit its attacks to the aristocracy but targets, as well, the peasantry. The sins of the king are, thus, visited upon his kingdom, and all subjects under his domain bear the burden of his crime. The narrative then introduces Khosrovidukht, the sister of the king, who occupies a privileged position both within the Armenian conversion narrative and, more generally, among the few Armenian women attested in the medieval literature. A vision reveals to Khosrovidukht that these calamities occasioned upon the Armenian populace can be ameliorated only by the prisoner Gregory, at this time incarcerated in the “deep pit” following his persecutions at the hands of King Trdat. The citizenry reacts to Khosrovidukht’s revelation with scorn and derision, dismissing immediately her premonition as a demon-induced delusion: “When the populace heard this they began to mock at her words. They began to say: ‘You too then are mad. Some demon has possessed you.’”<sup>21</sup> The passage reflects the capability of demons to effect both somatic symptomatology and, comorbidly, presentations of psychiatric dysfunction. Agat’angeghos thus considers demons capable of inducing hallucinogenic visions and other psychoactive phenomena – an attitude that will be endorsed by his literary successors. This in supplement introduces the propensity—and the capability—of demons to infect both men and women indiscriminately of gender. Neither masculinity

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<sup>20</sup> Agat’angeghos § 213, p. 219.

<sup>21</sup> Agat’angeghos § 215, p. 219.

nor femininity, regardless of their respective virtues, will confer any degree of insulation against demonic attack.

Resigned to his predicament, the king relents and issues a command that St. Gregory be released from his confinement at *Khor Virap*. In anticipation of their restoration, the *nakharars* hurtle toward the emancipated Gregory, whose "...body was blackened like coal..."<sup>22</sup> Agat'angeghos notes that "...they ran to meet them, raving and eating their own flesh, possessed and foaming."<sup>23</sup> Receiving their miraculous renewal from the saint, which mobilizes the Armenian conversion to Christianity, the populace remains conscious of the hazards that await them should they stray or falter in faith: "For if they ever went away from him a little, then the demons pounced on them and made them mad, so that the people ate their own flesh with their own teeth."<sup>24</sup>

Subsequent to this disturbance, the text notes that Trdat "...had been changed into the form of a wallowing pig. For his whole body had become hairy, and on his limbs bristles had grown like those of great wild boars."<sup>25</sup> The boar, significantly, codes for the cultivated audience a thinly veiled allusion to Zoroastrianism – commonly anthropomorphized as the animal in medieval Armenian semiotic culture. In this way, the demonic and the foreign converge to represent, in synergy, alterity of nation and faith and the somatic inferiorities inherent to both. Agat'angeghos emphasizes this alterity through a tertiary layer – that of speciation. The author thus likens the exogenous in body to that of a domesticated beast, suggesting the Armenian body so profoundly superior to the

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<sup>22</sup> Agat'angeghos § 219, p. 223.

<sup>23</sup> Agat'angeghos § 220, p. 223.

<sup>24</sup> Agat'angeghos § 246, p. 243.

<sup>25</sup> Agat'angeghos § 727, p. 269.

exogenous as to present an entirely unique etiology. The text goes on to describe further the porcine metamorphosis of the king: “Now king Trdat was still in the form of a pig, save only that he could speak in human fashion. The claws of his hands and feet were those of a pig, his face was like a snout, he had great teeth like a boar, and he was hairy all over his body.”<sup>26</sup> That Trdat is dispossessed not only of his faculties but of his very humanity is perhaps latently harnessed by Agat‘angeghos to caution the faithful against spiritual deviation: such impairment as affects the king may be visited upon any but the most steadfast in Christian faith. The zoomorphic transformation of victims by demonic elements from human to animal, additionally, echoes centuries of philosophical and exegetical writing about the distinctions between the two, man being largely differentiated from beast only by his ability to exert control over his actions and behavior. Moreover, that Trdat corporeally transforms from man to beast implies that he somatically embodies that which his foreign dogma represents to the Armenian nation – a body so dissimilar to Armenian humanity as to be rendered bestial. Thus, the intangible alterity of his faith (and of the Persian nation with which Armenian Christendom associates it) is incarnated into corporeal alterity.

The historical text attributed to Movsēs Daskhurants‘i similarly indicates demonic interference in his narration of the same events, though distorts the chronology: while Agat‘angeghos asserts that the demons infested the king *ex post facto* of his persecutions of Gregory and the Gayianeank‘, Movsēs contends that it was the demons who, preliminary to these events, incited Trdat to perpetrate these very persecutions: “The king, having been led astray by various demons (*dews*) and by their loathesome cults,

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<sup>26</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 763, pp. 301-303.

with the aid of the wicked dragon, undertook to make [Gregory] the mighty martyr of Christ worship the gods of filth in the pit of perdition.”<sup>27</sup> Movsēs further condemns the populace, indicting their own submission to these demons for the travails incurred by the Armenians in consequence: “By means of those same demons whom [the pagans] had exalted with gifts and sacrifices [God made the evil spirits] come upon them as though they were enemies, made them mad and made them eat their own flesh.”<sup>28</sup> Movsēs here modifies the story, identifying the offending demons as those ironically venerated by the populace. This deviates from the version supplied by Agat‘angeghos. Movsēs, unlike his source, explicitly inculcates the afflicted in their own perdition: it is their own receptivity to these demons, Movsēs alleges, that has exposed them to possession and empowered the demons to engender chaos. Movsēs does retain the original element that the demons compelled the population to consume their own tissue, and additionally retains the detail that Khosrovidukht is ridiculed for her visions: “But everyone chided the woman and said: ‘Have you, too, been afflicted by the demons?’”<sup>29</sup> The preservation of these details suggests that their demonological and semiotic foundations endured across the centuries that separated the two texts. Movsēs further continues of the deliverance of the Armenian people in concordance with the reports of Agat‘angeghos: “Then they brought before the great Gregory unwillingly those folk whom the demons had made mad and who were eating their own flesh. Similarly they brought before the Saint ... the demon-afflicted king.”<sup>30</sup> Movsēs’s text again reinforces the power of holy personages, and even immediate proximity to them, to extinguish and disperse demonic creatures. Perhaps the

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<sup>27</sup> MD I.14, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> MD I.14, p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> MD I.14, p. 13.

<sup>30</sup> MD I.14, p. 13.



most astonishing revelation about demons from this text is their predisposition to act in collaboration with—or at the direction of—the Abrahamic God: “When [the mob] rushed onto the church porch, they were firmly bound and fettered by the demons at the command of benevolent God.”<sup>31</sup> In this way, Movsēs artfully averts the error of challenging the omnipotence of God, his text intimating that even the preternatural potency of demons is superseded (and perhaps even dictated) thereby.

The *Buzandaran* contains the first documented descriptions of demons in Armenian, which illuminate their corporeal physiology, metaphysical properties, incarnate plasticity, phenotypic qualities, and behavioral pathology. Crucially, while P‘arandzem is implicated in the corruption of her son, and assigned maternal responsibility for his consecration to demonic elements, it is the demons themselves who initiate his moral degeneration: “And many *dews* dwelt in the child and governed him according to their will.”<sup>32</sup> The passage construes the potentiality of demons to expropriate the free will of those whom they infect, challenging such suppositions as the complicity of Pap himself in the commission of his various indecencies. The passage proceeds immediately to attribute Pap’s sins—notably for the purpose of this study, the carnal infractions of sodomy and fornication—directly to the demons who inhabit him, potentially absolving him thereby. The text then introduces an ornate passage describing the demons themselves and their relations with the king:

And his mother looked and saw with her own eyes white serpents which were wrapped around the feet of the couch [*gahoyk* ] and were twisting themselves over young Pap as he lay there. He remained on the bed wailing and calling to the youths with whom he was accustomed to have intercourse, but his mother understood and remembered those to

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<sup>31</sup> MD I.14, p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> BP IV.xliv, p. 164.

whom her son had been devoted at birth. She knew that they were the ones who were twisting themselves around her son in the shape of serpents.<sup>33</sup>

That the demons appear serpent-like in phenotype coordinates predictably to the context of an early Christian culture that associates serpents, snakes, and other reptilian predators to the Satanic and malevolent. This serpentine imagery will appear again in the eighth-century text of Ghewond, who quotes the emperor Leo's assertion that demons emerge in "waterless places" and "in the form of serpents..."<sup>34</sup> To follow, T'ovma Artsruni will aver the fragility of evil upon exposure to water.<sup>35</sup>

An accompanying passage further expounds upon the anguine manifestation of the demons that controlled King Pap. In so doing, it offers mitigating circumstances that may act to acquit the king of his indiscretions. The compiler, predictably, reinforces the liability of the king's mother, Queen P'arandzem, for the commitment of her son to the demons at his infancy – a datum that intimates his incapacity to consent to the process and, by extension, exonerates him of culpability. These demons are then empowered by P'arandzem to infiltrate both the somatic and mental faculties of the young heir. The passage then discloses a most fascinating item: these demons, amid their coital requisition of the king, are immediately visible to human observers:

But when King Pap was still an infant [newly] borne by his mother, his impious mother P'aranjem then offered him up to the *dews*, and so he was filled with the *dews* from childhood. And because he always obeyed the will of the *dews*, [he] would not seek a cure. For he constantly consorted with the *dews*, and the *dews* manifested themselves magically on him. And everyone could see with open eyes the *dews* upon him. For, whenever people entered every day to give him the morning greeting, they saw them in the guise of snakes rising from the bosom of King Pap and weaving themselves around

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<sup>33</sup> BP IV.xliv, p. 165.

<sup>34</sup> Ghewond 14, p. 100.

<sup>35</sup> TA III.18, p. 280.

his shoulders; and all those who saw him were afraid of him and of drawing close. But he answered the people, saying: ‘Fear not, for they are mine.’ And every man at every hour saw such shapes on him. For such a mass of *dews* was accumulated on him; and this [sight] showed itself every hour to every man who came to see the king.<sup>36</sup>

That the demons assume physical, tangible, and visible properties detectable to human perception demonstrates the incarnate capacity of demons and their direct association to Satan. The king’s demons not only accompany but, in fact, integrate constitutively into his soma, reflecting contemporaneous Armenian anxieties not only about demonic presence but, further, the threat of comprehensive acquisition by such malevolent energies and the resulting disinheritance from the Kingdom of God. Pap’s voluntary ownership of the demons who have attached to him reifies the license of demons to so profoundly penetrate a human vessel as to excise his volition to repent, in consequence depriving him of his Christian (and, by extension, national) patrimony through the confiscation of his mental, corporeal, and spiritual faculties. Predictably, the demons disperse only in the presence of the holy: “But when the patriarch Nersēs or the holy bishop Xad came before him, the *dews* did not appear and became invisible.”<sup>37</sup>

An earlier passage of Movsēs Daskhurants’i’s text contends that the cult and rituals of the “finger-cutters” proceed under demonic direction. The violence inherent to this episode will be analyzed in a forthcoming chapter; the present will address here the properties of this demon itself.<sup>38</sup> Notably, it is reported to manifest “...in the form of a

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<sup>36</sup> BP V.xxii, pp. 202-203.

<sup>37</sup> BP V.xxii, p. 203.

<sup>38</sup> Because Classical Armenian (like its modern counterpart) does not employ gendered pronouns, the present study will retain translator Robert Bedrosian’s ascription of masculine pronouns to the demon in quoted passages while applying elsewhere the genderless “it.” Nevertheless, it merits stating that from the original text cannot be discerned the gender of the demon, nor whether the demon exhibits any such quality as gender at all.

man...” and possesses the capacity to command human subjects – though whether it is able to effect this control by force or through voluntary participation by a receptive actor remains unclear.<sup>39</sup> The text continues of the demon:

When the time for the wicked service arrives, a folding chair made of iron is set up. The feet of the chair are in the shape of human feet, as many of us present there saw. Now some valuable garment is placed upon the chair and when the demon arrives, he puts this garment on, and sits on the chair. Then he takes a weapon, and begins to examine the slain man's skin and fingers. Now if they are unable to procure any [human for sacrifice], [the demon] orders that the bark from a tree be stripped off and that an ox or sheep be sacrificed in front of him. Then he eats and drinks with his evil servitors. A horse, saddled and harnessed, is held ready. Mounting the horse he gallops around until the horse stops by itself. Then [the demon] becomes invisible and disappears. He does this every year.<sup>40</sup>

The passage provides remarkable insight into the characteristics and behaviors of demons in Armenian cognition. The physical and metaphysical properties of this creature—that it can assume human constitution, attire itself in ceremonial garments, occupy a chair outfitted to accommodate its (human) occupant’s feet, mount and maneuver a horse and subsequently “gallop” upon it, and, finally, conceal itself from visual detection—illuminate the perspective from which these traditors imagine, augment, and fear demonic substance. These passages articulate several neuroses of the tradition that conjures them, foremostly the facility with which demons incarnate themselves in human likeness and even mimic human mannerisms. That demonic entities are documented to participate undetectably in communal activities evokes the unnerving potential of demons to deceive humans into associating with (and perhaps eventually serving) demonic personages.

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<sup>39</sup> MD I.18, p. 23.

<sup>40</sup> MD I.18, p. 23.

Accordingly, any member of the community, irrespective of social or ecclesiastic station, may be, in actuality, a demon disguised in human expression. Equally evident in this description is the notion that demons may roam invisibly among the community, their influence permeating the local ether and inspiring to malice the otherwise righteous. Deception by one such creature potentiates not only total usurpation of one's physical and mental faculties but, moreover, death by sacrifice in a gruesome ritual such as that described above. This possibility instills an existential terror, deploying not only fear of death but, infinitely more disturbing to a medieval Armenian clerical sensibility, the prospect that so sacrilegious a demise will void his Christian inheritance and disqualify him for admittance to the Kingdom. Further, that this demon engages in such dermal tortures as were exacted upon the Armenians by their Persian enemies (to be analyzed in chapter VIII) retroactively introduces the notion that the Persians themselves may act under the influence of such demons, or that they are to some degree composed of demonic matter. Significant in this regard is that Movsēs refers copiously to the Persians, though only sparingly to the more recently arrived Arabs, who would unquestionably have presented a more exigent threat. Quite feasibly, the oral transmission of these legends accumulated momentum and accrued mutations along their historical trajectory, culminating in the mythos preserved in the text of Movsēs Daskhurants'i. Such excruciating tortures as excarnation would comprise a most effective deterrent against heresy and instantiate so visceral a collective reaction as to expand, contract, and finally crystallize over time into a comprehensive corpus of demon lore.

The passage continues of the demon-adulating sect: "That sect had the form of worship in which every year the demon would order a man to be given poison and killed.

If it proved impossible to give [the poison] to a stranger, the demon so harassed [the worshipper] that he gave the fatal poison to a member of his own family.”<sup>41</sup> This assembles a portrait of demon phenomenology that is clearly capable of inducing psychosis beyond the compulsion to autosarcophagy – so, too, are they capable of instantiating such psychoses in their victims as to impel familicide, motivated if not by demonic compulsion then by their desperation for release from its predation. These anxieties likely paralleled the constant and unpredictable danger of persecution that pervaded the medieval Armenian experience under suzerain extraneities, be they Zoroastrian, Islamic, or the heretical Christian other (ie: Byzantine). Movsēs continues to delineate the physiological and medical afflictions at the disposal of demons to exact, in this instance including excruciations unattested by his predecessors – specifically, lesions and visual impairment: “There were still other diabolical sects. [According to one, supposedly,] one demon would cause blindness to those refusing to worship evil while another would give spots [to those refusing to worship]. Should one [member of the sect] betray another, the sorcery of evil demons would bring upon him the afflictions of blindness and spots.”<sup>42</sup> This particular symptomatology may consist with a number of infectious pathogens already familiar to the Armenians, most identifiably among them leprosy (corroboratively attested elsewhere in Armenian medieval sources). Irrespective of conjectured medical pathology, the attribution of these diseases to demonic interference or to ritual invocation of the demonic by the doctrinally suspect (such as this

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<sup>41</sup> MD I.18, p. 24.

<sup>42</sup> MD I.18, p. 24.

cult of “finger-cutters”) evinces a clear distrust by these monastically inculcated authors toward those who practiced foreign religions.

In the eleventh century, Aristakēs Lastiverts‘i will ascribe similarly reptilian imagery to the service of evil to that which appears in the *Buzandaran*. He writes of the sisters Akhni and Kamara, considered previously in chapters IV and V:

These two were actual sisters, infected with that outrageous dissolute disease which is typical of their fold, and by the art of sorcery they became satan's *vardapets*, and the father of all evil made them strong. ... [These two sisters] possessed two villages from their patrimonial inheritance which they turned into dwellings and dens for that crafty dragon-snake. [Yakobos] nested therein and violently spewed forth his bile. [The sisters collected the poison] and, serving as cup-bearers, gave it to the folk living about them to drink themselves to ruin.<sup>43</sup>

Though Aristakēs does not directly reference demons, he depicts the sisters unequivocally as servants of evil, ophidian imagery threading continuously throughout this account as through the testimonies of demons that precede it. Wielding the libidinal power vested in them by both the Satanic and the natural—that is, the carnal instincts that so impair the piteous prince Vrverh—the sisters Akhni and Kamara effectuate demonic corruption through the deployment of female sexuality, providing the second documented association in the Armenian record of women and sex to demonic presence (the first being the introduction of demonic influences by P‘arandzem to her infant son Pap, who subsequently engages in sex acts at the demons’ behest). Akhni and Kamara manifest as incarnations of the succubus, a female demon common to several ancient cultures (and enduringly popular in modern mythos) who operates nocturnally to exploit the moral vulnerabilities of men through sexual manipulation. Garnik Asatrian identifies several

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<sup>43</sup> AL XXIII, pp. 150-151.

iterations of indigenous Armenian demon—necessarily female and potentially erotic—as classifiably succubine.<sup>44</sup>

Of the femineity of demonic agents, James Russell remarks: “A number of Zoroastrian demons are female ... In certain districts of Armenia, all evil demons are considered female....”<sup>45</sup> Russell directs further attention to Eznik’s censure of those who worship the “female spirits” of Iranian extraction.<sup>46</sup> Throughout his influential 1987 monograph, Russell continues to survey the Zoroastrian elements in Armenian demonology. More recently, catalogues of Armenian demons have been prepared by Garnik Asatrian, whose philological study examines demonic figures in Armenian taxonomy from antiquity to modernity, and Armen Petrosyan, who in particular examines the paranormal genus of the *k’aj*.<sup>47</sup> While Petrosyan’s study contributes behavioral analyses to the demonological literature, a lacuna prevails in scholarship thereof, meriting further research into the behavioral (and, specifically, sexual) properties of demons in medieval Armenian representation. The present survey is in no way sufficiently exhaustive to remedy this void, though does endeavor to establish foundations for reinvigorated scholarly attention.

That “bile” is identified as the fluid served to the righteous so as to occasion their spiritual ruin connects the Armenian conception of the monstrous to Hippocratic-Galenic medical theory. It is significant that evil is “served” to the righteous in liquid phase as

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<sup>44</sup> Garnik Asatrian, “Armenian Demonology: A Critical Overview,” *Iran and the Caucasus* 17, no. 1 (2013): 9-25.

<sup>45</sup> Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*, 449.

<sup>46</sup> Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*, 449.

<sup>47</sup> Asatrian, “Armenian Demonology,” 9-25; Armen Petrosyan, “From Armenian Demonology: The K’aj’s,” *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 46, nos. 1-2 (2018): 206-218.



serpentine bilious secretions, concentrated bile representing to Galenic interpretation an indicator of fluid imbalance and, ergo, disease – both of which have been applied by Armenian traditors such as Aristakēs to states of somatic and spiritual infirmity. That hepatic fluid emitted by a creature identified in Abrahamic cosmology with temptation and Hell would appear in an Armenian text as a potable essence to be voluntarily ingested, then, represents the union of spiritual and physical salubrity (or malady). Not only does this reference clarify the Armenians’ exposure to Hippocratic and Galenic medical theory and the endurance of humorism to Armenian somatic consciousness; it elucidates the Armenians’ application thereof to notions of both physical and spiritual vitality. Further, it implies residual vestiges of the hepatocentric model so centric to ancient somatology (to be explored further in chapter VIII).

That the sisters are ordained “*vardapets*” in service of Satan implies a parallel between the faithful and the wicked, both beholden to antipodal forces along a unified moral continuum. As invariably celibate priests, *vardapets*—the title bestowed upon Armenian clerics edified in the monastic tradition that would afford them access to scholarly pursuits and the potential for a scribal career—by definition serve Christ.<sup>48</sup> Their inverse, then, were such an order to emerge, would ineluctably manifest in diametrical opposition to the obligations, customs, and traditions assumed by the *vardapets*: rather promiscuous than celibate, Satanic than Christian, and feminine-chaotic than masculine-ordered. That Aristakēs genders this polarity provides critical insight into the conception of monastic aptitude instilled within him by the institution, revealing that it is yoked as much to moral rectitude as to masculinity. Sexuality and inclinations to

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<sup>48</sup> See Thomson, “*Vardapet*,” 367-384.

sexual sensoriality are presented (in this passage as in others across the medieval Armenian canon) as exclusively feminine domains, the righteous masculine corporally challenged to resist its temptations. Aristakēs incisively connects feminine sexuality to Satan and his agents – demonic coordinates to the *vardapets* who are explicitly female.

Femineity and its intrinsic sexuality, Aristakēs latently cautions, are to be rejected as resolutely as one must reject Satan. To this extent, as masculinity accords eligibility to the monastic class, so too does femininity incline a woman to the service of Satan and all that subverts righteousness. Though Aristakēs (like his literary predecessors) does not explicitly associate femininity to ethnic alterity, this passage resonates with an ancient tradition that vehemently does so – his implication being that femininity wields the destructive power to separate righteous men from their Christian faith, ethnic and religious identity having become, by this time, inextricably integrated (as discussed previously). Feminine sexuality, and its ensuing chaos, effect destruction similar to (if not surpassing) that of the more tangible invader. As this chapter’s earlier discussion of corporal integrity has submitted, man can be restored from a state of corporal disfigurement; spiritual corruption, however, is irredeemable.

This glimmer of misogyny is not the first amid Aristakēs’s text. He has previously impugned the malevolent proclivities of women, specifically as they entail the demonic. Aristakēs asserts that the Byzantine emperor Michael “...was wickedly afflicted by a *dew*,...” though there remained an unresolved question as to whether this possession came upon him as a result of his own corruption “...or whether [Michael] was naturally

possessed.”<sup>49</sup> Following this, however, Aristakēs provides his own theory, which convolutes the sequence of events so as to assign blame to the women involved. To rationalize Michael’s possession, Aristakēs explains that the emperor would habitually patronize “...a certain woman witch giving himself in service to the father of all evil,...” and that it was through the services of this sorceress that Michael seduced the queen: “[And they say] that through a demon of prostitution he had inflamed the queen with love for himself, and that she had set him up as emperor of the lands.”<sup>50</sup> The passage recalls the technique customary of demons—with the recruitment of mortal women—to destroy the righteous through arousal of libidinal passions just as had precipitated the downfall of King Pap, whose own sexual instincts were ignited to homosexual acts, and of the pitiable prince Vrverh whose spiritual delinquency was actuated by the seductive malignancies of the sisters Akhni and Kamara.

Michael, then, has successfully inflamed female sexual arousal in pursuit of power, having—much to the amusement of the chronicler—cleverly duped the women involved in his intrigue, both the high-born and the humble. Thus, the genre once again connects sexual energy to both the feminine and the demonic. This tripartite paradigm positions women as agents of evil whose labor synergizes with both the demonic and the human—that is, in its carnal predisposition to concupiscence—to effect spiritual destruction. The episode belies several of Aristakēs’s hostilities toward women. That Michael has so artfully manipulated the ingenuous queen through the inflammation of her sexual appetites discloses Aristakēs’s estimation of women, even those exalted to the

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<sup>49</sup> AL IX, p. 38.

<sup>50</sup> AL IX, pp. 38-39.

highest ranks, as intrinsically incapable of containing their carnal instincts. In this manner, Aristakēs further condescends on the mental aptitudes of women, portraying even the most illustrious among them as effortlessly exploitable.

Michael accomplishes his deception through the services of a second woman, here emblematic of the association between women and the occult, which his female agent has harnessed to Michael's advantage. Just as Pap's demons of the fifth century disperse in the presence of the holy, Michael's demons resist exposure to consecrated space. Aristakēs prefaces that Michael, having acceded the throne (however dubiously), was thereupon obliged to attend liturgical services. "But the wicked *dew* was unable to abide this, thinking that [Michael] was rebelling from him."<sup>51</sup> Aristakēs then refers once again to Michael's frequent visits to "the witch," concluding this segment by informing his reader that "...until his death, [the demon] which tormented [Michael] did not leave him."<sup>52</sup> Aristakēs moralizes that despite the political benefits availed to Michael by this demon (and the women through whose activities the demon promoted him), it nevertheless "tormented" and distressed him, exemplifying the precept (perhaps commensurably present in the story arc of P'arandzem) that to negotiate with the demonic will invariably invite one's own destruction.

This episode, thus, provides Armenian literature's third major installment to cement the association between women, sex, and the demonic. The queen—though not herself in the service of demons, by contrast to the women who topologically precede her—has submitted to her primitive sensualities, allowing herself to be manipulated and

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<sup>51</sup> AL IX, p. 39.

<sup>52</sup> AL IX, p. 39.

her kingdom usurped by a nefarious interloper operating through demonic provision. Of tantamount significance, it is a female agent who supplies Michael the aforementioned demon, communicating that Michael could not have completed his ascent to power were it not through the agency of two powerful women, one endowed politically and the other mystically. It is, then, these women who function as the instruments of—and the obstacles to—Michael’s mobility, their talents and their consent required for him to advance. Absent the facilitations of these women, Michael’s station would have stagnated at the level of paramour. Despite the author’s malignment of these women, he accepts categorically that Michael’s political promotion depended inevitably on the benefaction of women (however wicked) – and their contact with both sexual and demonic power.

Aristakēs later opines that the most egregious of human deficiencies is arrogance, which he submits is the foundation of all worldly evil. So potent a malady is the trait, Aristakēs expounds, that it threatens to divest one of his very humanity and, thereby, transmogrify him into a demonic being: “I consider arrogance to be the root of all evil, the mother and first cause of it. For it turns a human into a *dew* and subjects [humans] to their torments.”<sup>53</sup> The prospect that an excess of arrogance could deplete a man of his humanity and thereby ontologically demote him from human to demon is the only documented reference to such a metamorphosis. Despite its isolation, this hypothesis of Aristakēs merits thoughtful consideration, as the origin of demons is otherwise never attested in medieval Armenian literature. The proposal, then, that demons develop from the transubstantiation of wayward humans, perhaps in like manner to the expulsion of Lucifer from among the angels, provides the only theory attested in the Armenian

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<sup>53</sup> AL XII, p. 81.

historical record of the genesis of demons. Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i will later caution women against soliciting the curative powers of demons, alleging their services reported to have remedied infertility: “If it should happen, however, that the progenerative capacities of a man or woman are affected by illness and cured by doctors, this is unobjectionable, but not [if they are treated] by demons or witches or hydromancers.”<sup>54</sup>

Aristakēs pronounces, further, that women are especially susceptible to the hazards of arrogance, and are thus more vulnerable to demonic transfiguration: “This disease is damaging to all, but especially so to womankind. First and foremost [women] should be charged with this [fault], and then one might recall their heavy [trains] which they drag along the ground, the earrings, finger-rings, bracelets, the ruffles, necklaces, and everything else.”<sup>55</sup> Aristakēs determines that women’s natural inclination to vanity predisposes them to arrogance and, in consequence, summary expulsion from humanity, and posits that women’s affinity for material luxury and inexorable attraction to finery exposes them more acutely to dimensional metamorphosis. Predictably, Aristakēs has once again condescended upon women, in this instance through the distillation of femininity as essentially immodest, superficial, and negligently frivolous. This evinces a marked departure from the “living martyrs” attested by Ghazar and Eghishē, whose material luxuries (including, similarly, a miscellany of beautifying ornaments as admonished by Aristakēs) are of little consequence to them in their virtuous endurance. That Aristakēs dismisses as “arrogant” the instinct of women to present themselves as aesthetically beautiful—situated amid the context of a culture that otherwise celebrates

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<sup>54</sup> DG 53, p. 41.

<sup>55</sup> AL XII, p. 81.

physical beauty, be it masculine or feminine—reveals much about the relationship between beauty, gender, and the ascription of moral virtue in medieval Armenia. Moreover, the ideas encapsulated in this passage align with the disdain Aristakēs has previously directed toward women.

Monstrous imagery additionally suffuses the legend of Ara “the handsome,” most visibly in its deployment to characterize the erratic behavior of his pursuer, the libidinous Assyrian queen Semiramis. Upon his death, Semiramis prevaricates that supernatural creatures under her authority will resurrect her deceased paramour.

When the Armenian army had regained its confidence to continue the struggle against Queen Semiramis and to avenge Ara’s death, she said: ‘I have ordered my gods to lick his wounds, and he will be restored to life.’ At the same time she hoped to revive Ara by the magic of her sorcery, being demented by desire for her darling. But when his corpse became stinking she ordered it to be cast into a great ditch and covered up. One of her paramours she had dressed up in secret, and she gave out this report about him: ‘The gods licked Ara and brought him back to life, fulfilling our wish and pleasure. Therefore from now on they are all the more to be worshipped and honored by us, as they fulfill our pleasures and accomplish our desires.’ She also set up a new statue in the name of the gods and greatly honored it with sacrifices, pretending to all that this power of her gods had brought Ara back to life.<sup>56</sup>

The creature of which Movsēs speaks is commonly identified as the *aralez*. Described by Eznik Koghbat’s in the fifth century as “imaginary dog-shaped creatures ... which are supposed to be able to cure wounds by licking them,” the *aralez* has been variously attributed to Assyrian and Persian inception.<sup>57</sup> Despite its foreign origins, the *aralez* appears inextricably integrated into the Armenian national mythos, and references to its powers of necromancy abound in medieval Armenian texts. It is these *aralezk*‘ invoked

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<sup>56</sup> MX I.15, p. 94.

<sup>57</sup> Eznik, I.20-26, p. 34; See James Russell, “Arlez,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, last modified August 12, 2011, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/arlez-term-for-a-supernatural-creature-in-armenian>.

by the Mamikonean upon the death of their kinsman, the celebrated war hero Mushegh, in entreaty for his resurrection:

And when they brought the body of the *sparapet* Mušel home to his family, his household did not believe him dead, though they saw his head severed from his body. ‘For,’ they said: ‘he has been in countless battles and never received a wound, not a single arrow ever reached him, nor did any other weapon pierce him.’ But others expected his resurrection, consequently they joined his head to the trunk, took him up, and placed him on the roof of a tower, saying: ‘Because he was a valiant man, the *Arlezk* will come down and revive him.’ They stood guard and awaited his resurrection until the body was decomposed. Then, they brought it down from the tower, wept [over it], and buried it as was fitting.<sup>58</sup>

Though Movsēs Khorenats‘i here identifies the creature—and its services—with the nefarious agenda of a foreign (and, thus, suspect) actor, this representation stands somewhat at variance with the more general Armenian approach to the *aralez*, which skews more neutral-to-positive.

Demons are attested numerous in the Armenian sources to have influenced the Islamic prophet Muhammad. In a passage dated to the tenth century, Movsēs Daskhurants‘i describes the arrival of the prophet as follows: “Then was the word of the Savior fulfilled concerning the acceptance of a false prophet, for Muhammad, who was deluded by demons, began to prophesy.”<sup>59</sup> The author’s assertion that Muhammad’s claim to prophecy was a “delusion” instantiated by demonic activity implies, recalling the exposure of King Pap to demonic acquisition, a similar degree of exculpation to that accorded Pap. As previously attested in the Armenian tradition, including such a reference in this very text, demons reserve the prerogative to effect psychosis,

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<sup>58</sup> BP V.xxxvi, p. 217.

<sup>59</sup> MD III.1, p. 121.



hallucinations, and other indicators of mental disturbance. Muhammad, then, according to this passage, sincerely accepted the delusions projected to him by the demons and asserted his selection by God as prophet out of genuine (albeit deluded) confidence in its validity. The *History of the Anonymous Story-Teller*, of indeterminate (though assuredly medieval) dating, states that Muhammad "...was possessed by a demon and was deranged by this demon day after day. Incensed by the demon he burst his iron chains and bonds, and was driven by the demon into deserts, mountains and caves."<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the title of this chapter identifies Muhammad, as do so many of the Armenian sources, as a "servant of Anti-Christ."<sup>61</sup> It merits further consideration that the text specifies Muhammad's reclusion into the geologic formations of desert, mountain, and cave – all three of which being suitably arid (that is: "waterless") to accommodate demon habitation. Similarly, Movsēs Daskhurants'i writes of the companions of Muhammad: "They convened a great assembly, went into the waterless, devil-haunted desert, and with the greatest honor led that demon-inspired Muhammad into their midst."<sup>62</sup>

A later chapter of the *Anonymous Chronicle* (which may or may not be attributable the same author) approaches Muhammad in considerably less sympathetic terms: "The demon-possessed, false teacher Mahmēt established his own tradition and laws."<sup>63</sup> Aristakēs Lastiverts'i refers to Islamic houses of worship as "...those dew-infested lairs called mosques..." where formerly righteous Armenians study "...the sayings of Islam (*mahmetawand*)."<sup>64</sup> That Aristakēs appraises mosques as spaces

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<sup>60</sup> AST p. 183.

<sup>61</sup> AST p. 182.

<sup>62</sup> MD III.1, p. 121.

<sup>63</sup> AST p. 191.

<sup>64</sup> AL XVII, p. 114.

inhabited by demons echoes the Armenian notion of Islam itself as not a legitimate Abrahamic faith—an Islamic tenet that medieval Armenian traditors devote herculean exertion to attacking and dismantling—but an instrument of subversion through which Satan has deceived Muslims (and perhaps their very prophet himself). This reaffirms the Armenian conception of demons as beings so potent as to inspire entire calls to faith, assemble religious institutions, and even command their own spaces of worship. Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i will echo this precaution mere decades later (though will avoid explicit reference to Islam):

...let no one called a Christian and a believer in Christ dare to prance and dance about in accordance with various heathen games; [the house] thus becomes the dwelling of *devs* instead of that of Christ and the angels... Now, if any priest enters in where such a satanical rite is performed, it is as if he enters a temple of the *devs* and a house of idols and eats of the sacrifices.<sup>65</sup>

Dawit‘ will acknowledge his reception of this idea from the authority of the scholars cultivated in the Armenian monastic tradition and awarded the title “doctor of the church” (*vardapet*): “And I do not say this on my own authority, but upon that of the canons laid down by holy vardapets.”<sup>66</sup>

Though both Movsēs Daskhurants‘i and the Anonymous Story-Teller allege that Muhammad broadcasted himself a prophet due to demonic interference, each assigns, customized to his own agenda, a unique degree of culpability to the prophet. Each likewise navigates such mitigating factors as psychiatric disturbance (and the extent to which it is occasioned by the demonic) and questions, however indirectly, to what degree

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<sup>65</sup> DG 23, pp. 19-20.

<sup>66</sup> DG 23, p. 20.

the prophet exerted agency over his actions. That the Armenians attribute the genesis of Islam to demonic intervention, however, once again corroborates their inclination to equate the demonic with the foreign. So zealously motivated are demons to combat Christianity that they will design entire religious machineries dedicated to its downfall.

As visibly as gender and sexuality operate in the medieval Armenian estimation of demons, so too does alterity – as Armenian associations of the demonic to Islam substantiate. To this effect, the demonic becomes proxy not only for the pitfalls of corporality but, further, for the dangers presented by the ethnic and religious exogeneities who would embrace that fallible corporality. These elisions juxtapose the parallel alterities of femineity and somatic otherhood – the latter so acutely extracted as to surrender its humanity entirely. Where not represented in the demonic, ethnoreligious alterity is grafted onto the practitioners of heresy by their association therewith. The frequent connotation of the demonic to the external—whether demons act in concert with, in possession of, or as representatives of the foreign—exposes amid this genre an anxiety about the potential of the exogenous to damage the Armenian nation not only physically but spiritually, threatening both the individual and the national church that insulates him.

### Disease

Medieval Armenian medical culture problematizes the body along the following primary classes of symptom: pustules, inflammation, edema, fever, gastrointestinal distress consistent with dysentery, and even presentations of psychological disturbance. In addition, the Armenian sources display in their approach to the anatomized body familiarity with Aristotelian, Galenic, and Hippocratic principles such as, most notably,

humorism. Like tortures of persecution, pathogenic affliction is presented predominantly through dermal and gastrointestinal symptomatology. In one case especially reflective of the Armenians' trepidatious approach to the exogenous, Movsēs Daskhurants'i alleges the atmospheric toxicity of the Byzantine interior to foreign visitors: "It is said that the air of that country brings disease to foreigners who enter the country in the spring, the season of sicknesses, and for that reason the hair and the beard immediately fall out."<sup>67</sup> Thus, the foreign emanates the menace of not only military and demographic annihilation, nor that of encroaching heresy, but of pathogenic peril. Further, the passage evinces the penetration of miasma theory into Armenian literary awareness, further substantiating Armenian familiarity with Hippocratic corpora.

Movsēs Khorenats'i twice identifies diseases of an "elephantine" nature, though the determination of these conditions remains untenable. The first such indication refers to Emperor Constantine, and is offered by Movsēs to illustrate the righteousness of the world's premier Christian monarch:

After making many martyrs, because of his presumption he himself was afflicted with elephantine leprosy over his whole body, which the soothsayers and Marsian doctors were unable to heal. Therefore he sent to Trdat asking him to send magicians from Persia and India. But even they brought him no relief. Some pagan priests, at the advice of demons, bade him slaughter a great number of children in basins and to wash himself in the warm blood and be healed. But when he heard the crying of the children and the wailing of their mothers, he had pity and spared them, preferring their salvation to his own.<sup>68</sup>

That the advice to bathe in the blood of children is received from "demons" further elucidates demonic influence over humanity. They are once again documented to

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<sup>67</sup> MD III.12, p. 128.

<sup>68</sup> MX II.83, pp. 230-231.

communicate with humans (primarily those so receptive to their commands as “pagan priests” who mediate between the exogenous temporal and their foreign gods) and persuade them to commit such atrocities as infanticide, the turpitude of the sin magnified by its self-serving purposes. Further, that the vociferations of mournful mothers so rend Constantine to empathy that he declines to proceed with the therapy endears the (likely already reverent) reader to the emperor, reinforcing not only his own moral virtue but the virtuous and even salvatory capacity of women’s lamentation (examined in chapter II). Here once again the Armenian texts reify the expectation that women, especially pious mothers fulfilling their familial commitments, lament – even to excess. To partake of this indelibly embedded Armenian ritual (however egregiously it may violate Nersēsian law) is both sympathetic to a contemporaneous reader and, further, essentially feminine.

This episode is reproduced by Ukhtanēs of Sebastia, who decorates his version with alleged quotations of the physicians and augmented detail: “Leprosy affected King Constantine and caused wounds all over, and physicians were totally unable to cure him. The sorcerers told him: ‘It is impossible for you to be healed, unless you gather innocent infants and fill the pool with their blood, and while the blood is warm, you should enter the pool naked, and wash yourself in the blood. Then you shall be cured.’”<sup>69</sup> Ukhtanēs enhances to higher resolution the distress and lamentations of the aggrieved mothers:

[Constantine] gave orders and they immediately gathered innumerable little children, while he rode his horse and went to the temple where idols were erected, known as Kapetl. Then women ran holding their infants in their arms, groaning deeply, dishevelled, and feeding their infants on their breasts. They fell before the king with agony and cry. Seeing the mothers’ sufferings and lamentations, as well as the excessive weeping of the children, he had great pity on them and showed his compassion.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ukhtanēs I.71, p. 87.

<sup>70</sup> Ukhtanēs I.71, p. 87.

Subsequently to his display of empathy, Constantine is cured of his affliction by the intervention of Saints Peter and Paul. That the grief of mournful mothers is among the details that Ukhtanēs selects for particular attention and emphasis suggests that this value had become only more pronounced in the centuries intervening between the two texts, the lamentations of women elevated to yet higher esteem as a semiotic gesture of feminine virtue by the tenth century.

Movsēs Khorenats‘i’s second reference to disease of an elephantine nature appears amid the following litany of pathogenic maladies: “For lepers were persecuted, being considered impure by the law; and those suffering from elephantiasis had to flee lest the disease spread from them to others.”<sup>71</sup> The historian further alludes to the social rejection of the paralyzed and the deficit of adequate accommodations for the suffering.<sup>72</sup> Movsēs then details the correction and redress of these societal ills implemented by St. Nersēs during his fourth-century tenure as *katholikos*, noting in particular that he modeled their design after “the Greek hospitals.”<sup>73</sup> Further, Movsēs notes that St. Nersēs allocated resources for their supply to be funded through taxpayer support: “And he set aside for them towns and farms, fertile in fruits of the land, in milk from herds, and wool, that these through their taxes might cater for their needs from a distance and the inmates would not leave their dwellings.”<sup>74</sup> Finally, he attests the construction by Nersēs of “...hospices for orphans and the aged and for the care of the poor.”<sup>75</sup> That Nersēs so

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<sup>71</sup> MX III.20, p. 270.

<sup>72</sup> MX III.20, pp. 270-271.

<sup>73</sup> MX III.20, p. 271.

<sup>74</sup> MX III.20, p. 271.

<sup>75</sup> MX III.20, p. 271.

solicitously attends to the infirmed and the destitute, presumptively at great personal risk (particularly common pathogens such as leprosy being highly communicable), demonstrates his righteousness and, moreover, the centrality of altruism to the designation of virtue. Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i embellishes, reproducing this account in the tenth century, that Nersēs “...built houses for the poor, leprosoria for lepers, hospitals for invalids and all those that were disabled so that the ailing bodies of men could be comforted.”<sup>76</sup> The details supplied by Hovhannēs more center the palliation of corporal distress, by contrast to the focus applied by the *Buzandaran* upon the saint’s attention to the indigent, the orphaned, and the widowed. This may suggest a more intimate awareness of contagion on the part of the tenth-century bishop, likely conscious of parallels to his own era. The tenet of service to the infirmed will endure throughout the next several centuries, as evidenced by the penitential text of Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i, which assigns to the incestuous and the fornicators a penance of lifelong service thereto.<sup>77</sup> The same penance will be imposed upon the heretical, among whom Dawit‘ names the Paulicians and practitioners of witchcraft.<sup>78</sup> Hovhannēs’s account refers, to a significant degree, more frequently—and in more extensive detail—to pathogenic assault than do the historical texts of his predecessors. Such descriptions will only increase (in both frequency and precision) in the centuries to follow, escalating notably in the eleventh-century chronicle of Aristakēs Lastiverts‘i, who will announce such afflictions with vivid explication.

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<sup>76</sup> YD XII, p. 84.

<sup>77</sup> DG 50, p. 39.

<sup>78</sup> DG 53, pp. 41-42; The Paulicians were an anathematized sect of Christian dualists active as of the mid-seventh century. The most comprehensive study to date of the Paulician movement remains Nina Garsoïan’s *The Paulician Heresy: A Study of the Origin and Development of Paulicianism in Armenia and the Eastern Provinces of the Byzantine Empire* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967).

Similarly, the Armenian princess Shushan is attested by Ghewond in the eighth century attending to the wounds of injured Arab soldiers: “She bandaged their wounds, healed them, and gave them clothes to wear.”<sup>79</sup> Shushan’s solicitude toward even the exogenous invader disports Armenian virtue contrasted to foreign barbarity and extracted in the most tangible of corporal dimensions. Irrespective of the incursive Arab campaign and the chaos thereby engendered, Shushan extends her feminine virtue to the aggressor, displaying the performed righteousness of the Armenian feminine in a most literally somatic context – the administration of medical care.

Virtues of this manner will be, several centuries later, documented of King Ashot, of whom Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i records:

He gathered around himself the scurviéd, the disabled, and the blind, treating them as being of equal rank to himself at banquets. ... He reckoned their red scabs and sores before his eyes as equivalent to decorations and sparkling gems. Moreover, he offered to them his royal cup with drink and when the discharge of their wounds mixed with the wine, then he took and tasted what they had left.<sup>80</sup>

In consuming the commingled contents of the cup, Ashot performs his virtue as both a symbolic and a corporeal act of communion. Step‘anos here implicitly likens Ashot to St. Nersēs, whose voluntary exposure to leprosy codes him as exceptionally virtuous as does Ashot’s ingestion—thus, likewise exposing himself to so virulent a bacterium as leprosy—of the hazardous fluids secreted by the infirmed. Step‘anos positions the ingestion of the contaminated wine, then, as an ascetic act: one that signifies virtuous discomfort, the personal sacrifice of Ashot’s physical health, the endurance of the

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<sup>79</sup> Ghewond 8, p. 60.

<sup>80</sup> ST III.8, p. 231.



unpalatable, and the altruistic acceptance of even the contagious. The passage signals that this value had maintained status despite an absence of attestation through the intervening centuries. Indeed, tending to the leprotic has long, for the Armenians, possessed redemptive properties – it is in several canons of the Shahapivan Council assigned as penance (specifically: Canons IV, V, X, XII, and XIX), suggesting its spiritually restorative qualities and capability to impart atonement.<sup>81</sup> Also implied is the secondary penalty of infection itself, as leprosy is easily contracted through prolonged and intimate contact (such as that suggested in the Canons, penance being applied as service and attendance to the needs of the leprotic) with infected individuals.

Chroniclers of latter centuries direct greater attention to the particulars of the infections themselves, and considerably less to the figures and institutions that attend to the afflicted. These infirmities are often packaged as divine retribution, and gratuitous experiential details enrich these accounts to evoke a visceral sense of divine justice. A crucial feature of the trope is that such graphic medical agonies are narratively applied only to antagonists – the unjust, the malicious, and the ethnoreligious other. Not in one instance recorded does the medical condition of a virtuous Armenian held to high esteem by his peers and legatees (inferably, among whom have commissioned these texts) receive so lucid a literary treatment. In the event that an illustrious Armenian kinsman does perish by disease, the details of his demise are decorously withheld from posterity so as to protect his legacy in dignity. The sufferings of the maligned, by contrast, are

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<sup>81</sup> Hovhanessian, “The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan,” 81-93.

ingloriously displayed to portend for the reader that which awaits him should he deviate from the inscribed standards of social, religious, and communal conduct.

Eghishē writes in the sixth century that the apostate Vasak Siwni “...succumbed to painful disease...” while imprisoned for his treachery against the Armenian nation:

His entrails began to burn, his chest hurt and was festered, his fat belly shrank. Worms crawled in his eyes and ran down from his nostrils; his ears were bunged up, and his lips were painfully pierced; the sinews of his arms decomposed, and the heels of his feet were bent backwards. The stench of death emanated from him, and his domestic servants fled from him.<sup>82</sup>

Evocations of abdominal and gastrointestinal distress persist constantly through Armenian commentaries on deific vindication of enemies. Such illustrations, peppered with scatological imagery and a distinctive tinge of sanctimony, will continuously suffuse Armenian literature throughout the remainder of the dynastic period. In the eighth century, Ghewond attributes the dishonorable death of a malicious figure identified as Grigor to “a swollen stomach.”<sup>83</sup>

Movsēs Daskhurants‘i will, in a near-contemporaneous passage, somewhat comically recount the condign death of a Persian “mage” who approached Christian relics intending to urinate upon them. Movsēs gleefully recounts an ironic reversal: “However, when he loosened his pants his intestines fell out upon the earth, and he died in the greatest agony.”<sup>84</sup> T‘ovma Artsruni will later describe in similar discourse the affliction that befell the iniquitous Arab governor Awshin and his military detachment, identifying

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<sup>82</sup> Eghishē VI, pp. 190-191.

<sup>83</sup> Ghewond 26, p. 121.

<sup>84</sup> MD I.19, p. 24.

the responsible pathogen as “Herod’s disease.”<sup>85</sup> T‘ovma elucidates that “...the body of that beastly man became bloated with pus and horrible swelling,” following which the same pathogen infected his companion, the apostatized Greek eunuch Sap‘i, who will come to so offend the Armenians as to merit his narrative disposal.<sup>86</sup> T‘ovma notes that the eunuch’s “...bones and flesh were infected with incurable ulcers...” which precipitated his expiration.<sup>87</sup> T‘ovma further elaborates that this condition was highly infectious and capable even of zoonotic transmission, attributing to it the annihilation not only of Awshin’s contingent but of its livestock as well: “In similar fashion all the soldiers and captains with the entire army perished; and also the herds of horses and donkeys and camels died from the same ulcerous infection.”<sup>88</sup> Of the same “unbearable affliction” that destroyed Awshin, Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i illustrates: “His abdomen was inflamed, and his insides decayed. His ruptured intestines burst out of his abdomen, and before his spirit had departed from his body, the stench of death rose from him. He met his end in this painful condition, and descended to hell in utmost agony.”<sup>89</sup> Like T‘ovma whose description preceded (and likely informed) his own, Hovhannēs too notes that this infection exterminated multitudes of Awshin’s Muslim soldiers.<sup>90</sup>

Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i will disclose, only two decades later, that the heretical priest Arius of Alexandria perished to a disease similarly gastrointestinal in modality, and will follow T‘ovma Artsruni in attributing this malady to the victim’s own malice: “The penalty that he paid was worthy of his impiety, since he died [as a result of]

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<sup>85</sup> TA III.26, p. 305.

<sup>86</sup> TA III.26, p. 305.

<sup>87</sup> TA III.26, p. 305.

<sup>88</sup> TA III.26, p. 305.

<sup>89</sup> YD XXXVII, p. 153.

<sup>90</sup> YD XXXVII, p. 153.

his bowels gushing out with his excrement.”<sup>91</sup> Hovhannēs again applies scatological imagery to the “divine wrath” visited upon conspirators against the *katholikos* Mashtots‘, sensationalizing: “The iniquitous lips of one of them swarmed with worms before the eyes of everyone including myself, and he perished. Another’s bowels fell down forthwith together with the excrement.”<sup>92</sup> He will later document an infirmity characterized by abscessed eruptions of the skin, accenting the anguish with which it dispatched his enemy: “The traitor burned with high fever and parching heat, until pustules broke forth and he died.”<sup>93</sup> The emphasis on gastric symptomatology appears to backlight the persistence of Hippocratic medical theory, which considered fundamental the viscera to holistic health or dysfunction (cooperant with the liver which comprises a vital component of the gastric system, to be explored in chapter VIII), among the Armenians well into the Middle Ages.<sup>94</sup> A similarly apprehensive approach to pathogenic exposure is recorded in the recommendations issued by Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i, whose collection of advice for parish priests reflects perspicacious attention to hygienic and sanitary practices and to ensuring the immaculacy of the sanctuary as a space of both communion and community: “If anyone is sick, coughing continuously or vomiting, he shall not be given communion until this ceases. If [communion be] taken by such a man and brought up again onto the vessel, [the sacraments] shall be taken outside the church

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<sup>91</sup> YD IX, p. 80.

<sup>92</sup> YD XXX, p. 137.

<sup>93</sup> YD XXX, p. 137.

<sup>94</sup> Recent neurological research has, in fact, corroborated this assertion of Hippocrates; see Louisa Lyon, “‘All Disease Begins in the Gut’: Was Hippocrates Right?” *Brain: A Journal of Neurology* 141, no. 3 (2018): 1-5.

and buried deep near the foundations, and any splash [of phlegm or vomit which may have] fallen on the vestments shall be washed from the holy place.”<sup>95</sup>

Dawit‘, however, will also write of excrement, though in alternatively medicinal terms:

If children at play put the dung of man or animal or their urine into the mouth of a child dedicated to the priesthood, or [if this is done] as a medicine [sic], he shall be called to the priesthood. If it should happen that a priest [be prescribed] as a medicine [sic] the dung of man or an unclean animal, he shall not take it. If any from among the elders suffer this as a punishment is or as an insult at the hands of infidels, he shall be barred from mass, but may perform the other rites. If a priest drinks the urine of clean animals as a medicine [sic] or as an insult, after 3 times 40 days of penitence [he shall] commune...<sup>96</sup>

This item of Dawit‘’s text evinces that the segment of Armenian society to whom he directed his counsel did not necessarily approach excrement (or, at least, that of an animal) as consummately toxic but, rather, selectively curative and capable even of restorative activity when ingested. This particular admonition may refer to tinctures or balms, regarded as occult by the Armenian cleric, promoted by local pagan populations – Kurds practicing indigenous religions, Turkic animists, survived Zoroastrian communities, and perhaps even adherents to mystical sects on the margins of Christianity or Islam. Revealingly, Dawit‘ in another passage associates coprophagia to the heretical Paulician sect, instructing that those who engage in the ingestion of excrement and other behaviors mimical of the Paulicians be punitively mutilated.<sup>97</sup> He will further prescribe exterior isolation to any person “afflicted with gonorrhoea,” revealing the prevalence of

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<sup>95</sup> DG 25, p. 22.

<sup>96</sup> DG 33, p. 28.

<sup>97</sup> DG 53, pp. 41-42.

sexually transmitted disease among this population, the measures taken to contain its transmission, and the social attitudes with which the infected were approached (that is: quarantined sequestration and, quite likely, some duration of ostracism).<sup>98</sup> This caution further echoes the commandments of the Shahapivan Canons, three of which (Canons VIII, IX, and X) rebuke the pursuit of supernatural intercessions by theurgists or through personal engagement with the occult.

Though far less common, illness of a psychiatric nature features selectively in medieval Armenian texts, overwhelmingly—though not exclusively—the prerogative of demons to impose. Frequently it will manifest in the form of spiritual acedia, hallucination, or heresy – as demonstrated by the Armenian assessment of the prophet Muhammad, whose claims to prophecy are dismissed by the Armenians as episodes of demon-induced mania. It is a disorder of this class, symptoms of which accord consistently with post-traumatic stress or other psychological sequelae of extreme duress, that Movsēs Daskhurants‘i describes in subsequence to devastating famine:

Those who were infected by this disease became crazy for the space of one month or two. They would grind and gnash their teeth, and roll their eyes. Nor did they comprehend that they were sick, and they even did not know how to ask for water. Some, like frantic madmen, rose naked and shameless from their bed, talked to the walls, and beat the air, while others mistreated their nurses. Although the illness was severe, death was not the result. They called it madness. Those afflicted grew black and thin, their bodies wasted away, their limbs were paralysed, and their hair and beard fell out.<sup>99</sup>

A most remarkable episode among these is that recorded by Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i early in the eleventh century, which is by all appearances the first written

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<sup>98</sup> DG 33, pp. 27-28.

<sup>99</sup> MD II.15, p. 76.

acknowledgment in the Armenian record of mental illness not produced at the volition of the demonic but directly attributable to psychological or psychiatric dysfunction. Somewhat radically for this period, Step‘anos promotes the provision of mercy to the psychologically compromised and communicates his conviction that to do so is a Christian virtue incumbent upon the faithful. This value he divulges in his rebuke of King Smbat for his (as Step‘anos presents) excessively cruel and unduly severe punishment of the impaired for a crime committed in a state of mental incapacity. The chronicler implies that just as the intent of the perpetrator was compromised, so too must be the justice delivered to him. Step‘anos records that despite the political success of King Smbat, “...his heart became proud and he rose above himself.”<sup>100</sup> The chronicler continues that Smbat “...committed three wicked deeds,...” the first of which being his injustice toward the mentally unstable arsonist.<sup>101</sup>

The first was that he burned to death an innocent man for the following reason. He had granaries of grass and grain in the city of Ani, which had been filled over many years. They burned down. There was a certain man in the city who was confused and mentally incapacitated. At dawn, he was praying in the church with the congregation. He stepped out and lifted up the source of the flame which heated the incense and caused it to smell. And the people said, ‘What is that?’ And he said, ‘I am going to set fire to the granaries of the king.’ And they went and repeated this to the king. He ordered that they should first tear out his eyes and then surround him with stalks and reeds and then burn it all up. When they had done this, they threw [his body] outside the city.<sup>102</sup>

All the more outrageous to Step‘anos is King Smbat’s refusal to accord the condemned man a proper burial, signaling his disregard for the body of a countryman – an offense intolerable to the chronicler. Especially noteworthy of this passage is

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<sup>100</sup> ST III.29, p. 291.

<sup>101</sup> ST III.29, p. 291.

<sup>102</sup> ST III.29, pp. 291-292.

Step‘anos’s use of the word “innocent” (*անւնէղ* – lit. “sinless”) to describe the man, disclosing that as early as the eleventh century, there existed an attitude among (at least some contingent of) Armenian intellectuals toward mental illness as an extenuating circumstance that moderates, to an indeterminate degree, criminal liability – however reprehensible the transgression. Evincing the pollination of this idea throughout the period following the Seljuq conquest, Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i analogously condemns the abandonment of a spouse for reason of mental defect: “It is not proper to abandon a lunatic wife, for what God has joined, let Man not put asunder; if he [the husband] leaves her, he may not take another wife, for he is a wife-deserter; if he dares to take another, he shall repent for 7 years and fully provide for the needs of her whom he has abandoned.”<sup>103</sup> This supplements a commandment set down at Shahapivan against the repudiation of a wife for reason of corporal defect (*չսոր ի մարմնի*), suggesting that between the fifth and twelfth centuries the incorporeal psyche had acquired considerable status relative to the more pragmatically regarded soma (long privileged in popular mentality) among the Armenian literate.<sup>104</sup>

That the Armenians had by this time developed a concept of limited culpability for the mentally compromised illuminates a disposition that mental deficiency was as much a class of medical disorder—and not simply reducible to the interference of demons, divine retribution, or other supernatural phenomenology—as was any physiological or pathogenic condition. Accordingly, as Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i’s text suggests, mental incapacitation must be afforded mercy, compassion, and some degree of

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<sup>103</sup> DG 70, p. 51.

<sup>104</sup> For the Armenian text see Hovhanessian, “The Armenian Council of Shahabivan,” 63.



accommodation. Specifically, the defect would present a mitigating factor in the adjudication of criminal intent and the administration of justice. Just as other villainous figures are humiliated in text through salacious documentation of their demise, Step‘anos literarily requites Smbat this indignity by recording the king’s ignominious downfall. He attests that the king died consequent to “...a fever involving a painful inflammation.”<sup>105</sup>

A final condition set to paper only in the instructive protocols issued by Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i and, perhaps his source in crafting them, the Shahapivan Canons is that of infertility. The Shahapivan Canons, while silent on the pathology and treatment of the condition, make explicit as early as the fifth century that sterility does not constitute a sufficient premise for spousal abandonment.<sup>106</sup> Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i observes that some provincial women have, with sufficient frequency to merit the codification of its penance, in abject desperation sought recourse in the demonic, having exhausted all other methods and abandoned appeals for divine intervention. Dawit‘ further cautions women against invocation of the occult to fulfill such purposes, illuminating that some women perhaps local to Dawit‘’s parish (or to those ministered by his associates) have engaged in such rituals so as to induce conception through the intercession not of the divine but of the demonic: “There are other wicked women who administer a drug to their husbands fabricated with the excrement of their body and mix it in their food.”<sup>107</sup> The citation of coprophagia, which Dawit‘ associates to heresy (specifically, that of the Paulician movement) echoes simultaneously issued sanctions against the employment of excrement for ritual purposes (discussed above). Significantly, Dawit‘’s admonition appears among

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<sup>105</sup> ST III.29, p. 292.

<sup>106</sup> Hovhannessian, “The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan,” 81-82.

<sup>107</sup> DG 53, p. 41.

the earliest associations of women to thaumaturgy, specifically of the variety that entails alchemical concoctions and collusion with idolaters. Of these women and their practices,

Dawit‘ will inveigh:

There are certain filthy and vicious women who by means of satanical drugs and out of revenge or hatred or jealousy on account of other women incapacitate their husbands or paramours, disciples of an evil art, [or who] in their own wicked ineffectiveness hire heathen women and destroy and effeminise the strength of men. There are other women ... who compound a drug with the blood of the gecko and other filthy reptiles, putting it in a vessel and compounding a destructive drug. First they try it out on animals or on the bodies of innocent strangers, and then apply it to their husbands or paramours or others for whom they harbour spite. Now, they are no different from murderers who destroy the body of men by leprosy, smallpox and other divers [sic] diseases.<sup>108</sup>

Significant of this invective is the explicit citation of “heathen women” and their enlistment in these conspiracies – Armenian clerical rhetoric predictably inculcates foreign (of both race and religion) influences for the incitement of Armenian Christian women to transgression. Of further import is the comparison of occult ritual to the deliberate infliction of such contagions as leprosy and smallpox, suggesting a suspicion that these pathogens were induced into populations at the directive of sorceresses or other malevolent actors, all implicitly exogenous in their heathen customs. Likewise, the insinuation that these women toil to physically emasculate their husbands—as this item is, notably, titled “Concerning Wives who Incapacitate their Husbands out of Spite”—illuminates the pervasiveness of this anxiety, and that instances of men’s enfeeblement were likely attributed to the nefarious potency of women mobilized through demonic agency.<sup>109</sup> Thus the supernatural is again gendered feminine when exhibiting a proclivity

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<sup>108</sup> DG 74, p. 52.

<sup>109</sup> DG 74, p. 52.

toward destruction, in this instance that of a medical modality. In a later passage, Dawit‘ will caution the faithful against exploitation by demonic manipulation and advise them not to seek counsel with practitioners of the occult:

Let no man or woman, called a Christian, dare to indulge in such evil practices, and let them not dare go to those of the infidels and Christians who perform them and consult wizards and witches, hydromancers, crithomancers and other diviners upon any essential matters, [that is to those] who make one imagine that they possess knowledge which they do not in fact possess, and who are of no use whatever, except to alienate men from God.<sup>110</sup>

To this effect, Dawit‘ refers not exclusively to sorcerous conjurations but, as well, to the anathematized practices of divination and sortilege.

The approach of medieval Armenian chroniclers to disease, thus, necessary entangles their estimations of ethnic, religious, and somatic alterity. So central is this concept to Armenian medical culture that even the exotic ether of Byzantium harbors climatological toxicity, as Movsēs Daskhurants‘i informs. No body falls so vulnerable to disease as that which transgresses against Armenian Christian morality – the sinner, the heretic, the apostate, the heathen, and the ethnoreligious other. Further, Armenian Christendom demonstrates its virtue by documenting its solicitude toward the corporally and psychiatrically impaired, as demonstrated in numerous exhortations to attend to the leprotic and in the episodes recounting King Smbat’s maltreatment of the disturbed arsonist and King Ashot’s ingestion of the contaminated wine. Armenian admonitions against occultism discursively invoke the exogenous of faith and custom, implying the practice inherently foreign and pronouncing its intolerability on the Armenians’

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<sup>110</sup> DG 95, p. 69.

sovereign Christian soil – its national faith insulating it from the impurity of extrinsic savagery. This practice, too, becomes identified with medical phenomenology, reinforcing the medieval Armenian association between the collusive hazards of pathogenic and exogenic infiltration.

### Conclusion

Chroniclers of the medieval Armenian dynastic period approach the body most saliently through its most devastating insecurities: physical attack by assailant, moral danger represented in the intangible and ethereal demonic, and pathogenic affliction that would relentlessly descend upon the Armenian body both personal and collective. Further, the Armenians cognized their own bodies as only secondarily individual and, principally, national. Through their own vulnerabilities to the corporeally externalized alterity of the ethnoreligious other are cast into focus the most visible and most prevalent of those enemies and threats. These most pronounced of dangers, in turn, reveal the anxious subjectivities through which medieval Armenian culture somaticized otherhood and contrasted thereagainst a vision of idealized ethnoreligious selfhood.

This generates a totalizing construct that positions the Armenian body as righteous, virtuous, and arbitrarily subjected to indiscriminate calamity. The exogenous actor is corporeally typified, in opposition, as the iniquitous and vicious adversary who has through his own voluntary malice exposed his body (and that of his collective nation) to moral peril such as that abstracted as demonic attack or infection. This reflects a constant, aplastic, and unidimensional enemy epitomized by an uncultivated savagery and instinctive brutality that engender spiritual receptivity to demonic and pathogenic infiltration. The exogenous body—that of the heathen, the heretic, and the ethnoreligious

opponent—succumbs more to his own malevolence than to the incidental misfortunes inflicted at random by an irascible and erratic temporality. It is this latter, more capricious force that, medieval Armenian traditors lament, unpredictably erupts its chaos upon the nationally pious and devout Armenian body. Defectors and apostates die violently, as do heretics – a scripting mechanism employed by the architects of Armenian literary tradition to display for native readers the fates awaiting those who associate with the exogenous or participate in their customs. These gruesome deaths often entail irremediable premortem damages to the body. Contrarily, Armenians who expire—however gruesomely—in confession are recompensed in martyrdom with the restitution of their corporal integrity in the realm of the incorporeal, indicating the celestially restorative potential of righteous conduct in the temporal. In this way, medieval Armenian morality was both actively applied to the human body and, in turn, developed and informed by the physiological mechanics of the body as an incarnate device for achieving salvation and averting treacherous detours to damnation.

The vulnerabilities about which these Armenian texts most vocally express anxiety, then, expose their auteurs' perceptions of the body as the physicalized proxy of temporal experience, and of the sensory experience of mortality itself – as one of fragility, destruction, affliction, and constant vigilance against the attacks of the temporal and the myriad malevolencies to which it is intolerably susceptible. These hazards the body deflects while aspiring toward an eternity which mercifully alleviates the insufficiency, decrepitude, and sensory distress of the mortal body. Indeed the Armenians, as explored in chapter V, anticipate an eternity characterized by invulnerability to the temptations and inclinations of the flesh and an invincibility to the

traumas suffered by the precarious carnal integument. These limitations exemplify for the Armenians the inferiority of the temporal to the eternal, the body itself acting as conduit for the suffering entailed in temporality and inevitable deterioration of the incarnate vessel.

It is through the exercise of these notions—those that aspire toward eternal liberation from temporal captivity—that the Armenians operationalize the body to express nationality. National identity and alterity are located somatically within the temporal, the physical body acting as the vehicle that conveys individuals between temporality and eternity. One's moral conduct on Earth would, then, necessarily dictate his or her eternal destination upon dislocation from the soma. Medieval Armenian experiences of temporality and (anticipated) eternity were inextricable from its estimation of identity and alterity. It is only upon transcendence to the celestial that the Armenian and the other bifurcate into the realms of, respectively, deliverance and damnation. The necessarily Armenian righteous will ascend to the Kingdom, while the impious and operationally foreign will be deported to Hell. It is along this fissure that the eschatological locations of identity and alterity converge, both domains fracturing along somatic axes. This elides with material explored in chapter V which examined eschatological geographies of sexuality.

The body, then, signifies to medieval Armenian culture the canvas upon which such constructs as ethnicity and gender are installed. These typologies apply consistently and uniformly across the genre of medieval Armenian historical writing, the temporal-sensory experience of the entropic—and atrophic—body developing further in Armenian awareness along anatomically gendered indices. While the experience of the temporal

was itself universal and unisexual, distributed across gender in expressions that transcended (though were certainly negotiated by) gendered experientiality, it was further anatomized into feminine and masculine dimensions, to be explored in the following chapter.

## VII. Gendered Anatomy

### Introduction

The assessment of the body along parameters of corporal integrity, central to the previous chapter, filtered congruently into its articulation of gender. Armenian somatological theory invokes the integrity of gendered anatomy so as to regulate gender attribution and to ensure civic adherence to the gender binary. Conformity to one's assigned gender, then, was conditional not only to individual acceptance within one's local community but, in macrocosm, a moral imperative toward national security. In cooperatively and collectively acting out the Armenian gender binary to its nationally endorsed parameters (charted partly in the previous chapter and further developed in the present), each individual contributed to and reinforced the somaticized apparatus of Armenian national identity against its ethnic rivals. While the previous chapter has cursorily discussed these concepts in a generalized context, the present and following chapters will explore these phenomena vis-à-vis their gendered applications and will interrogate the Armenian approach to corporal anatomy as a gendered object.

Gendered anatomy contributed critically to a medieval Armenian conception (as articulated by the clerics under whose architecture was constructed its literary tradition) of gendered behavior and religious axiology: morality was gendered to whatever extent was the body itself, the incarnate integument acting as the vehicle of performed morality. Once assigned cultural gender—a process that considered reproductive anatomy, public behavior, and active expressions of gender identity, and was continuously reassessed for conformity to circumscribed gender standards—the masculinized or feminized body conveyed one's virtue in the civic sphere. A successfully executed performance of morality, then, was evaluated for adherence to an inventory of gendered protocols. This



regulatory program applied to gender a miscellany of biological dynamics, none more salient than reproductive viability. Capacity for and impediment to procreation governed the preponderance of Armenian somatic morality, and, as such, mobilized a gendered dichotomy of the body over which to map the enforcement of moral standards.

Medieval Armenian somatic culture appreciably factored gendered anatomy into its distribution of moral liability, and anatomical considerations dominated the assignment of moral obligation. These determinations applied consistently across a spectrum of gender presentations, the reproductive organs in particular conferring specialized considerations for one's assumption of and compliance with standards of moral conduct. The human body, both as a pre-gendered template and following its filtration through the gender binary, is additionally marked by such biological processes as menstruation, excretion, and the discharge of fluid secretions, all of which fluctuate in moral connotation across time and in opposition to a diversity of corporal alterities. In effect, biological gender—and the individual's public conformity to his or her assigned gender and its unique entailments—dictated the terms by which one's morality would be evaluated. Entrenched within these dictates is the expectation that anatomical gender reify and reinforce Armenian national identity by physiological contrast to the gendered anatomies of its ethnoreligious adversaries. The assignment of corporal gender, in this way, reflects only secondarily the distinctions between the masculine and the feminine and, more vitally, those between Armenian and foreign masculinities – engagement with corporeal femininities occupying the domain of the other. Appreciation of the somatic feminine, by extension, the Armenians come to associate with the moral deficiency (and, thus, the necessary alterity) of the exogenous. This contrast becomes focal to Armenian

somatic self-cognition: its evaluation of selfhood and otherhood, in essence, becomes gendered and, in turn, genders its external projections of indigenous identity and exogenous alterity. This chapter will examine the processes by which these ethnocultural distinctions were anatomically externalized and applied to medieval Armenian gender constructions.

### Female Bodies

The Armenian sources discuss female bodies exclusively in their capacity as procreative vessels: they represent entities unique from male bodies only insofar as they cultivate in gestation the incipient human life and nurture it through infancy. To this effect, only the womb and the menstrual and gestational processes carried through it are acknowledged elements of female anatomy in medieval Armenian texts, and conspicuously absent from any narrated documentation is the exterior female anatomy. This accords to the previously postulated injunction against conscious attention (literary or otherwise) to female bodies, appreciations of which the present study has posited were displaced onto the more socially acceptable male body. The consequent intricacy with which men's physical aesthetics are illustrated reflects by contrast the values assumed by medieval Armenian society of ideal feminine physicality. Discussion of women's external sex organs is accepted only in one context – through the proxy of Armenian-Islamic discourse. By dissembling to assert that only Muslims engage in such vulgar subject matter as female genitalia, the Armenian texts theatrically perform their more puritanical approach to female anatomy (and its mechanics) as essentially and exclusively reproductive. Nevertheless, the Armenians do harness the opportunity to redirect their suppositions of the female body through discursive exercise with their Muslim counterparts. Canon laws set down by St. Nersēs in the fourth century patently forbid

“the holding of intercourse during menses,” though the medieval Armenian canon appears elsewhere to accept and even celebrate menstruation as a vital and divinely endorsed component of creation – one not to be denigrated or reviled.<sup>1</sup> This transition appears coeval to the incursion of Muslim populations and their application of religious praxis to the body, which induces a modulation in Armenian gynecological attitudes from abhorring menstrual fluid to defending its organicity and regenerative utility. Post-Islamic Armenian subjectivity operationalizes this turn in the reception of menses to further contrast Armenian theological anatomies against those of their Muslim counterparts, which the Armenians in response come to regard as excessive aversion thereto.

Ghazar produces a verbal exchange between an assembly of (eventually martyred) Armenian priests and their Persian captors. A particular priest identified as Ghewond derides the Zoroastrian worship of fire by asserting its omnipresence in or creative contribution to virtually all Earthly matter. This dialectic he maneuvers to suggest that the Persians worship only “half” of the fire-containing compounds on Earth, casting aside and polluting the remainders. Ghazar deploys this duality with its inherent contradictions as a rhetorical device from which to assail the Zoroastrian sanctification of fire. Comparing the utility of fire to that of water, Ghazar measures distinctions between the potential of potable water to purify and nourish against its decidedly more indecorous applications:

’...Fire is not absent from any material, so then all materials of the earth are gods. But if you so believe, why with blinded mind do you call half of them gods and insult the other half by putting it to impure use? For example, with bricks and stones you use some for

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<sup>1</sup> BP IV.iv, p. 114.

building palaces, and some for building privies and latrines; with silver, part you form into cups, and part into chamber-pots; with fire, you roast and cook the oxen and sheep of the gods; with water, you wash away menses and pus and filth, yet part of it, by itself or mixed with wine, you drink without being frightened or horrified. ...<sup>2</sup>

In drawing this parallel, Ghazar likens menstrual blood to such bodily impurities as “pus and filth,” disclosing his repulsed appraisal of menses as commensurate in toxicity to these.<sup>3</sup> An alternative translation of this passage renders “menstruation-chambers” in place of “privies and latrines.”<sup>4</sup> The Classical Armenian edition prepared in the *Matenagirk* ‘Hayots’ supplies *տոմիս դաշտաւան* (“houses for menstruation”), which may indeed indicate the relegation of menstruous women to isolated quarters.<sup>5</sup> This appears to be the only documented citation in medieval Armenian literature of these secluded structures, consistent with a tacit prohibition against explicit mention of women’s bodies and their intimate functions. The comment likely evades administrative censure due its obscurity – it refers not to any specific woman but to the generic condition of menstruation in abstraction and, more permissibly still, to a structure erected for its containment and concealment. Alternatively, Ghazar in so polemicizing may not allude to any such apparatus on Armenian soil or operated under Armenian auspices but, perhaps, to those exclusively under Persian operation. Under Armenian authorship, no such privilege applies to Persian indecencies as that which enigmatizes and obscures Armenian bodies, and the presence of such quarters is indeed documented in Zoroastrian Persia.<sup>6</sup> James Russell further adduces that such beliefs extend both throughout the region

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<sup>2</sup> Ghazar II.44, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> Ghazar II.44, p. 126.

<sup>4</sup> See Thomson’s addendum to the text, p. 275.

<sup>5</sup> See Ghazar II.44 in MH vol. 2, p. 2276.

<sup>6</sup> Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*, 449.

and “in other societies remote from any possibility of Iranian influence,” in agreement with several scholars on the global ubiquity of menstrual isolation.<sup>7</sup> Qualifying the connection between Persian and Armenian approaches to menstruation, Russell continues that the Armenian language “inherited” its menstrual verbiage from Persian, and, thus, “...the fact that a foreign word is used by Armenians for such a common function suggests that specific Zoroastrian beliefs about it may have entered Armenia.”<sup>8</sup> This inference could both substantiate and refute the suggestion that Ghazar refers exclusively to Persian menstrual quarters, as it both supports the infiltration of Persian menstrual culture into the Armenian ethos and confirms the essentially Persian derivation of the system in Armenia.

James Russell observes a contemporaneous association of menstruation with irregularity and aberration, characterizing medieval Armenian appraisal thereof as an anomalous physiological dysfunction rather than as a regular biological process.<sup>9</sup> A larger medieval Armenian somatic culture, however, does not aver this approach, or—supposing that it did prior to the fourth century—swiftly distanced therefrom coterporally to the entrenchment of Christianity. Certainly by the time of Ghewond’s activity in the late eighth century, any aversion to menstruation had long evaporated from Armenian subjectivity, supervened by an attitude of acceptance if not reverence. An approval of menstruation (perhaps in celebration of Armenian progress toward Christian enlightenment on matters of the body) becomes, following exposure to Islamic

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<sup>7</sup> Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*, 449.

<sup>8</sup> Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*, 449.

<sup>9</sup> Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*, 449.

somatology, tangible enough in Armenian thought that Ghewond validates its sanctity, including in his text a passage in its defense.

The correspondence preserved by Ghewond between Emperor Leo and Caliph ‘Umar reveals a dramatically transformed Armenian approach to menstrual fluid following the arrival of Islam to Armenia. Ghewond records the following interrogation by ‘Umar of Orthodox Christology: “...Is it possible that God could have dwelt in flesh and blood, and in the unclean [uterus] of a woman?...”<sup>10</sup> Ghewond’s ‘Umar here expresses revulsion at the suggestion that a venerated prophet of the Abrahamic tradition—the second-highest revered in Islamic cosmology—had inhabited the feculent vessel of an incarnate woman. The authenticity of this passage as attributable directly to ‘Umar, or to any Muslim, merits examination. Islam conceives of Jesus not as the divine offspring of God but, rather, as a mortal prophet born of human parentage as was the Islamic prophet Muhammad. To disparage gestation within a woman’s body in such vulgar locution, then, by extension dishonors Muhammad. In addition, this idea directly contradicts the Islamic notion of Christ’s singular humanity—in profound opposition to all extant Christian denominations, even those embracing a mortal facet to the nature(s) of Christ—that so distinguishes Islamic cosmology from its Christian precursor. An Islamic interpretation would certainly accept and, in fact, insist upon the Earthly gestation of Jesus Christ in the biological anatomy of his mother. This passage, then, may be in fact a product of Christian authorship—whether original to the Armenian tradition or to a

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<sup>10</sup> Ghewond 13, p. 71; Arzoumanian translates *յարգուլնի* as “entrails,” which I have emended to “uterus.”

Greek source—seeking to parody an Islamic cosmology with the intent of subsequently dismantling its inconsistencies with Christian messianic ontology.

The converse, however, is equally viable. If authentic, whether to ‘Umar or to an unidentified Muslim author, opposition to the Christian conviction that “God” gestated within the body of a mortal woman may function as an attack not on the prophet Jesus but, rather, on the divine nature of Christ as itself the primary axis of Christological contention – that which doctrinally estranges Christians from Muslims. The idea under attack, should this interpretation prevail, would be not the humanity of Christ but the divinity: the very trinitarian schema in which Christianity is inextricably ensconced. This analysis considers the preserved word *Quunmlōny* (“[for] God”) in the body of the text as a critically distinguishing factor. Were its original author genuinely concerned with debating the corporeality of Christ, as postulated above, he (or the copyist replicating his account) would have rendered rather *Qn̄hunnuh* (“Christ”) than *Quunmlōny* (“God”).<sup>11</sup> The scribal use of “God,” then, supports the latter of these theories: that the originator of this passage—likely a Muslim—concerned himself more with attacking the divinity of Christ and the trinitarian convention than with disputing the prophet’s embryonic development amid the putrid uterine environment.<sup>12</sup> This, then, aligns seamlessly with Islamic Christology: to cite the obstetric—and necessarily terrestrial—gestation of Christ not to refute his sanctity as a prophet but his divinity as immaculately and ethereally begotten, and to assert his incarnate humanity, thereby validating an Islamic cosmology and promoting it above the consequently discredited Christian paradigm.

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<sup>11</sup> For the Armenian text see the edition prepared by Alexan Hakobian in *Lewond, Discours Historique*, 371.

<sup>12</sup> Gheovnd 13, p. 71.

In response, Leo counters that menstrual blood is, in fact, a natural and even nourishing substance required for the proliferation of life. Significantly, he nevertheless relates the fluid, even in its admitted necessity, to the products and processes of excretion: “For example, the menses of the female serve in the procreation of the human species, and the elimination of the excesses of food and drink serve for the conservation of our life.”<sup>13</sup> Even in validating the gestation of the incarnate Christ in a materially embodied female receptacle, he relies rhetorically upon the analogy of menstrual fluid to excrement, as if to suggest the substance either equally noxious or, in like manner, to be eliminated from the body. Leo then justifies the proximity of Christ *in utero* to menstrual blood, feces, and other organic impurities, recognizing each of these as biologically indispensable. Unlike Ghazar’s approach, however, which is to summarily dismiss the totality of these substances as contaminants, the letters preserved by Ghewond propose to judiciously value each of them in its providential capacity to both metabolically sustain the individual and cyclically perpetuate humanity.

Menstrual blood will continuously present a matter of exigency for Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i, who will repeatedly articulate his admonishment against menstrual coition, commanding expressly that husbands “shall not lie” with their menstruous wives – resonating the directives of Mosaic law.<sup>14</sup> Among his more inflammatory assertions is that to conceive during menstruation will effectuate birth defects in the developing embryo or fetus: “A wife who becomes pregnant shall not have intercourse until the child has been born. The reason is as follows: all the deformities in the body of a child arise

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<sup>13</sup> Ghewond 14, p. 97.

<sup>14</sup> DG 51, p. 40.



during coition whilst she is pregnant or menstruous. It is not proper to lie with a woman at these times, especially for priests.”<sup>15</sup> The injunction against gestational intercourse likely derives from the dogmatic impulse to criminalize all sexual activity conducted in pursuit of sexual pleasure. The achievement of pregnancy obviates any continued insemination; the conception of a child would then render superfluous any subsequent act of copulation until delivery. Thus, any sexual activity commenced during gestation would by default aspire not toward the sole doctrinally sanctioned objective of conception but, rather, amount to fornication. More curious, however, is Dawit‘’s contention that such complications as teratogenesis will develop in consequence to prenatal coitus. It is perhaps this proximity to concupiscence, Dawit‘ deduces, that exposes a developing embryo to corruption. That intercourse is forbidden by Dawit‘ during gestation suggests the possibility that he witnessed frequent miscarriages among his own congregants and those of his pastoral proteges. Dawit‘ offers this advice perhaps in response to a rising (or alarmingly static) rate in local miscarriages, many of which possibly resulting from the well-documented famines that plagued the Armenian Highland during this period (if not from the chaos of constant invasion). In forbidding prenatal coitus, Dawit‘ attempts to mitigate such occurrences, attributing them to the sins of expectant parents—an explanation which places a remedy directly and fortuitously within their control—rather than to the volatility of their environment.

Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i’s admonitions evince a stable continuation of these ideas well through the eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Echoing the position of Emperor Leo via Ghewond—a value undeniably absorbed by the Armenian clerical institution as

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<sup>15</sup> DG 51, p. 40.

substantiated by its very preservation in an Armenian text—Dawit‘ will advise as follows:

Menstruation is not considered an uncleanness, but is [the work] of nature; for nature is wholly the creation of God and among his creatures there is nothing vile. Now the child is nourished [by the blood] in its mother's womb and [so] lives, likewise also after its birth until it is taken from the breast.<sup>16</sup>

Translator C.J.F Dowsett attributes this position to “the age-old necessity in Armenia of refuting Iranian dualism.”<sup>17</sup> In this way, Armenian rejection of the Zoroastrian aversion to menstruation epitomizes the revolution in Armenian somatic and sexual attitudes following Armenia’s national conversion to Christianity. Dawit‘ then offers an unusually medicalized explanation of the menstrual process and female reproductive anatomy, by overt contrast to the texts of his predecessors which center predominantly the theological aspects of menstruation. He explains the menstrual cycle as follows, evincing perhaps some degree of acquaintance with both Aristotelian somatology and Hippocratic-Galenic medical theory:

Again concerning the menstruation of women, know this: the nature of women accumulating monthly within them, this blood flows out of their body for seven days. While the woman is pregnant and the child lives in her womb, the mother of the child does not have this affliction, that is, the monthly flux of blood, for this is the child's food in the mother's womb; therefore it is retained during pregnancy and does not issue forth. Similarly also after birth, as long as the child is at the breast, the mother does not menstruate, for the blood rises as through a tube into the breasts of the mother and is transformed into white milk, with which the child is fed. When the child is taken from the breast and there is no one to draw it from the breast, the blood returns to its previous state.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> DG 67, p. 47.

<sup>17</sup> See C.J.F. Dowsett’s introduction to the text, viii.

<sup>18</sup> DG 67, pp. 47-48.

Dawit‘ demonstrates remarkable command of this knowledge and intimate familiarity with its applications both biological and religious. Menstrual fluid is not uniquely controversial for Dawit‘; he will hold breast milk in like regard, even assessing canonical restrictions upon permissible lactation habits. Dawit‘ forbids the provision of breast milk by a baptized Armenian woman to “the child of a Kurd at her breast,” rationalizing that “... that milk was made pure in the baptismal font.”<sup>19</sup> The breast milk of a baptized Christian woman, Dawit‘ insinuates, comprises a vital resource which must be conserved within the Armenian community to nourish its nascent generations of infants, and not to be expended wastefully on the exoteric. Exceptions will be granted, he clarifies, for adoptive children who have received the sacrament of baptism. The breast milk of Armenian Christian women then becomes for Dawit‘ a resource not only of crucial value to the elemental domestic unit, but one of national import – a community asset rather than one proprietary to the individual woman who produces it.

After acquainting his reader with the mechanics of lactation vis-à-vis the circulation of blood throughout the female body (evincing exposure to and agreement with Aristotelian natural philosophy), Dawit‘ offers the following explication of humorism as it affects female biology, specifically addressing fluid homeostasis in the body as modulated by the lunar cycle:

If [one asks] why [the menses] recur is monthly and cease on the seventh day, [the reason is as follows]: as for four seven-[day periods] the humours in nature increase in accord with the moon, as the nature of the body is accustomed to wax and wane therewith, so the body wanes for one seven-day period and nature is purified. And this is the reason why the laws forbid one to approach one's wife during these days:...

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<sup>19</sup> DG 20, p. 18; Dawit‘ often uses the term “Kurd” indiscriminately to refer to Muslims in the region.

<sup>20</sup> DG 67, p. 48.

Dawit' proceeds to elucidate the impediments by menstrual blood to conception at every stage, cautioning first that menstrual coition will flush or neutralize any seed introduced into the menstruous environment, and, secondarily, that any embryo conceived from such an act will not be viable. Finally, Dawit' cautions, should a woman carry to term the child conceived during menses, it is likely to exhibit congenital defects and immunologic deficits:

If he sows at this time, the flux of blood drowns the seed, carries it out of the womb and does not permit of conception; if it does grow the mixture of black, polluting blood corrupts its nature and gives rise to all serious diseases, that is, leprosy, smallpox, squinting, blindness, lameness, deformity, crippled hands and feet and [the so growth of] superfluous flesh and limbs which occur in nature [?], and insanity, [all of which afflictions are] incurable. On account of all these diseases, the laws and the prophets and apostles and vardapets forbid men to approach their wives at such times. For whoever incontinently has intercourse [in such circumstances] is responsible for these ills and is the murderer of his children.<sup>21</sup>

Dawit' issues a final admonition against any woman who "...conceals her indisposition and does not reveal it to her husband," noting increased repentance required of her who so deceives her husband into menstrual intercourse.<sup>22</sup> Dawit', however, does not confine his rancor exclusively to women – in equal measure, he condemns for the same destructive transgression "evil men," who "in the course of fornication or in order to spite their wives, act contrary to Creation, that is, they spill the seed of procreation...."<sup>23</sup> The sin of copulation for any purpose extraneous or even secondary to conception Dawit' deems fornication.

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<sup>21</sup> DG 67, pp. 48-49.

<sup>22</sup> DG 67, p. 49.

<sup>23</sup> DG 54, p. 42.

From this precept Dawit‘ extends the conclusion that “those over sixty” are not to marry, citing (in addition to the canonical origin of this precept) their impaired fertility thereafter: “At this limit it is reckoned that sterility prevails, on which account the canons forbid those over sixty to marry, since this would be not for the procreation of children, but concupiscence; ... [and from the thirtieth year] the seed of procreation diminishes daily.”<sup>24</sup> This divulges the remarkable gynecological observation by Dawit‘ that women of this historical setting often (with, at minimum, sufficient frequency to warrant this item of documentation) successfully birthed children well into their fifth and sixth decades – else the upper limit mandated by Dawit‘ would reflect a lowered threshold for marriageable age. Dawit‘ then defines marriageable age explicitly by the interval of menstrual activity: “...the seed for the procreation of children and the menses for the nourishment of the children clearly grow together in strength from the fifteenth to the thirtieth year, and thereafter decline and weaken until the twice-thirtieth year.”<sup>25</sup> Dawit‘ thus determines a woman’s natural term of fertility conclusively between the ages of fifteen and sixty, declaring thirty the optimal age of female fecundity. This supplies a number of extraordinary revelations. Inferably, a woman’s marital eligibility commenced with menarche, severely restricting any possibility that the Armenians practiced child marriage during this period (as Dawit‘ cites the ecclesial canons as his source matter in crafting these instructions). Dawit‘’s statement that fertility activates at age fifteen and subsequently increases may be construed as an encouragement to delay marriage and procreation until after age fifteen and possibly closer to thirty. This corresponds to an

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<sup>24</sup> DG 67, p. 49; Dawit‘ does not specify gendered parameters of this law, rendering unclear whether the Armenians had observed (empirically or otherwise) the increased probability of congenital anomaly and infant death correlated to advanced paternal age.

<sup>25</sup> DG 67, p. 49.

Islamic consensus between Abu al-Hasan al-Tabib, Ibn Sina, and al-Razi, and which draws authority from Hippocrates, that considers fifteen the earliest obstetrically viable age of parturition.<sup>26</sup> Before age fifteen, Islamic medicine proclaims, female reproductive anatomy remains underdeveloped, introducing risk of complications as severe as exsanguination and as benign as urinary incontinence.<sup>27</sup> Further, it can be asserted that thirty was the age at which women, as witnessed by Dawit‘, most often (and perhaps most successfully) delivered healthy children. He does not provide whether these women had birthed children previous to these deliveries, fertility among Armenian women anecdotally augmenting until age thirty and then gradually declining thereafter. Couples, then, are not to marry under conditions hostile or obstructive to procreation; as Dawit‘ admonishes, such marriages are intended inevitably and exclusively for erotic indulgence. Ironically, this directly contravenes the principles of coterminous Islamic medical theory, which held not only that sexual pleasure was an admirable and commendable delight of the temporal, but that no method of contraception—not even presumed infertility—could impede a conception ordained by God.<sup>28</sup>

Dawit‘ divulges an almost medical command of what one might term in the modern era gynecology, and his familiarity with Aristotelian, Galenic, and Hippocratic ideas suggests not only competency with female biology but some degree of medical expertise as well. That he possesses exponentially greater knowledge than his Armenian predecessors of the female anatomy and reproductive processes accounts for the exhaustive precision and proficient navigation of issues related thereto in his text, which

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<sup>26</sup> Musallam, *Sex and Society in Islam*, 70.

<sup>27</sup> Musallam, *Sex and Society in Islam*, 70.

<sup>28</sup> Musallam, *Sex and Society in Islam*, 26.

are decisively and resolutely evaded in the historical texts of the *vardapets* who preceded him. While monastics such as Ghewond have attempted to engage in discourse related to the theological functions of female anatomy, Dawit‘ appears advantaged by comprehensive academic proficiency with these organs and their operations.

Tenth-century chroniclers employ similar parallelisms to reflect the Armenian preoccupation with female anatomy as exclusively procreative, often to the extent of applying gestational imagery to religious devotion and likening spiritual deficiency to the termination of pregnancy. Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i writes in epilogue to his text:

Do not alienate yourselves from the mother who gave you a new birth into a living hope by the newly given living Word. Do not be deceived by being aborted from the womb, nor strip yourselves naked of that luminous and redeeming garment in which you were properly clad from the womb of the [baptismal] font.<sup>29</sup>

Mere decades later, Ukhtanēs of Sebastia will editorialize of the heretical bishop Kyrion’s poor moral character: “...I consider the embryo fallen prematurely out of the mother’s womb far better than him...”<sup>30</sup> That the imagery of a spontaneously arrested pregnancy supplies the metaphor for spiritual dereliction reifies the tenth-century Armenian estimation of the function and purpose of the female body as the incubator of both humanity and its faith—that which edifies and cultivates a righteous person in his carnal integument—as explicated in the second chapter of the present study. A miscarriage of faith, then, is easily likened to a medical miscarriage of literal pregnancy, as each equates to a maternal failure to sustain nourishment whether physical or spiritual – an essential function of femininity. Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i will employ similar imagery

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<sup>29</sup> YD “Epilogue,” p. 235.

<sup>30</sup> Ukhtanēs II.66, p. 127.

beyond his medical discourse, describing faith absent the spiritual investment of action as “stillborn.”<sup>31</sup> He will later comment that clerics deficient of faith “are to be counted as abortions” and dismisses them as “disciples of Satan.”<sup>32</sup>

Curiously, the external genitalia of women is not once addressed in the Armenian texts, though only passively alluded to as an object of adoration by Muslims. This contrasts dramatically with Armenian discussions of male anatomy, which constitute the entirety of medieval Armenian writing about external genitalia. That these descriptions appear exclusively in the context of violence presents a matter of further curiosity. It would appear that such instances as these provided the only acceptable context in which to discuss sexual anatomy, though this even as a self-contained phenomenon arouses several ancillary questions: Why did the Armenians consider violence the only acceptable platform from which to discuss the exterior sexual organs? Adopting the conclusion proposed by the present study that Armenian literary culture proscribed (whether explicitly or implicitly) visual description of the female body, the pronounced phallocentrism exclusive to the context of violence remains opaque.

The vulva, by conspicuous contrast, is never discussed or even alluded to, likely owing to the requisite celibacy of the Armenian scribal class. The overrepresentation of male anatomy in Armenian textual discourse is, then, attributable to the chroniclers’ ostensible ignorance (assuming obedient adherence to their monastic commitments) of female organs. Considering that inclusion within this cohort was, in part, conditional upon sexual abstinence, the creators of these texts likely conceptualized female genitalia

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<sup>31</sup> DG “Preface,” p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> DG 97, pp. 70-71.



as a vacant and otherwise nondescript cavity where would otherwise protrude the phallus and testes of the more “perfect” male anatomy. An acceptance of this premise would explain, further, the absence of gynecological awareness – no properly cultivated scribe would err to expend such precious materials as ink and paper upon organs that, to his own knowledge, do not exist.

This assessment relies on both the Armenian literary neglect of vulvar anatomy as a site of torture, pleasure, ritual, or even procreation (contrasted against frequent incidental references to the phallus) and the Aristotelian paradigm of gendered anatomy—according to which women did not possess unique genital structures but, rather, simply lacked (or possessed in internal inversion) the external assemblage of organs that rendered male bodies more complete and, by extension, superior—to which a cleric educated in medieval Armenia would certainly have been exposed.<sup>33</sup> The Armenian cleric, then, both literate and celibate (the two conditions inextricably entangled), demonstrates ignorance of female anatomy, and instead relies upon the accounts of medical texts in the adjacent traditions that informed his own.

In reproaching the alleged Islamic veneration of female genitals, Ghewond’s text invokes the idolatry of a further removed, more ancient other. The chronicler quotes a denunciation by Emperor Leo of the Biblical Moabites of the Old Testament, who

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<sup>33</sup> For Galen in medieval Armenian consciousness, see Alessandro Orengo, “The Reception of Galen in the Armenian Tradition (Fifth–Seventeenth Centuries),” In *Brill’s Companion to the Reception of Galen*, eds. Petros Bouras-Vallianatos and Barbara Zipser (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 559–576. It merits mention that Galen, with whose work Alessandro Orengo has persuasively demonstrated medieval Armenian familiarity, contested Aristotle’s paradigm of gendered anatomy and posited (correctly) the interiority of female gonads. It appears that the Armenians did not integrate this specific aspect of Galenic physiology – though it remains unclear whether this is due to a rejection of the idea by the Armenians, a political or scribal injunction against its acknowledgment, or if the transmission of the Galenic corpus into Armenian even included this particular hypothesis.

“...adored ... the genitals of man and woman, instruments of the most detestable voluptuousness.”<sup>34</sup> T‘ovma Artsruni echoes this notion in the tenth century, alleging that Muslims pronounce covenants “...on the privy parts of their women...”<sup>35</sup> The concept will be reinforced by Movsēs Daskhurants‘i who, in a passage dated also to the tenth century, testifies to identical procedures by Muslims: “Such then is their legislation: they swear by the terrible name of God and then break their oath, yet they swear by the genitalia of women and keep the oath inviolable. He also taught other similarly disgusting things to that people.”<sup>36</sup> The assertion by Armenian traditors that Muslims engaged in such proceedings, in conjunction with the Armenians’ performative objections to these behaviors projected onto Islamic actors, belies their own abhorrence of the female anatomy and assessment thereof as fundamentally vulgar and polluting. This evinces an acute departure from Armenian attitudes toward female reproductive anatomy such as Ghewond’s, which largely regarded its organs and their properties as natural inventions of the divine, their components to be considered congruently sacred to the totality of the body. Over time, and with accumulating exposure to Islam, the Armenian texts come to politicize female bodies (or, more accurately, attention thereto) in their literary propaganda campaign—protracted across several centuries—against the cultural and doctrinal threats presented by Islam. This conversation becomes increasingly anatomized, the Armenians taking the position that acknowledgment of female genitalia by Islamic exegetes epitomizes the sexual perversion intrinsic to the Muslim faith.

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<sup>34</sup> Ghewond 14, p. 88.

<sup>35</sup> TA III.5, p. 216.

<sup>36</sup> MD III.1, p. 122.

Nevertheless, these Armenian intellectuals exploit the opportunity to indulge their otherwise inhibited inclinations to engage with such scandalous substance, the dialectical pretext permitting such stimulation under immunity from accusations of misconduct, and to simultaneously weaponize the discourse itself to condemn their religious opponents. It is only through the filter of revulsion at the ethnoreligious other, first Zoroastrian and then Islamic, that the Armenians relent to acknowledge female genitalia. The Armenian cleric-historians mobilize this hostility to project onto their opponents their own anxieties surrounding female reproductive anatomy. These ideas will continuously reenact themselves in Armenian accounts of natives' sexual interactions with Muslim figures, accessorially manifesting in vignettes of salacious sexual conduct by Muslim men toward (primarily but not exclusively) Armenian women, as previously explored in chapters IV and V.

Dawit' Gandzakets'i provides further insight into abortive procedures practiced in Armenia by the early twelfth century, including ingestion of abortifacients, documenting the methods apparently confessed by women who have voluntarily terminated their pregnancies (as well as their accomplices and others party to this knowledge, whose complicity Dawit' likewise condemns). Dawit' denounces the woman who "...kills the child in her womb by means of a drug or by crushing it or by falling off a wall," noting that those complicit in what he classifies "murder" of this nature bear commensurate sin that must be likewise expiated through penance.<sup>37</sup> He additionally sets down punishments for "harlots who kill their children," though he does not specify whether these apply

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<sup>37</sup> DG 48, pp. 37-38.

exclusively to children already delivered or to those terminated prenatally.<sup>38</sup> This commandment mimics an earlier castigation issued by Dawit' against prostitutes "who take drugs to prevent pregnancy," and "those who kill their child in the womb."<sup>39</sup> The parallel sins of contraception and abortion he judges equivalent in magnitude, recommending for each the same manner and degree of penitence.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps the most shocking disclosure of Dawit's text is the insinuation that to induce fertilization artificially parallels abortion in severity as a violation of natural order, and that to commit such an infraction as the engineering of conception must be sentenced in like manner to the termination of a naturally conceived pregnancy. Dawit' then commands that women neither terminate nor artificially facilitate conception: "Sterile women who take drugs to induce pregnancy shall repent for one year, for God is the Creator of nature."<sup>41</sup> Dawit' further censures the exploitation of sterility by promiscuous women to indulge their carnal impulses in adultery: "Certain women, being sterile, impute the cause to their husbands and go and fornicate with strangers."<sup>42</sup> This castigation recalls the centuries-earlier Shahapivan Council, the fifth canon of which forbids a man to repudiate his wife for cause of her sterility.<sup>43</sup> In such cases, the offending man is to remit to his wife monetary restitution commensurate with the public dishonor that his rejection has caused her; she is further entitled to expropriate the totality of her marital assets.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> DG 57, p. 43.

<sup>39</sup> DG 53, p. 41.

<sup>40</sup> DG 53, p. 41.

<sup>41</sup> DG 53, p. 41.

<sup>42</sup> DG 75, p. 53.

<sup>43</sup> Hovhanessian, "The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan," 81-82.

<sup>44</sup> Hovhanessian, "The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan," 81-82.

Dawit' evinces cursory knowledge of obstetric medicine in a final passage wherein he issues directives for the extraction of a miscarried fetus: "If the child dies inside [the womb] and be difficult to deliver, and consequently so the mother comes near to dying, those competent in this work, men or women, who feel confident, shall insert their hand and dismember the dead child and extract it, so that the mother may not die."<sup>45</sup>

Dawit' effectively describes a primitive predecessor to a dilation-and-curettage procedure. Perhaps significant is Dawit's permission for medical practitioners of either gender to perform the procedure, suggesting that midwives of twelfth-century Armenia may have possessed some degree of obstetric proficiency, and also significantly insinuating the presence of male medical providers alongside midwives at the birth of a child. That male practitioners would preside over such procedures as parturitions appears historically unique in the medieval Middle East. Dawit' then makes unambiguous the hierarchy of priorities to be observed for all involved in such events: "If the child is alive, however, let no one dare kill it for the sake of the mother's life; let the mother die, but not the child. If anyone should kill the child for the sake of the mother, he shall repent for 10 years."<sup>46</sup> The same sanctity he will assign to fetuses discovered within slaughtered animals postmortem, the consumption of which amounts to "gluttony": "If [when an animal is] slaughtered one should find a breathing foetus inside, it shall not be eaten, for this is gluttony."<sup>47</sup> It is noteworthy that such knowledge is introduced into the Armenian record only with Dawit's text (as far as modern scholarship has discerned), suggesting

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<sup>45</sup> DG 77, pp. 53-54.

<sup>46</sup> DG 77, p. 54.

<sup>47</sup> DG 9, p. 14.

that such information was received directly from contact with Islamic medical science (however derived it may have been from Greek sources in translation).

### Male Bodies

The tenth-century text attributed to Hovhannēs Mamikonean introduces the phallus as the primary site of humiliation for the foreign encroacher at the hands of the ascendant Mamikonean dynast Vahan, to be explored extensively in the forthcoming chapter. This designation is preceded in Armenian literature by a phallic location of native valor and victory. The *Buzandaran* relates in the fifth century:

And after this, when everyone had come and gathered around him as he lay sick on his bed—Aršak the king and Vardanduxt the king’s wife, all the nobles, the magnates, and *naxarars* of Armenia, both men and women, and all the notable persons in general, Manuēl stripped and bared all his limbs before them all and showed that there was not a space of sound skin as large as a coin on his [whole] body, which had been wounded in battle, for there were more than fifty scars of wounds, even on the virile member, that he uncovered and displayed before everyone.<sup>48</sup>

The compiler, then, locates male value in the phallus, both humiliation and triumph expressed physically upon the organ that anatomically defines masculinity. In this way, masculinity is articulated phallically as both anatomy and the valiant action that it engenders, which incur physicalized evidence of masculine exploits. Armenian traditors such as the compiler of the *Buzandaran* consider corporal masculinity not only by its anatomy but by its production of seminal fluid – a substance so unambiguously masculine that it is not once associated with female production or connected to female anatomy in any Armenian text of this period. This contradicts the Hippocratic model of reproduction, which firmly asserts that both men and women produce semen of

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<sup>48</sup> BP V.xliv, p. 229.

complementary compositions which in synergy contribute genetic material to the child *in utero*. Oppositely: this observation may, simply, further validate the Armenians' aforementioned reluctance to discuss female anatomy and its particulars, in which case the Armenian position in the contemporaneous debate concerning whether women produce semen remains indeterminate. As medieval Armenian historians consistently conceive gender as both its anatomical distinction and the products generated from these dichotomized anatomies, a projection emerges of both male and female fluids as decisive in the assignment of gender. Just as menstrual blood comes to define, by the eighth century, discourse concerning biological femininity, so too does semen determine masculinity – each fluid essential (as even Aristotle asserts, persuasively suggesting an Armenian agreement with the philosopher) in complementarity to the creation of life, and each definitional to the gender of its producer.

The first Armenian reference to semen as a biological function, and not solely as a matter of generative metaphor, appears in the advisory text of Dawit' Gandzakets'i. Its placement herein is most appropriate, as Dawit' intends his text for practical use rather than propagandistic exaltation of a patron (as typifies the preponderance of surviving Armenian texts prepared prior to the production of Dawit's). The twelfth-century cleric, in fact, devotes several passages to the redress of seminal emissions, meticulously evaluating a miscellany of scenarios in which it may discharge and the respective remedies and penances for each such occasion. He then delineates gradations of severity for each of these offenses contingent upon multifarious factors: the age of the offender, the involvement (voluntary or otherwise) of kin by blood or marriage, the circumstances and activities precipitating the emission, the time of day at which the emission occurred,

the intent of the confessor during the act, and the gender and species of any associated parties. Dawit<sup>49</sup> offers select situations in which the production of semen is appropriate or “harmless,” and assures his audience of peers and subordinates in the pastorate (and, by extension, the laity dependent upon them for spiritual guidance) that these include occasions “...where the superfluous [seed] flows at the fulfilment of its time; ... that which [is caused by] washing the body,” and “that which [is the result of] labour and sickness...”<sup>49</sup>

Dawit<sup>49</sup> condemns, however, such instances which produce semen illicitly, assigning distinctive penalties determined by the object of his arousal. Mitigating factors include the extent of the offender’s familiarity with the desired and the proximity of the offense to liturgical service:

If it occurs at the sight of his wife, he shall that day remain outside in double penance and shall commune on the morrow. If it occurs at the sight of a stranger he shall likewise in double penance remain that day outside and shall enter inside on the morrow and commune the day after. If it occurs after the conclusion of the evening service at the sight of his wife or a stranger, he shall commune on the third day.<sup>50</sup>

Dawit’s advisement then takes an unexpected direction, addressing the (apparently common) phenomenon of sexual arousal and even stimulation by domesticated animal: “If [it occurs at the sight of] the wife of a priest or through the bestial temptations of Satan, he shall remain 2 days outside, one day inside and shall commune on the fourth. If [it occurs when he] is on a beast of burden or [at the sight of] the union of animals, he shall commune on the third day.”<sup>51</sup> He follows this brief zoophilic interjection by

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<sup>49</sup> DG 31, p. 25.

<sup>50</sup> DG 31, p. 25.

<sup>51</sup> DG 31, p. 25.



reminding his readers that sexual attraction even to one's own spouse may constitute sin should it arise at an inappropriate time, following which he cautions that an overabundance of seminal fluid, resulting in its inopportune discharge from the body, can eventuate even from immoderate desire for (and consequent physiologic arousal by) food. Dawit' here reifies the connection between carnal impulses for food and sex so insistently perseverated upon (and commensurably denounced) in previous Armenian texts: "If he is tempted after mass by his wife, he shall remain 5 days outside and shall commune on the 6th day. If it occurs because of gluttony for food, [he shall remain] 3 days outside, one inside, and shall commune on the 5th."<sup>52</sup>

This association, discussed previously in the present study, announces itself as early as the fifth century, when Armenian chroniclers and commissioned scribes associate coequally the impiety innate to carnal desires of all derivations. As established in earlier chapters, the incapacity to contain one's sexual impulses equates in sin to the parallel inaptitude to moderate one's appetites for food and drink, both symmetrically condemned in identical terms. The gluttonous and (consequently) corpulent are maligned as are the libidinous, and connections are often drawn between the two as in the depictions of Prince Eruand's unnamed mother (who is varyingly rotund, promiscuous, and unattractive, subject to the hand under which she is caricatured). The inclusion of this notion, albeit fleeting, reveals the perseverance of a semiotic relationship between dietetic and sexual appetites between the fifth and twelfth centuries. That Dawit' notes the generation of excess semen due unmoderated ruminations of food indicates that the sensory experience of consumption was considered by the Armenians analogous to that

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<sup>52</sup> DG 31, p. 25.

of sexual indulgence and, thus, capable of effecting a sexual response in one's physical anatomy beyond the intangible sin of cogitation – each of these compulsions being indiscriminately carnal. Further, the inclusion of this counsel divulges that such responses, in all likelihood, actually occurred and were reported to Armenian clerics by the penitent.

Importantly, a failure to contain one's sexual fluids amid the throes of arousal appears to be considered an exclusively male problem, as the few women depicted amid sexual excess across the dynastic period are never accused of emitting sexual fluids. Further, Dawit' himself does not acknowledge the production of any sexual fluids by the female anatomy even as he devotes copious attention to those generated by male organs. It remains unclear whether this silence derives from the Armenians' literary modesty around the female body or from their (potential) alignment with Aristotelian somatology and its summary rejection of female ejaculation.

Dawit' continues his directives on the confessional adjudication of seminal emission:

If in the daytime he should see a strange woman and covet her and go after her in his mind and be tempted through her by Satan at night, this falls within the definition of fornication, for he has fornicated with her in his heart. If the temptation occurs whilst he is asleep, he shall remain two weeks in double penance [outside] and one week inside. If he falls once or twice under such a decree, he shall commune; if it occurs many times, habitually and unconcernedly and with inclination towards his wife, or if his mind is occupied with the vision of many [women] and constantly polluted thereby and his body ill, he shall be barred from the holy sacrament for ever.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> DG 31, pp. 25-26.

Here concludes this particular item of Dawit's text, though he will later resume his attention to ejaculate. In a later passage, he remarks once again—and at much enhanced resolution—on sexual arousal in the presence of animals, issuing a similar hierarchy of penance dictated by the severity of the transgression. Dawit' first attends to the involuntary release of semen before turning his focus to voluntary—that is, masturbatory—emissions:

If pollution occurs involuntarily on a beast of burden, one shall remain 3 days outside, If an ejaculation occurs involuntarily, from fear alone, one week outside. If one's person becomes polluted by one's own volition, 10 days outside and 2 days inside, and then one shall commune. If ejaculation occurs intentionally, one shall remain 30 days outside and shall commune on the 40th.<sup>54</sup>

He continues to inventory various permutations of the sin, offering recompense for each, before returning his attention to bestiality:

If one sits naked upon a beast of burden and pollution occur by reason of deliberate movement of the body, one shall remain outside holiness for 3 weeks, 5 days inside, and then one shall commune. If ejaculation occurs, 3 times 40 days in double penance with fasts, and then one shall commune. If in waking pollution should suddenly occur involuntarily, one day. If ejaculation should occur without cause, 2 days, and on the 3rd one shall commune.<sup>55</sup>

Dawit's advertency to bestiality refracts the denunciations thereof set to canon law as early as the fourth century by St. Nersēs.<sup>56</sup> Finally, Dawit' offers the bizarre counsel that “If any in a frenzy should curse his passion, mount a steed, give it its head and allow it to gallop in order to occasion the flow of seed from his body, if he is a priest,

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<sup>54</sup> DG 33, p. 27.

<sup>55</sup> DG 33, p. 27.

<sup>56</sup> BP IV.iv, p. 114; the term *Զանխանազխորթեսն* in the text almost certainly indicates sexual knowledge of an animal; see BP IV.iv in MH vol.1, p. 316.

he shall be excluded from mass...”<sup>57</sup> Subsequent to this item, Dawit‘ continues to itemize the factors that will determine one’s punishment for such an infraction, among which are the frequency with which it is enacted and the social standing of the penitent within the community. These recommendations Dawit‘ issues likely in response to commonly reported confessions, and in this way Dawit‘’s text illuminates a panoply of sexual behaviors, transgressions, and anxieties common to the Armenian Highland in (and, likely, well before) the early twelfth century. Among these onanistic sins committed with sufficient frequency to warrant such extensive issuances are, evidently, manual masturbation and genital stimulation via frottage upon an animal. In the case of the latter, Dawit‘ defers to the discretion of local priests to treat both the offending man and the animal which he has profaned “as they think fit.”<sup>58</sup> Dawit‘ will later condemn of manual onanism and those who perform the act voluntarily: “There are certain men who have the evil custom of abusing their body to induce their seed to flow.”<sup>59</sup> He further introduces a gamut of penances commensurate to the age and frequency of the act, as with offenses Dawit‘ has adjudicated prior:

If anyone fifteen years of age does this once in ignorance, he shall repent for 2 years. If anyone does the same thing later at the age of twenty, he shall repent 3 years and shall not be received into the priesthood. If anyone retains the same habit after marriage, he shall be subject to the decree concerning evil-doers, for he who fornicates with himself is their associate.<sup>60</sup>

The notion that to engage in onanism is to fornicate with oneself construes the Armenian regard for any expression of sensory indulgence as essentially illicit and

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<sup>57</sup> DG 33, p. 28.

<sup>58</sup> DG 33, p. 28.

<sup>59</sup> DG 55, p. 42.

<sup>60</sup> DG 55, p. 42.

spiritually contaminating, the most egregious violation entailed in the act not the wastage of seed in conformity to a more general Christian attitude but, rather, the abandonment of restraint and the rejection of discipline in exchange for the carnal rewards of intemperance. Dawit' will issue specialized canons for priests who experience inopportune ejaculatory emissions, noting the elevated standard to which these men are accountable due their clerical status and corresponding position of authority. Dawit' advises that should a married priest from among the pastoral (as opposed to the scholarly) class

...become polluted in the bed of his wife without coition, he shall remain outside for 8 days. If he becomes polluted with his wife in mind, [he shall remain outside] for 2 days; if with another woman in mind, for 8 days, and he shall thereafter commune. If [his seed] flows while he is awake at the thought of his wife, 8 [days outside], if at the thought of strange women, in double penance three weeks, [them] he shall commune.<sup>61</sup>

Dawit' further clarifies degrees of penitence for such instances, noting the intervention of such factors as whether semen is produced at the contemplation of the offender's own wife, of another's wife, of a stranger, or of a multitude of women. In addition, penitence will vary by time of day, position in the liturgical calendar, elapsed time from liturgical services (including provisions for arousal that occurs while conducting service at the altar), whether the emission occurs nocturnally or consciously, and even the presence of any surfaces in physical taction therewith. Further specifications apply in such cases, suggesting that these events routinely transpired amid the experienced reality of the Armenian clergy:

If he becomes polluted in church at the thought or the sight of his wife, one week outside; if his seed flows, 40 days outside; if any should fall at the foot of the holy altar, twice 40

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<sup>61</sup> DG 47, p. 36.

[days outside], and one shall scour the place and wash the paving of the church, and shall read [the passages in the Ritual prescribed for the case of a] polluted temple. If this should happen whilst embracing, he shall do double [the penance].<sup>62</sup>

Further, however, Dawit' allows for select exceptions to these precepts, evidencing possibly a deficit of local pastors in the Armenian villages now decimated by Seljuq conquest:

But concerning the question concerning communion, [the answer] is as follows: if the priest has had marital relations and on that day it becomes necessary for him to administer communion, there being no other to do it in his stead, no harm is done, but for the sake of conscience, he shall purify himself for three days in accordance with the canon by genuflexions, without remaining outside, and shall then commune. If any priest should be unworthy and none of the clean priests is available, it is proper for him to give communion by virtue of his orders."<sup>63</sup>

Further in his text, Dawit' offers a corresponding exemption: "Likewise, if he is unprepared on the day because of [relations with] his wife or the temptation of dreams, he shall perform the marriage towards evening, but shall do three-fold penance."<sup>64</sup> It is precisely to prevent this scenario that Dawit' advises his direct audience of parish priests to depart from their wives' chambers immediately following the completion of coitus:

When a priest approaches his wife, let him not remain the whole night in bed after the way of the world, but let him chastely pass through it as though through fire, and separating immediately, return to his own bed; and he shall remain outside for three days under the rule, and then commune in holiness, and after two days perform mass; if it happens thus [they may then] return to each other.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> DG 47, p. 37.

<sup>63</sup> DG 25, p. 22.

<sup>64</sup> DG 27, p. 23.

<sup>65</sup> DG 47, p. 36.

Noteworthy is Dawit's command that priests abstain from conducting mass and all other clerical proceedings, including even physical entry into the sanctuary, for a period of days following sexual congress (and the resulting pollution of one's person by ejaculation) – even that completed within the sanctified marital context. Thus, Dawit demonstrates that the Armenian disdain for sexual intimacy even within nuptial confines—literarily observable first in the fifth century through such models as the marital pattern endemic to the Gregorid line—perseveres throughout the Middle Ages, perhaps even intensifying over time (likely compounding in response to sequential spates of invasion).

### Eunuchs

A conspicuous distrust of eunuchs circulates constantly through medieval Armenian historical texts. Infinitesimally few eunuchs exhibit any modicum of virtue, an overwhelming majority of them cast as villains, apostates, and defectors. The preponderance are introduced during the commission of a flagrant transgression against the Armenian crown (though the crown itself rotates throughout the progression of this trope between Arshakuni, Bagratuni, and Artsruni investitures), the featured dynasty adapting with the loyalties of the author. The first iteration of this topos appears in the *Buzandaran*, which introduces the *hayr mardpet* (“grand chamberlain”) as “...an iniquitous and demonic man, the one who held the great dignity of *mardpet*,” and who “incited King Tiran exceedingly against the *naxarar* clans.”<sup>66</sup> The text implicitly connects the iniquity of the *mardpet* to his castration and resulting state of corporal compromise – a feature commonly mistrusted and vilified in medieval Armenian

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<sup>66</sup> BP III.xviii, p. 93.

literature as one warranting suspicion (consistent with the material presented in chapter VI): “He was a eunuch called *hayr* [‘Father’], a man of evil heart and evil counsel and evil deeds.”<sup>67</sup> It seems that especially influential eunuchs of high courtly station are frequently inculpated for the incitement of royals to unpopular actions, perhaps as a mechanism to deflect culpability from an eminent noble (especially one whose commission has funded the text at issue) onto, instead, the scapegoat of the archetypally deceitful eunuch. Shaun Tougher writes of the political exploitation of eunuchs in the Byzantine Empire to absorb negative publicity on behalf of errant emperors who had aroused public scorn through unpopular policies or actions, observing that eunuchs were considered to Byzantine society highly trustworthy and genuine.<sup>68</sup> It is certainly plausible that eunuchs functioned analogously to Armenian chroniclers as proxies for literary representation of scandalized Armenian nobles or royals for whom these traitors could not openly express contempt.

The compiler continues to cast blame upon the *hayr-mardpet* for the slaughter of Armenian nobles at the hands of King Tiran: “He had many guiltless *naxarars* slaughtered through [his] slander...”<sup>69</sup> The *Buzandaran* indicates that the office of the *mardpet* “...had been an office held by an eunuch from the very beginning of the kingship of the Aršakuni...”<sup>70</sup> This office and those who occupy it will be continuously disparaged throughout the centuries under examination, often without direct reference to the status of its occupants as eunuchs (though the convention is implied). No other

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<sup>67</sup> BP III.xviii, p. 93.

<sup>68</sup> Shaun Tougher, “Byzantine Eunuchs: An Overview, with Special Reference to Their Creation and Origin,” in *Men, Women, and Eunuchs*, ed. Liz James (London: Routledge, 1997), 170.

<sup>69</sup> BP III.xviii, p. 93.

<sup>70</sup> BP V.vii, p. 198.



ceremonial office is so aggressively maligned throughout the corpus of medieval Armenian literature. The *Buzandaran* persistently attacks the *hayr-mardpet*, excoriating him as follows in a subsequent chapter: “And the *hayr-mardpet* was an evil and malignant man, more unjust and unrighteous than the previous *mardpets* named *hayr* [‘father’]. It was he who had destroyed all the *naxarar* clans during the reign of King Tiran, and likewise in the reign of Aršak he did even more harm to all men than before.”<sup>71</sup> This fourth book of the text contains, in addition, a passage delineating the chamberlain’s acrimony toward the Arshakuni royal house, sovereign at the time with which the *Buzandaran* concerns itself. The compiler draws conspicuous attention to the condition of the *mardpet* as “drunk” and “inebriated,” connecting his insolence to his state of intoxication – referential for the Armenians of an undisciplined appetite and an incapacity to contain oneself. “He then went in and reclined to eat and drink, and when he had drunk and become inebriated, the eunuch began to speak drunkenly arrogant and presumptuous words. He reviled King Trdat, and both the living and the dead of the race, origin, and house of the Aršakuni kings of Armenia. ‘How,’ said he: ‘have such places been given to men in women’s clothing and not to real men?’”<sup>72</sup> It is this synthesis of emotive incontinence and consumptive excess that render the *mardpet* so inflammatory a character in the text; the two traits produce in fusion a villain of such malignant proportions as to pronounce such indignities to the Armenian royal house and, by extension, the nation which it represents.

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<sup>71</sup> BP IV.xiv, p. 139.

<sup>72</sup> BP IV.xiv, p. 139.

The compiler's attention to the characteristics that confer authentic masculinity proves especially puzzling – he situates the interrogation of masculinity not as an accusation by the king against the eunuch, but the reverse. This irony is drawn perhaps purposely to dramatic effect. The passage in totality appears to suggest that the masculinity of the castrated *mardpet* exceeds that of the king. Several additional questions arise from an investigation of the passage, among them that of the king's attire. That his garments would have been insulted as womanly presents a matter of further confusion: What facets of his clothing would have been classable as feminine? Why would the compiler (by all detectable measures influenced by, if not contractually obliged to, Mamikonean dynasts) call attention to this notion, and by what particular cultural mechanisms would a parallel to effeminacy degrade the Armenian monarch? Bearing in mind that it is the eunuch under literary attack, and not the Armenian sovereign, how does this specific insult cast the *mardpet* in a more unflattering light than the king? Moreover: what comprised the attire at issue? The reference to clothing, conversely, may allude more to the king's general deportment than to any particulate aspect of his regalia. In any case, this episode commences an enduring narrative motif that, throughout several centuries of medieval Armenian literary culture, positions eunuchs against testicated men—particularly those of regnal or noble station—in contests of masculinity. Underlying these contests is the constant intimation that masculinity derives not only from one's anatomy, but, moreover, from a multiplicity of cognitive and behavioral characteristics (as previously explored in chapter I).

Subsequent to his verbal attack on King Arshak, the *mardpet* reproaches Queen P'arandzem, then sequestered within the fortress of Artagers in anticipation of an

imminent Persian assault: “Queen P‘arānjem remained [alone] in the fortress with two serving-women. Then the eunuch *hayr* the *mardpet* secretly entered the fortress and he greatly insulted the queen as though she were a harlot. And he began to revile the clan of the Aršakuni for being men of ill-counsel and ill repute as well as destroyers of the realm. ‘Justly,’ he said, ‘has all of this come upon you, and [also] that which shall come!’ and he left secretly and fled.”<sup>73</sup> The *mardpet* demeans the queen as would one a commoner of such lowly station as “a harlot,” the compiler clearly drawing a parallel that is both gendered and referential of the sexual deviancies that he construes throughout his text to propagandize P‘arāndzem’s narrative arc. The same character further denigrates the entire house of Arshakuni, which opposes him directly to Armenia’s dynastic and royal sovereignty. Amid a text characterized by its praise of the royal dynastic clans of Armenia (specifically: the Arshakuni Dynasty and the Mamikonean who unofficially succeed them as *de facto* sovereigns), this display positions the chamberlain as an enemy of the state. Shortly thereafter, the fortress at Artagers in which P‘arāndzem takes refuge is breached by Persian attackers, following which P‘arāndzem succumbs to a most violent demise – one saturated with raw sexuality, perhaps vulcanizing the foundations of an “execution erotica” genre that will be later mobilized by Armenian chroniclers of the tenth century. Seeking retaliation for the dishonor to his mother, King Pap commands his soldiers to execute the *hayr-mardpet* by submersion in the frozen Euphrates.<sup>74</sup>

This unnamed chamberlain is succeeded by another identified by name as Dghak, who is similarly duplicitous and commits congruous acts of treachery. He defects to the

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<sup>73</sup> BP IV.lv, pp. 174-175.

<sup>74</sup> BP V.iii, pp. 188-189.

invading Persians, betraying his Armenian kinsmen to their Zoroastrian intruders. For this offense, Pap likewise executes the *mardpet* Dghak, in this instance by beheading, following which his severed head is affixed to a pike and displayed in the “royal-square.”<sup>75</sup> Just as the *Buzandaran* has articulated the superlative masculinity that distinguished the previous *mardpet*, the text specifies that, like other male figures selected to exemplify masculinity, “...Głak was a tall and well-made man with large and powerful [*k’aj*] bones....”<sup>76</sup> These qualities identify the eunuch, despite his malignance, as both essentially masculine and aesthetically appealing. Shaun Marmon observes similar ruminations on the visual beauty of eunuchs in medieval Medinan literature.<sup>77</sup> The compiler makes no attempt to narratively emasculate either of these prominent eunuchs throughout their intricate trajectories, suggesting that despite a palpable Armenian distrust of eunuchs, they were not characterologically perceived as effeminate. In fact, quite the opposite: it appears, counterintuitively, that chroniclers of the medieval Armenian tradition aggressively hyper-masculinize eunuchs, perhaps expressing perplexity or astonishment at the eunuch’s capacity to retain his masculinity absent his testes. Quite possibly, this accounts for the suspicion with which the eunuch is approached over the course of (at minimum) seven centuries of Armenian historical writing. This may also account for the *Buzandaran*’s testimony that the chamberlain demeaned the king as “effeminate” – which, by contrast to the exceedingly masculine eunuch, he may well have been considered.

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<sup>75</sup> BP V.vi, p. 197.

<sup>76</sup> BP V.vi, p. 197.

<sup>77</sup> Shaun Marmon, *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries in Islamic Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 65-66.

The *Buzandaran*, however, also contains the sole positive portrayal of a eunuch in the entirety of the medieval Armenian record through the Bagratuni Kingdom. The compiler tells of a eunuch called Drastamat who occupied the governorship of the “royal district” – a position superior in rank to all lordships of the Armenian noble houses, and traditionally wielded by a eunuch.<sup>78</sup> The text portrays the relationship between King Arshak and the eunuch Drastamat as one characterized by extraordinary affection and intimacy, noting that Drastamat was the “favorite eunuch” of the king.<sup>79</sup> The compiler relates that Drastamat had been taken captive by the Persian monarch Shapuh and separated from his king. Drastamat’s allegiance, however, extends to his Persian captor, as in service to Shapuh he evidently “...performed incredible feats of valor.”<sup>80</sup> The compiler elaborates: “He fought so bravely for King Šapuh that he saved him from death, and he slew many of the K‘ušan there, and presented to [the king] many heads of his foes.”<sup>81</sup> In appreciation of the eunuch's loyalty and valor, Shapuh commits to honoring any wish made by him: ““Ask anything from me, and whatever you ask, I shall give and not refuse.””<sup>82</sup> In response, Drastamat requests to be reunited with King Arshak, if even for only one day, demonstrating his virtuous devotion to his king. Drastamat rhapsodizes as follows of his wish to visit King Arshak:

’... And when I shall have come to him, order him released from his bonds. And that I be empowered to wash his head and anoint it, and garb him in a robe-of-honor, and set up banqueting-couches for him, and place roasted meat before him, and give him wine, and gladden him with musicians, for just one day.’<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> BP V.vii, p. 198.

<sup>79</sup> BP V.vii, p. 198.

<sup>80</sup> BP V.vii, p. 198.

<sup>81</sup> BP V.vii, p. 198.

<sup>82</sup> BP V.vii, p. 198.

<sup>83</sup> BP V.vii, p. 198.

Shapuh grants this request, whereupon Drastamat departs for the court of King Arshak in Armenia. The text then reiterates, confirming the fulfillment of Drastamat's wish, the sensory details that vivify the experience:

And he freed Aršak from his iron chains—from the iron bonds on his hands and feet, and from the bonds of the iron yoke upon his neck. And he washed his head and bathed him, and garbed him in a precious robe-of-honor. And he set out banqueting-couches for him and made him recline [on it]. And he set before him a meal suitable for kings, and placed before him wine such as was fit for kings. He heartened and comforted him, and gladdened him with *gusans*.<sup>84</sup>

This gratuitous profusion of sensory details conjures a vivid image of Armenian courtly luxury: obeisance through the provision of ablution (as exemplified in the ritual cleansing of the head or hair, possibly with precious oils, as the precise selection of the term “anoint” suggests), sartorial finery, extravagant victuals, and the festive entertainments of musicians and bards. Enjoying these festivities, however, Arshak is overcome with anguish at his condition, and begins to lament dramatically. The compiler conspicuously notes, in addition, that Arshak had by this time become intoxicated with wine, signaling a failure to exercise discipline and the reckless abandon of one's senses so vehemently condemned across the medieval Armenian canon. Subsequently to this display, Arshak seizes a fruit knife and, thrusting it “into his heart,” ends his own life.<sup>85</sup> Distraught at the suicide of his beloved master and overcome with grief, Drastamat “...threw himself on [Aršak], drew the same knife from him, and thrust it into his own side. And there he died at the selfsame hour.”<sup>86</sup> So abiding is the commitment of Drastamat to Arshak that a life absent his king is one bereft of purpose. The fidelity of

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<sup>84</sup> BP V.vii, p. 199.

<sup>85</sup> BP V.vii, p. 199.

<sup>86</sup> BP V.vii, p. 199.

Drastamat, as previously noted, remains the sole positive quality ever documented of a eunuch in the entirety of the medieval Armenian literary tradition through the collapse of Armenian sovereignty in the Caucasus. Indeed Drastamat lies peripheral to traditional assessments of gendered character by the Armenians, according perhaps more strongly to later Islamic representations that depicted eunuchs as characteristically trustworthy, pious, and even charitable.<sup>87</sup>

Several factors may contribute to the genre-consistent and ubiquitous distrust of eunuchs that so pervades medieval Armenian literature. Quite feasibly, writers of later centuries reprised the model imprinted in the *Buzandaran*, this momentum crystallizing the archetype of the malevolent eunuch into an instantly accessible topos across centuries. Though sympathetic a character he may be, Drastamat proves insufficient to mitigate this paradigm and its intrinsic malice. As observed in chapter VI, Armenian Christians may have generally regarded with suspicion any survivors of a mutilative act—not one is attested in the seven centuries under investigation, though the Armenians clearly possessed awareness of such persons as evidenced in T'ovma's comparison of the fractured church to a maimed individual—other than those compromised by castration. Considering the Armenians' preoccupation with the ontology of the supernatural, it is quite possible they attributed such preternatural survivals to demonic intervention. This contrast would align with the presentation of the mutilated martyrs of Ghazar's text, who died in confession—exchanging their temporal bodies for incorporeal transcendentalities that emerge inviolate—despite the metaphysical regeneration of their severed appendages. To physically survive so deleterious an injury, then, is to invert the narrative

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<sup>87</sup> Marmon, *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries in Islamic Society*, 65-68.

of the miraculously regenerated martyr: the survivor perdures in Earthly disfigurement, by contrast to the martyr who resurrects intact. The eunuch's ability to retain his masculinity (that is: the physical and mental qualities that confer a masculine identity) in spite of testicular deprivation likely stimulates this suspicion, perhaps accounting for the *mardpet*'s verbal emasculation of the Arshakuni kings – that his own mitigated masculinity would eclipse that of the most powerful man in the realm qualifies the supernatural virility of the eunuch.

Somewhat counterintuitively, eunuchs represent the most potently masculine figures described in an Armenian literary tradition whose gender binary is predicated on the equation of masculinity with physical strength and size (as discussed in chapter I) and femininity with fragility (as demonstrated in chapter II). In adapting the history of Armenian sovereignty to recenter regnal legitimacy from the Arshakuni-Mamikonean axis to the Bagratuni-Artsruni, T'ovma Artsruni similarly characterizes the earliest-documented *mardpet* of the Buzandaran. Of this unidentified and chronologically first chamberlain to appear in the Armenian record, T'ovma writes:

But the evil-minded *hayr mardpet* never desisted from his typical evil plotting. ... The malicious *hayr mardpet*, the son of Satan, was not satisfied with working evil among men, but even had presumptions against God and his saints. Having opened his filthy mouth against heaven, like an insolent and shameless dog he drew his tongue over the earth.<sup>88</sup>

Curiously, T'ovma never explicitly identifies the *mardpet* as a eunuch, deviating substantively from the *Buzandaran*. The most likely explanation for this omission is that awareness of the office of the *mardpet* as one traditionally occupied by a eunuch may

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<sup>88</sup> TA I.10, p. 125.



have acquired an implicit assumption over subsequent generations of Armenian historians, rendering dispensable the detail for the expenditure of precious ink and paper. It is certainly not the case that T‘ovma was more favorably inclined toward eunuchs than was the compiler of the *Buzandaran*, as will become apparent further into his text.

In two consecutive chapters, T‘ovma introduces two malevolent eunuchs, each in the service of the much-disdained Abbasid *ostikan* Awshin, and both originally Christians of Greek provenance. The first is identified by T‘ovma as Awshin’s surrogate to the vassal polity of Vaspurakan: “Awshin entrusted the country to a certain minion Sap‘i, a eunuch, from among the Greek captives; he had abandoned the Christian faith and accepted the Muslim religion, induced by its bloodthirsty teaching.”<sup>89</sup> T‘ovma indicts Sap‘i as doubly iniquitous: first as a eunuch, his body marred by the trauma of castration, and, secondarily, as a Christian-born convert to Islam – a mortifying dereliction of the faith around which the Armenian nation converged in solidarity. Though both eunuchs are comparably vilified, the second of the two is illustrated in far more ferocious imagery: “A man named Yovsēp‘ of Greek origin had entered Awshin’s service; a eunuch, he abandoned the Christian religion, accepting the erring faith of Mahumat‘. He was a ferocious man, savage, unsparing in the drinking of human blood, but of mighty prowess in deeds of war, who cast fear into [other] nations; into his hands Awshin had entrusted power and force.”<sup>90</sup> Again emerges the representation of eunuchs as not effeminate or insufficiently masculine but, to the contrary, supremely virile, potent, and robust. An identification as feminine or of otherwise deficient masculinity would entail

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<sup>89</sup> TA III.25, p. 303.

<sup>90</sup> TA III.26, pp. 304-305.

such descriptors as those offered by Ghazar in the sixth century (ie: “delicate” and “dainty”) – these do not appear in application to eunuchs, suggesting once again that the Armenians perceived eunuchs not as deficient of masculinity but as exceptionally (perhaps even supernaturally) masculine to the extreme that it viscerally unsettled and disquieted the anatomically intact observer. T‘ovma’s assertion that Իօվսեփ՛ consumed human blood—a motif common to literary impressions of the Armenians’ adversaries—amplifies the masculinity, potency, and ferocity of eunuchs that so profoundly disrupts the Armenian cognition of gender. Like Sap‘i, Իօվսեփ՛ is vilified as both the religious and the somatic other, his savagery propagandistically enhanced in this way so as to personify the Armenians’ collective anxieties: the bipartite alterity of the Muslim eunuch constitutes a threat to both the Armenians’ ethnonational cohesion and their internalized comprehensions of their own bodies.

The second continuator to T‘ovma’s *History* later recapitulates these events as follows:

...leaving two eunuchs, the first of whom was called Sap‘i, as governors ... the emir himself went to the province of Albag and stopped at the town of Hadamakert. He sent a eunuch named Yiwsr with a large army to wage battle with the prince. But because they were secure in the village of Kakenk՛, which was difficult [of access], the eunuch returned in great shame, having been unable to harm them because of the strength of the site and the valour of their soldiers.<sup>91</sup>

The continuator then refers to a third (unnamed) eunuch assigned “...to govern the city of Partaw...” who incited an insurrection against Awshin, demonstrating once again the disloyalty (and masculine military aptitude) wholly characteristic of eunuchs.<sup>92</sup> The same

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<sup>91</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 2] IV.2, pp. 337-338.

<sup>92</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 2] IV.2, p. 338.

continuator later refers to yet another iniquitous eunuch, this instance amid the Seljuq invasions:

...a certain eunuch, baneful and licentious, devoted to the service of Satan, bloodthirsty and an eater of carrion, Srahang by name, came to the province of Vaspurakan and plundered it. He reached as far as the city of Van, besieged it and inflicted terrible disasters. Its [populace] he put to the sword, and the habitations he burned with fire.<sup>93</sup>

The eunuch identified as Srahang, exhibiting the same physical vigor as the eunuchs who literarily precede him, is mimetically described as a drinker of blood and, as a creative novelty, “an eater of carrion.” Like the inaugural *mardpet* to appear in the Armenian record, Srahang is, as reported by T‘ovma’s continuator, assumed to act in “service of Satan.”<sup>94</sup>

These events are, two decades following the initial completion of T‘ovma’s text, revisited by Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i, who embellishes his account with the introduction of Armenian nobles to the drama. The version supplied by Hovhannēs contains perhaps the most essentialized distillation of eunuch duplicity in the Armenian record. The author establishes a scenario in which the *ostikan* Ap‘shin machinates to deceive the Bagratuni king Smbat, then sovereign monarch over the Armenian lands. Hovhannēs reports that Ap‘shin deputized his son, accompanied by “the great eunuch,” to conduct these arrangements.<sup>95</sup> Much to Ap‘shin’s vexation, however, his eunuch becomes enthralled with the Armenian king: “The eunuch was very pleased with meeting the king, so much so, that he admitted having seen no one like him.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 2] IV.12, p. 371.

<sup>94</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 2] IV.12, p. 371.

<sup>95</sup> YD XXXVII, p. 151.

<sup>96</sup> YD XXXVII, p. 152.

In his tenth-century historical text, Hovhannēs habitually ascribes such enchantment with the physical beauty and virtue of the Armenians to Muslim Arab observers, as explored in chapter I. Hovhannēs reports that the eunuch’s awe at the Armenian king motivates him to desert the Arab governor and dedicate himself to Smbat: “Thereafter, the eunuch was of one mind with the king in word and deed, and having received many gifts and honors from Smbat, he went to the city of P‘aytakaran.”<sup>97</sup> The eunuch has, thus, betrayed the caliph and defected to the service of the Bagratuni Dynasty, at this time presiding in sovereign authority. However, the eunuch’s loyalties revert reflexively, and he withdraws his allegiance from Smbat en route to the city of P‘aytakaran to convene with the *ostikan*: “After taking leave of the king, on the way the eunuch allowed himself to be seduced by the temptation of licentiousness in the slanderous utterances of some whose minds inclined toward wickedness.”<sup>98</sup> By Hovhannēs’s account, the unnamed eunuch then proceeds to attack the Armenian house of Sewordik‘: “The eunuch attacked them in full force at an unexpected hour.”<sup>99</sup> The eunuch and his forces decimate the unsuspecting Sewordik‘ and subsequently deliver its *nahapet* and his brother, identified as Arues, as captives to Ap‘shin in P‘aytakaran, remarking that in spite of their valorous resistance, the Sewordik‘ “...could not hold their ground because of the suddenness of the onslaught.”<sup>100</sup>

This account is somewhat at variance with the version issued by Movsēs Daskhurants‘i, who identifies the eunuch in question as “Yusuf.” Robert Bedrosian has determined this figure to be “Yusuf, lieutenant of Muhammad Afshin ibn Abu 'l-Sadj

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<sup>97</sup> YD XXXVII, p. 152.

<sup>98</sup> YD XXXVII, p. 152.

<sup>99</sup> YD XXXVII, p. 152.

<sup>100</sup> YD XXXVII, p. 152.

Divdad.”<sup>101</sup> Movsēs depicts the eunuch in starkly less flattering locution: “He was a shameless and godless man who plundered and destroyed the churches of God wherever he went, and whenever he saw the cross of Christ, he ground it to dust. On his arrival in the land of the Armenians, King Smbat immediately fled.”<sup>102</sup> Movsēs dispenses with the vertiginous pendulations of the eunuch’s loyalties attested by Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i in favor of a less nuanced and more unambiguously hostile portrayal of the eunuch Yusuf. These two figures described, respectively, by Hovhannēs and Movsēs refer almost certainly to the same individual, though the reason for the variation is unclear. Movsēs attests, contrary to Hovhannēs’s version of events, that Yusuf did not deliver to Smbat his relatives but, rather, “...seized the fortresses and the queen and her ladies, their sons, houses, sacred vessels, crosses, and much treasure, and took them into captivity.”<sup>103</sup> This embellishment provided by Movsēs evokes to dramatic effect the Armenian inclination toward the protection and preservation of family as a unit of nation, further engendering Armenian outrage at the eunuch (and perhaps inflaming further suspicion toward eunuchs as an anatomized class).

Curiously, Hovhannēs pronounces an immediate reversal, once again, by the eunuch, who summarily exchanges his loyalties:

Sometime after this, the great eunuch, being distressed by Afshīn, deserted him, and taking with him the king’s son Ašot who was a hostage together with the wife of his brother Mušel who had been taken captive in the fortress of Kars, he immediately came to king Smbat, and returned to him his son and daughter-in-law.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> MD III.22, p. 140 (see translator’s commentary).

<sup>102</sup> MD III.22, p. 140.

<sup>103</sup> MD III.22, p. 140.

<sup>104</sup> YD XXXVII, p. 152.

Ḥovhannēs does not clarify the reason for this sudden retraction of loyalty on the part of the eunuch, leaving to the conjecture of the reader the source of his “distress” by Ap‘shin. Smbat expresses his profound gratitude to the eunuch for the deliverance of his royal kin, lavishing upon him “abundant gratuities and gifts.”<sup>105</sup> For reasons not disclosed, Smbat then dispatches the eunuch to Assyria. “But on reaching the boundaries of Egypt, the eunuch was seized by his caliph and executed.”<sup>106</sup> Ḥovhannēs attributes the eunuch’s execution to the wrath of the governor: “When the *ostikan* Afshīn was informed of these matters, he roared with anger like a beast released from its cage. Greatly enraged at Smbat, he considered the latter the instigator and cause of the wickedness that he had received from his eunuch.”<sup>107</sup> The text continues to detail Ap‘shin’s persecution of Smbat.

The arc of the eunuch in Ḥovhannēs’s portrayal is striking: his loyalties oscillate rapidly between Armenian and Islamic patrons, committing no fewer than three unique pivots. This particular eunuch, then, in spite of his ultimate allegiance to the Armenian monarch—a fidelity for which he forfeits his life—is nevertheless acutely maligned in text, his duplicity candidly exposed for registered Armenian posterity. His frequent moral fluctuations and suspect indecision render him more antipathic than endearing a figure to an Armenian audience, and ultimately serve to further legitimize Armenian apprehension toward eunuchs.

Only in two brief and casual comments do identifications of eunuchs as hypomasculine appear in Armenian literature, one from the tenth century and the other

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<sup>105</sup> YD XXXVII, pp. 152-153.

<sup>106</sup> YD XXXVII, p. 153.

<sup>107</sup> YD XXXVII, p. 153.

from the eleventh. T‘ovma Artsruni refers to “effeminate men” among the retinues of the Assyrian kings.<sup>108</sup> The historical context provided by T‘ovma renders improbable that these figures are any other than eunuchs or serve any other function than that traditionally performed by them. Notable is that these “effeminate” eunuchs—who are explicitly classified male by the gendered term *արք* (men)—appear not in an Armenian court, but in that of a foreign and cognitively distant entity. The designation is, nevertheless, sufficiently unusual that it may indicate a scribal distortion or error in transcription, corrupted possibly from *արք կանկանկ* (“the women’s men” ie: the women’s attendants, presumably though not necessarily castrated) rather than *արք կանկանկիք* (“womanly men”) as in the manuscript translated by Thomson. Excepting this generalized reference by T‘ovma (which he unambiguously deploys as a mechanism to both differentiate Armenian identity from their national and regnal rivals and to assert their superiority within a gendered domain) the only recorded allusion to the effeminacy of eunuchs appears in the *Universal History* of Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i, who disputes both the masculinity and the organicity of eunuchs. Significantly, this second allusion to eunuch effeminacy arises as a generality in rhetorical discourse, and not in reference to any particular eunuch. In explicating his analogy, Step‘anos likens eunuchs to both women—an analogy he appears to immediately recant due to its inherent denigration of women, whom he assents are “creatures of God” and thus elevates above eunuchs in spiritual and terrestrial status—and to mules, to which he compares eunuchs as similarly synthetic creatures engineered through human arrogance:

I question again something more serious, which seemed to your eyes of little importance. The priesthood, which is a high dignity, following the likeness of the chief priest Christ,

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<sup>108</sup> TA I.iv, p. 95.

why do you dare to give to women? And what do I mean ‘to women?’, because they are creatures of God, but I mean to eunuchs, whom you yourselves have created, like mules, outside the definition and the created beings of God.<sup>109</sup>

The parallel to such artificially created species as mules echoes language employed by the Byzantines to connote the fabrication of the eunuch, their manufacture contrary to natural order.<sup>110</sup> Step‘anos has previously referred to these eunuch priests—who, by decree issued at the Second Council of Nicaea, are explicitly ineligible for the priesthood by default of their corporal defect—as “effeminate pastors,” providing medieval Armenia’s only documented association of orchietomy to effeminacy.<sup>111</sup> Byzantine practice, contrarily, did permit the ordination of eunuchs, their castration esteemed by some as a liberation from the carnal limitations imposed by sexual urges and, thus, an anatomical enhancement of one’s aptitude for restraint.<sup>112</sup> Of particular curiosity is the Byzantine exclusion—a policy not adopted by the Armenians—of eunuchs from regnal office. Kathryn Ringrose notes that men were in some cases castrated specifically to invalidate them for imperial ascension.<sup>113</sup> Step‘anos further submits that these “effeminate pastors ... began to oppress the people of Armenia in matters of the faith.”<sup>114</sup> In this way, Step‘anos advances the trajectory of Armenian

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<sup>109</sup> ST III.21, p. 280; Step‘anos here applies the term *շեղքաւոր* (“neutered people”) rather than the more common *նեղքաւոր* which he uses with far greater frequency (he will, in fact, employ it later in the same passage) and which more directly denotes castrated men. This somewhat unusual word choice, it appears, he deliberately selects so as to distinguish neutered “women” from the typically male-gendered eunuch. It seems the presence of the former among the clergy so offends Step‘anos that he seeks purposefully to differentiate castrated priests (whom he identifies as effeminate) from the secularly functional eunuch typically identified masculine. See ST III.21 in MH vol. 15, p. 797.

<sup>110</sup> Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant*, 35; 59.

<sup>111</sup> ST III.20, p. 252; for this ordinance issued at Nicaea II see Kanonagirk‘, 33.

<sup>112</sup> Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant*, 62.

<sup>113</sup> Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant*, 62.

<sup>114</sup> ST III.20, p. 252.



trepidation toward eunuchs, associating them not only to the somaticized other but to the exoteric of both faith and nation.

These representations connect to a substantial body of literature addressing the well-documented phenomenon of disdain, distrust, and suspicion of those who do not detectably conform to the aesthetic and behavioral standards of their apparent gender or integrate, to the satisfaction of their social network, into the conventional gender binary. Further research is imperative to integrate the histories of these Armenian eunuchs—most especially, those promoted to the apical office of royal chamberlain—into those of comparable figures in proximal traditions. Notably, such figures are attested in ancient Greek, Byzantine, Islamic, and pre-Islamic Persian sources, as is their function to the institution of the gynaeceum – also common to all of these traditions.

No textual evidence suggests that medieval Armenian traditors conceived of eunuchs as a distinct gender assignment medial to masculinity and femininity (as did adjacent societies) or otherwise extraneous to the traditional gender binary. The Armenian texts appear, rather, to station the castrated on the extreme margins of masculinity, casting their gendered qualities in the language thereof. The gendered liminality proposed by Kathryn Ringrose of Byzantine eunuchs, while persuasively demonstrated in a Byzantine context, does not apply to Armenian gender concepts, as the Armenians by this time no longer maintained harems for eunuchs to secure.<sup>115</sup> Though the gender neutrality of Armenian pronouns does obfuscate these nuances, eunuchs are consistently described in medieval Armenian texts as essentially masculine – in fact,

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<sup>115</sup> Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant*, 66; for the extinction of the gynaeceum in early Christian Armenia, see chapter V of the present study.

hyperbolically so. They are, further, without exception assigned expressly masculine nomenclature wherever such indications appear (eg: “man”). It appears that the eunuch’s ability to survive orchiectomy and even retain thereafter the qualities that essentialized masculinity (stature, thew, musculature, and intellectual cunning) enhanced his masculinity, rendering him not just passably but, in fact, superlatively masculine.

### Conclusion

Like all aspects of temporal and somatic experientiality in Armenian reception, a developed disdain for sexuality and sexual intimacy is projected onto the image of the body itself. This manifests in an extreme aversion to the tangible products of sexuality—and the sexualized bodies that produce them—and a moralistic application of remarkably advanced biological awareness. Physically transformed by the activation of incarnate sexuality, the body becomes a vessel for sin, material impurity, and moral toxicity. This appraisal of sexual arousal as qualitatively transformative reflects, to some degree, that of Aristotle and his inheritors. These medieval Armenian intellectuals regard semen as so noxious a pollutant that its emission, even into the sole legitimate receptacle of the female body and for its sole authorized purpose of procreation, is believed to defile (however temporarily) each participant in the sexual act. Both parties must, irrespective of gender, to some degree isolate for a period of days (commensurate with, among other factors, social station and civic function) following coition so as to contain their residual sin from contaminating the ecclesial community.

Female bodies, in particular, so offend the authoring cohort of celibate scholars that, as repeatedly asserted throughout the present project, their explicit acknowledgment is effectively prohibited except to impugn ethnoreligious exogeneities for their

nonobservance of this precept. Discursive engagement with female reproductive anatomy—and, moreover, the Armenians' objection thereto—becomes a didactic utility harnessed by the Armenians to dissimilate their national piety from the projected turpitude of the incursive extraneity. One might predict, then, a corresponding tolerance for eunuchs, as physically desexed individuals. This, unexpectedly, does not materialize. Eunuchs incur radically more animosity, in spite (and perhaps because) of their hypermasculinity. This may reflect conversation with a Greek medical tradition contending that eunuchs retain and recirculate their testosterone rather than expending it through sexual exertion. The eunuch grows superlatively potent and virile in consequence, eclipsing the ordinary virility of the genitally intact man and thereby engendering hostility and trepidation. Further, Hellenic and Byzantine cognition considers the eunuch an artificially engineered creature akin to the similarly constructed mule (and likewise rendered sterile by the process) whose manufacture contravenes divine order. This attitude demonstrably pollinated Armenian perceptions of the body and its gender schematic. Of relevance, and as observed in the previous chapter, medieval Armenian texts communicate consistent hesitation toward any not whole of body. As such, the Armenian suspicion of eunuchs translated congruously into a broader and more totalizing awareness of gender as a somatic and behavioral continuum – the eunuch representing both a modified body and a synthetic gender. Absent both his reproductive anatomy and the vulnerabilities that would naturally derive therefrom, the eunuch doubly disturbs medieval Armenian moral sensibilities. Having survived an injury presumed (and often confirmed) mortal, the eunuch telegraphs to an Armenian audience as a disorienting idiosyncrasy – a being whose existence defies Armenian paradigms of

corporeality across multiple factors of analysis. The eunuch then both informed and was informed by Armenian constructions of gender and of the carnal integument that contained it, forcing his disconcerted audience to confront the cognitive dissonance that his mere presence provokes.

By contrast, femineity carries no innately pejorative connotation for the Armenians, as their textual tradition clearly demonstrate a reverence for conventional femininity observed within its assigned confines and parameters. Rather, it is the failure or refusal to act out the rituals of one's anatomically and socially assigned gender and to conform to its aesthetic and behavioral standards that is condemned and, in consequence, legitimates violence against the disobedient – this expectation has been previously explored in the second chapter, and will again be addressed in the following. It is for this reason that eunuchs incur such acrimony from medieval Armenian annalists, their hypermasculinity extracting them from normative corporal dynamics—as a gender neither medial nor external to the established binary—and creating in consequence a gender that cannot be regulated by the state and its propagandic machinery in the clergy. The castrated body thus defies the Armenian gender schematic both anatomically and ontologically. Frustrated by its incapacity to enforce a gender paradigm upon the eunuch, the Armenian tradition instead vilifies him and his body, effectuating its authority by administering copious and persistent literary violence upon the eunuch as a distinct anatomized object (to be further analyzed in the following chapter).

As a monastic class, the producers of this literary corpus do not readily accept (presuming some extent of exposure) the Aristotelian and more broadly classical impression of the female body as the corrupted and deficient inversion of a superior male

ideal. Contrarily, there appears by the time of Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i in the twelfth century a sophisticated comprehension of reproductive anatomy and its operations – one that deviates from the Hellenic paradigms and departs from their dependency on humorism. Yet ambiguous is whether this projection developed in isolation—though it does not appear in any surviving Armenian text predating Dawit‘’s—or if it is derived from (or informed by) a prototype in circulation during his activity. Its relatively late appearance in the Armenian record may suggest a reintroduction of these materials in translation via Islamic preservation.

In consequence to the above historical factors, the bodies of women and eunuchs reciprocally inflame medieval Armenian moral sentiments. The requisite unfamiliarity of the celibate scribal class with female bodies and the arrestingly superlative masculinity of the eunuch both arouse the anxiety of confronting a corporeal other. These bodies are congruently peculiar and exogenous, each textually othered in its own tailored permutation. Thus, the gendering of nativity and alterity codes in these texts a literary recognition of the self in the Armenian testiculated male. Again emerges the location of identity and alterity in the corporeal – albeit, in this instance, along gendered dimensions. Nevertheless, the literary othering of these bodies is reminiscent of the language deployed by this cohort to emphasize ethnonational extraneity, and decisively locates the national within the somatic – whether native or foreign. As an idealized masculinity (and, in particular, one customized to express a Christian morality) becomes the metric by which the Armenians measure identity and alterity, outliers thereto—eunuchs, sexual deviants, and women who fail to apply as instructed their femininity to the reification of

masculinity—are progressively driven further into the margins of Armenian ipseity and toward the perimeters of exogeneity.

## VIII. The Armenian Body as a Site of Ethnoreligious Violence

### Introduction

Armenian literary culture exercises a conspicuous disdain for sexuality (as previously explored) to so extensive a degree that virtually all documented sex acts in medieval Armenian historical writing are typified by violence, aggression, and depravity, epitomizing what Richard Bulliet characterizes as “the well-known linkage between sexual arousal and scenes of violence.”<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon remains astonishingly static across time, not a single positive construal of a sexual act appearing in the Armenian chronicles produced between the fifth and eleventh centuries. None of these documented (or invented) sexual acts conveys sympathetically the spiritual or sensory rewards of affection, intimacy, or even procreation within the sanctified context of consecrated marriage. Rather, medieval Armenian cognition receives and, in turn, reflects sexuality as irredeemably pollutive. Not only do Armenian texts construe sexual desire as spiritually deleterious without exemption (as the previous chapters elucidate); it communicates sexual activity as necessarily and exclusively violent. Every citation of sexual activity in the dynastic Armenian literary corpus originates and/or eventuates invariably in torment, persecution, spiritual perdition, and death. This idea exhibits remarkable stasis over the surveyed seven centuries, representing one of the least plastic aspects of Armenian sexual culture amid a period already characterized by extraordinary continuity. This chapter will explore the complex relationship between violence and sexuality to medieval Armenian subjectivity as manifests in its textual products.

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<sup>1</sup> Bulliet, *Hunters, Herders, and Hamburgers*, 114.

The experience of violence as expressed in medieval Armenian texts performs three primary functions: religious persecution, identification of enemy combatants, and reproductive impairment (examined singularly in the previous chapter). These assume sexualized and non-sexualized forms. This chapter will address both. Each is distinct in its deployment of violence, the purposes thereof, the methods by which it is effected, and the symbology of the intended subject (or its perpetrator) to the collective Armenian consciousness. Armenian conceptions of violence further diversify into four comprehensive categories: oral, dermal, mutilative (of which genital mutilation comprises a subclass), and internal. Tortures of these modalities are commonly applied to distinguished personages: royals, nobles, saints, and others whose social stature merited their direct acknowledgement by name. From this emerges another segment of somatic differentiation: that of social class. Other methods of violence commonly cited across the sources include rape, crushing or trampling by militarized beasts of burden, and decapitation; these methods, by contrast to those exacted upon illustrious figures, are reserved for accounts of more generalized mass violence – that affecting anonymous multitudes of lower-stationed civilians (frequently those consisting of women and/or children). Notable individuals are frequently ascribed tortures and subsequent deaths of remarkable epicism, while nondescript masses receive proportionately nondescript persecutions.

Of particular fascination is that no member of the *Gayianek'*, despite its composition (certainly in part if not in whole) of martyred noblewomen, is violated sexually. None is raped or sexually assaulted, each of their torments being exclusively non-sexual in nature. Further, female sex organs across the spectrum of Armenian texts



under inquiry are alluded to only briefly, infrequently, and in the most cryptic of modesties. This conflicts with the excessive detail to which men's sexual organs are discussed – frequent and direct references are made to phalli, especially so in contexts of violence. While descriptions abound of male genital torture and mutilation, only one mention of female genital mutilation is recorded in an Armenian text before the twelfth century, which refers neither to implementation by the Armenians nor to application of persecutory torments. Noteworthy of this passage is the Armenian derision of the practice, which it ascribes exclusively to Islamic somatology while vociferously publicizing its rejection thereof. Such matters, its Armenian author asserts, are improper for the pious race of the Armenians to entertain. Alongside the classing and gendering of literary violence, then, emerges a racialized component: while violence is to be virtuously endured by the Armenians, it is inflicted near-exclusively by the aggressive other. As such, violence manifests as the final avenue by which medieval Armenian textual culture articulates the alterity of foreign bodies. Their impulse to destruction—even destruction of the physical body itself, whether through gruesome disregard for their own or of the purportedly more perfect bodies of the Armenian righteous—ultimately epitomizes alterity for the Armenians, who abstract their own bodies (as established in chapter VI) as the vulnerable receptors of foreign aggression. It is the moral perfection made tangible in the Armenian body that renders it so perilously vulnerable, and, in turn, the moral corruption of the other that instantiates such incarnate savagery. While chapter VI explored Armenian national self-cognition through corporal fragility, the present chapter will examine presentations of the ethnoreligious other in the delivery of violence. Further, it will incorporate the gender dynamics introduced in chapter VII to analyze the impact of

gender upon the administration and receipt of interethnic violence. Finally, it will identify the methods and modalities of violence most commonly cited in the medieval Armenian record and situate them in conversation with those of adjacent traditions.

### Writing about Violence

Armenian writing about violence becomes gradually more graphic as centuries of its production elapse. Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i frequently attests the murder of Armenians by bisection, graphically writing in one passage that their Arab pursuers, after detaining fugitive Armenians “...as if they were plants, pruned off their shoots with swords, axes, and sabres, crippled their hands and feet as well as all the other parts. They tied the heads and feet of certain others with ropes, and made numerous strong men pull on them from two opposite ends, until their midriffs tore, and then, with the stroke of a double-edged sword at the waist divided them into two parts.”<sup>2</sup>

A common motif throughout the Armenian sources is the compression of brain tissue through the nasal passages. The *Buzandaran* reports such a phenomenon observed of the corpse of the treacherous *hayr-mardpet*, whose execution by orchestrated hypothermia in the frozen Euphrates River was commanded by the Arshakuni king Pap:

[Then] the commander-in-chief Mušel ordered the guards to seize him, strip him naked as he had come from his mother’s [womb], tie his hands under his knees, lower him to the river, and place him on the frozen river. And so he was killed there, for when they came the next morning, they saw that his brain had flowed down from his head because of the cold and emptied out through his nose.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> YD LI, p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> BP V.iii, p. 189.

The Pseudo-Ḥovhannēs inserts a similar account of a Persian fugitive fleeing his Armenian captors, the latter of whom “...seized him and crushed his head completely and his brains spewed out his nose.”<sup>4</sup> This episode continues to detail the acrimony of the Armenians toward the slain Persian soldier: “And one of his comrades, taking up some sand, offered it to the Persian and said: ‘Persian cook, have some salt.’”<sup>5</sup> The same text describes that upon the execution of the king “Nixorčēs” by Mushegh Mamikonean, the king’s “brains spewed out through his nose.”<sup>6</sup> Movsēs Khorenats‘i does not specify the expression of brain tissue through the nasal cavity, but graphically describes the death of the hostile nobleman Eruand by comparably gruesome trauma to the head. The historian reports that a soldier decapitated Eruand, “...scattering his brains over the floor.”<sup>7</sup>

Despite ubiquitous descriptions of beheading as a method of execution, unique to the Pseudo-Ḥovhannēs are references to the fashioning of severed heads into projectiles for game play. The theme first appears in reference to the Persian official Mihran, whose head is severed by the commander Vahan for sporting among his own troops. According to the text, Vahan narrates the assault to Persian messengers as follows: “‘When this *marzpan* arrived in our land, the troops ... wanted a ball but they were not able to find one. Now, since the Greeks were your enemies, we did not have the audacity to go to them [for a ball?]. But we were under your eyes [i.e., rule], and your troops did not have a ball. So we cut off this head and played [with it].’”<sup>8</sup> Vahan then continues to deride the emissaries to the Persian king, telling them: “‘Now listen: since you have come from

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<sup>4</sup> Ps.Y. VI, p. 123.

<sup>5</sup> Ps.Y. VI, p. 123.

<sup>6</sup> PS.Y. V, p. 111.

<sup>7</sup> MX II.46, p. 184.

<sup>8</sup> Ps.Y. VI, p. 128.

Šahastan ... and we know that you play ball, take the head of your sister's son and let it be a ball for you from generation to generations.”<sup>9</sup> The Pseudo-Ḥovhannēs's final mention of this activity refers to the Persian general Varduhri, who—following accusations of “sorcery” against the Armenians—is dismembered and decapitated by an Armenian soldier identified as Tiran, son of Vahan Mamikonean.<sup>10</sup> Tiran then tosses the severed head to a “servant,” thereupon instructing him: “Keep this! And let us go down into Matravank' and play ball [with it]....”<sup>11</sup> A similar passage recollects a Persian attendant frantically tossing the detached head of his master to the victorious Smbat Mamikonean by whose hand the head was severed; the attendant then snipes at Smbat, “Take it and roast and eat it!”<sup>12</sup> The Pseudo-Ḥovhannēs is unique in its reversal of a popular textual trope of its genre: rather than depict the Armenians as virtuous victims enduring torments at the persecutorial hands of the ferocious other, Ḥovhannēs writes—in all likelihood, fantastically—of the Armenians exacting gratuitous revenge upon their foreign antagonists. That this tenth-century “revenge fantasy” set to text would cast a Persian rather than an Arab combatant as the subject of vengeance exemplifies the post-Awarayr Armenian inclination to install contemporary conditions (and figures) onto canonical literary templates. For the operators of this device such as Pseudo-Ḥovhannēs, the Persian and the Arab exogeneities are mutually interchangeable, indiscriminately deserving of obscene literary treatment.

Perhaps the most explicit and most indelicate descriptions, those bearing the most exhaustive and unhesitating depictions of gore, appear in the most recent historical text

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<sup>9</sup> Ps.Y. VI, p. 128.

<sup>10</sup> Ps.Y. VIII, p. 154.

<sup>11</sup> Ps.Y. VIII, p. 154.

<sup>12</sup> Ps.Y. VII, p. 136.

under inspection, that of Aristakēs Lastiverts‘i – prepared shortly after the cataclysmic Battle of Manazkert which precipitated Turkish domination of the Highland. Of the decimation effected by the Seljuqs, Aristakēs graphically illustrates:

The city became filled from one end to the other with bodies of the slain, and [the bodies of the slain] became a road. From the countless multitude of the slain, and from the corpses, that great stream which passed by the city became dyed with blood. Wild and domesticated beasts became the cemetaries [sic] of those corpses, for there was no one to cover over the bodies of the slain with the needed earth, no one to bury them.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout his *History*, Aristakēs projects numerous such visuals to his reader. One such image conjures in visceral detail the decomposition of Armenian bodies littered across the terrain, their remains “...laid low, and our entrails congealed in the ground.”<sup>14</sup>

Another alleges with grisly specificity the peculiar Seljuq practice of extracting victims’ bile as they expired: “When [most] of the people had been executed, [the Saljuqs] then split open the sides of the slain, drained the bile into pans, and made the slave women take that along.”<sup>15</sup>

The motivation for such actions remains unclear, as does the purpose for which the Seljuqs intended the bile, though it perhaps alludes once again to the value of the liver (from which bile is siphoned) and the enduring vestiges of hepatocentrism throughout the medieval Mediterranean. The practice is otherwise dismissed by the chronicler as generic savagery typical of the Seljuq exogeneity. He alludes several times to small children thrashed to death against rocks, the bodies of some having “...torn open and their

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<sup>13</sup> AL XXIV, pp. 164-165.

<sup>14</sup> AL XXI, p. 132.

<sup>15</sup> AL XVIII, p. 128.

intestines poured out onto the ground.”<sup>16</sup> He describes the mothers of these slain infants, in their grief, soaking the corpses of their children “...with tears and blood.”<sup>17</sup> Aristakēs then portrays the Byzantine emperor Basil commanding that the heads of slaughtered enemies “...be made into piles and placed along the road, to shock and terrify the beholders.”<sup>18</sup> Of the carnage wrought by Seljuq invaders, he conjures lucid visuals of “blood-spattered heads of the elderly” alongside the corpses of slain “athletes” littering city streets.<sup>19</sup> He expounds: “Others whose throats had been slit but were still alive were emitting gurgling sounds in pain.”<sup>20</sup> An especially vivid passage details the slaughter of Armenian civilians who had escaped to refuge in the vineyards peripheral to the city: “The clusters of grapes were stained with their blood.”<sup>21</sup> Aristakēs then dramatizes that the returned inhabitants later “...located their dead among the vines, and buried them under the earth. Yet their consciences would not allow them to gather or eat those grapes. For they said that those grapes [were filled with] human blood.”<sup>22</sup> Analogous visuals are applied to the Seljuq invasions by the second continuator to T’ovma Artsruni’s *History*: “From the flowing of blood the land was irrigated as at the time of flooding. Many of the witnesses said that the blood from the fallen corpses of children reached the river which flowed by the city gate.”<sup>23</sup>

Interrogating the development of literary carnage across the medieval Armenian textual canon reveals that not only does the vividness with which auteurs depict violence

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<sup>16</sup> AL XI, p. 75.

<sup>17</sup> AL XXIV, p. 164.

<sup>18</sup> AL IV, p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> AL XV, p. 92.

<sup>20</sup> AL XI, p. 75.

<sup>21</sup> AL XIX, p. 130.

<sup>22</sup> AL XIX, p. 130.

<sup>23</sup> TA [Anonymous Continuator 2] IV.12, p. 371.

intensify over time; so too, in tandem, does the accentuation of perpetrators' alterity. As centuries of Armenian historical writing elapse, its depictions of violence augment from the generic persecutions of martyrs to the explicit tortures portrayed in the *History of Tarōn* and the chronicle of Aristakēs Lastiverts'i. In parallel, the otherhood of the violent aggressor—with few exceptions—augments in narration from the familiar Zoroastrian persecutors of the Gayianeank' to the conspicuously specified savagery of the Seljuqs. It is as much this hostile alterity, then, as its resulting aggression that Armenian documentary accounts emphasize in their conveyances of violence upon the ethnicized site of the Armenian body.

### Violence against Women

With few exceptions, the violence documented toward women in the medieval Armenian record is generally non-sexual in nature. These exceptions are limited to the aforementioned references to female genital mutilation, the gruesome demise of P'arandzem by fatal rape, and the generalized (and often euphemized) rape of women *en masse* at the hands of foreign invaders. Women in the texts are never mutilated to the degree perpetrated upon men; medieval Armenian textual sources contain no specific reference of cropping or rhinotomy inflicted upon a woman or group of women. More frequently, violent acts committed against women entail damage sustained to the extremities and abdominal cavity, accounts of which often exhibit disturbingly gory details, rather than facial disfigurement. This suggests again a medieval Armenian reluctance to address in any specificity the optical features of femininity, which the face most directly announces. Facial mutilations, as acknowledgments of facial dimensions in general, are reserved in narration for the masculine and evaded for the feminine.

Agat'angeghos, conforming to these conventions, describes the martyrdom of Hrip'simē as follows:

Then they stripped from her the torn clothing which was around her. And they fixed four stakes in the ground, two for her feet and two for her hands, and tied her to them. And they applied the torches to her for a long time, burning and roasting her flesh with their fire. And they thrust stones into her entrails, eviscerating her. And while she was still alive they plucked out the blessed one's eyes. Then limb by limb they dismembered her...<sup>24</sup>

Virtually identical tortures befall her companions, who are not burned as was Hrip'simē but flayed: "They pierced the skin of their soles and put in tubes, and by blowing they flayed the three saints alive, from their feet to their breasts."<sup>25</sup> Like Hrip'simē and their abbess Gayianē, their tongues are removed, following which they are eviscerated with stones and subsequently beheaded.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, the *Buzandaran* reports of the martyrdom of the noblewoman Hamazaspuhi Mamikonean only that she was forcibly denuded and hanged, the inflammatory documentation of her nudity corresponding to the essential depravity of her conspicuously foreign assailants.<sup>27</sup> This account is duplicated, in effectively identical detail (likely sourced from the *Buzandaran*), in the tenth-century text of T'ovma Artsruni.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Movsēs Khorenats'i reports that the traitor Mehruzhan Artsruni ordered the wives of Armenian nobles gibbeted.<sup>29</sup> Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts'i similarly dismisses the tortures of the martyr Sandukht, reporting only that she was put to death "...by means of torments and

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<sup>24</sup> Agat'angeghos § 198, p. 205.

<sup>25</sup> Agat'angeghos § 208, p. 215.

<sup>26</sup> Agat'angeghos § 208, p. 215.

<sup>27</sup> BP IV.lix, p. 179.

<sup>28</sup> TA I.10, pp. 127-128.

<sup>29</sup> MX III.36, p. 291.



the sword....”<sup>30</sup> Ukhtanēs of Sebastia remarks only in generic language that she was murdered by her father.<sup>31</sup> Further, Ukhtanēs relates perplexingly little of the suffering endured by the Gayianeank‘, summarizing only that they “...were tortured and murdered....”<sup>32</sup> Ukhtanēs, however, applies considerable detail—in suspicious contrast to his dismissals of Sandukht and the Gayianeank‘—to the martyrdom of St. Shushanik:

First, they dragged her in the streets and along the roads, beating her body with clubs and injuring her face and chin so severely that she was unable to see anything for many days, due to the loss of her eyesight. Then they bound her with fetters and threw her in prison where a terrible stench and humidity predominated. I am not even mentioning the sufferings she endured, caused by the fleas and the worms of which reference is made in her history.<sup>33</sup>

Curiously, Ukhtanēs neglects the salacious tortures of P‘arandzem and the Gayianeank‘ to attend more precisely to those of the lesser-attested St. Shushanik, perhaps so as to avert the impropriety of the former. In the process, Ukhtanēs capitalizes on the opportunity to exalt the fifth-century saint—an exemplar of Armenian female piety—against her heathen husband, a Persian who in his apostasy persecutes his virtuous wife. It is for this reason that Shushanik, a dynast of the illustrious Mamikonean clan celebrated for its noble defense of the Armenian nation against Persian irredentism, presents as so revered a figure to Armenian nationhood and its national church. She is, nevertheless, omitted from the accounts of Ukhtanēs’s predecessors, indicating her subordination in sanctity to the Gayianeank‘ and in punishment to P‘arandzem. The tortures of St. Shushanik present as comparatively benign by contrast to those effected upon

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<sup>30</sup> YD VII, p. 78.

<sup>31</sup> Ukhtanēs I.40, p. 51.

<sup>32</sup> Ukhtanēs I.64, p. 80.

<sup>33</sup> Ukhtanēs II.67, pp. 128-129.

P'arandzem and upon the Hrip'simēan martyrs. She is not sexually violated, nor is any such attempt even cited by Ukhtanēs. No mention is made of her physical beauty; the same literary restraint is universally applied to descriptions of the female martyrs Sandukht and Hamazaspuhi, unlike those of Hrip'simē and P'arandzem as well as to other pious (though not canonized) women of Armenian noble families.

Amid a literary culture otherwise characterized by a puritanical refusal to gaze upon women's bodies, the most graphic of deaths befall the two women of most beauteous repute. Hrip'simē, in this way, functions as an archetype of the beautiful and virtuous woman (explored previously in chapter III), the savagery of whose demise accords to the degree of her beauty. By contrast, P'arandzem conforms to this archetype only in her purported beauty. Her actions precipitate her most gruesome and ignominious demise, and a singly sexual one at that. She is, thus, doubly punished: primarily for her marital and maternal malfeasance, and secondarily for so recklessly abusing the remarkable beauty bestowed upon her. Armenian outrage at the corruption of beautiful women finds precedent in the martyrdom of Hrip'simē, wherein King Trdat laments the destruction not of Hrip'simē herself but, rather, of her beauty. Trdat holds responsible for this loss the abbess Gayianē, who had encouraged Hrip'simē to persevere in her resistance against the heathen king which eventuated in his command to execute the pious maiden. In retaliation, Trdat orders that Gayianē "...be put to death, since she had dared to corrupt with her harmful advice her who had the beauty of the gods among mankind. And her advice had displeased the gods, who had given that girl such beauty, therefore they should torture her to death."<sup>34</sup> In much the same fashion, P'arandzem

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<sup>34</sup> Agat'angeghos § 205, p. 213.

disrupts expectations of female beauty, meriting an especially ignoble death. In its fifth-century textual assessment, her beauty is squandered not in resistance but in malevolence. That both sinner and saint—respectively, P‘arandzem and Hrip‘simē—experience the most graphic and voyeuristic violence of the Armenian literary canon foregrounds the correlation between their equal renown as visually arousing. This dichotomy emerges, additionally, between the two sole acts of sodomy in the Armenian record. Both sinner and saint—that is, Pap and Gregory—receive equally the same unique torment, and both such instances appear in the same fifth-century texts that express this very sinner-saint dichotomy between Hrip‘simē and P‘arandzem. This dichotomy, then, perceptible across the *History of Agat‘angeghos* and the *Buzandaran Patmut‘iwnk‘*, manifests in the literary sexualization of its victims and intimates both the presence and absence of moral virtue as requisite for receipt of penetration. Quite conceivably, the compiler of the *Buzandaran* consciously draws upon this material from Agat‘angeghos—with whose text the compiler would certainly have been acquainted—and alludes to this duality in his own text as a latent reference detectable to an audience conversant in an established literary tradition. The duality itself may be rooted in a hagiographical or other literary source predating written Armenian – if so, one likely original in Greek or Syriac. More suspicious is the abrupt abandonment of this literary motif by Armenian writers of later centuries and their disinterest in advancing the trope, which stagnated in confinement to texts of the fifth century.

No other woman in the corpus of medieval Armenian literature is described to parallel the aesthetic value of Hrip‘simē or P‘arandzem. The disclaimer of extenuating beauty perhaps permits these auteurs a level of discretionary voyeurism with which to

disclose these women's scandalizing deaths, the exceptionality of female beauty excusing the writers' inability to contain their creative enthusiasm. Not even Semiramis, arguably presented as more dissolute and depraved than P'arandzem due her ethnic alterity, experiences so gruesome a demise, nor is she depicted as optically pleasant. Strikingly, her physical appearance is never addressed in any of the texts under examination – not even disparagingly. This is unusual for so universally maligned a character in Armenian literature, who would ordinarily acquire an ascription of visual unpleasantness correspondent to her iniquity represented generally as obesity, hirsutism, or depth of complexion. Beauty, then, appears to incur violence – a theme that transcends boundaries of gender to apply equivalently to men and women. This theme manifests in the demise of King Ara as well, whose physical beauty propels the invasion which precipitates his inadvertent death. Ara in this way parallels Hrip'simē – piously virtuous, aesthetically beautiful, and martyred at enemy hands in righteous conviction (Hrip'simē to Christ, Ara to nation – both of which preserve and circuitously reify Armenian identity). P'arandzem is, thus, an anomaly amid the trope in that it is her own behavior—and not that of an admirer—that occasions her death. Irrespective of the manifold variations in which the premise appears, there emerges unequivocally in the culture of medieval Armenian literature a complex entanglement of explicit violence, moral virtue, aesthetic beauty, and the anathema of addressing women's bodies.

Ghewond documents that women were “beaten with whips” by invading Arabs, and in a subsequent episode attests that the Arabs, to stave off famine, even killed and cannibalized their own servants and concubines.<sup>35</sup> Robert Thomson notes that this item is

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<sup>35</sup> Ghewond 3, p. 51; Ghewond 20, p. 112.

duplicated in the *History of the Anonymous Story-Teller*, though the latter does not distinguish the gendered functions of those cannibalized: “When the ships went there, they found about thirty persons, because they had sacrificed and eaten twenty of their slaves, and thereby survived.”<sup>36</sup>

Decisively the most frequent method of violence attested against women in the Armenian chronicles relates to their children, and is more aptly characterized as reproductive than sexual violence. Beginning with the arrival of the Arabs, Armenian sources document the bisection of pregnant women by Islamic belligerents. Ghewond reports as early as the eighth century that the soldiers of the caliph Marwan “cut the pregnant women in half.”<sup>37</sup> Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i writes in the eleventh century of Arab soldiers: “...the pregnant women they split in two ... and the young women they led away into captivity.”<sup>38</sup> The Pseudo-Ḥovhannēs refers in the tenth century to an Armenian bishop “...whose mother had been split open...” though does not account further for her demise.<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps the most horrific of these maternal tribulations date to the tenth century, from which both Ḥovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i and Ukhtanēs of Sebastia report that amid the famines that befell the Armenians during the Arab encroachments, mothers cooked and cannibalized their own infant children.<sup>40</sup> Ḥovhannēs further expounds that in addition, many would kill and cannibalize their friends and compatriots: “...certain mothers prepared meals for themselves out of the corpses of their famine-stricken

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<sup>36</sup> AST 85, p. 195.

<sup>37</sup> Ghewond 25, p. 116.

<sup>38</sup> ST II.4, p. 192.

<sup>39</sup> Ps. Y. VI, p. 129.

<sup>40</sup> YD LIII, p. 188; Ukhtanēs II.14, p. 59.

children. Others killed their friends treacherously in the likeness of sheep taken to be slaughtered and prepared meals for themselves. ... For merciful women cooked their children with their own hands, and provided food for themselves.”<sup>41</sup> This echoes similar testimony of necrophagy by Movsēs Daskhurants‘i: “I heard the following from reliable men: ‘We saw some people eat the limbs of dead folk...’”<sup>42</sup>

Aristakēs Lastiverts‘i documents particularly violent treatment of Armenian infants by the advancing Seljuqs, frequently citing that they would thrash the infants against rocks or otherwise bludgeon, drown, crush, or impale them. One particularly graphic scene recorded in his text reads as follows: “Of the suckling babes, some were torn from their mothers' embrace and hurled against the rocks, while others were pierced by lances in their mothers' arms, such that the mothers' milk mingled with the babies' blood. Yet others were thrown down at crossroads, trampled under horses' hooves, and they died, every one.”<sup>43</sup> The author later laments that in terror of such fates befitting their children, expectant mothers voluntarily terminated their pregnancies, presenting the first documentation of voluntary abortion in the Armenian historical record.<sup>44</sup> The methods by which these women terminated their pregnancies have been explored in preceding chapters.

### Rape

Unlike neighboring hagiographical traditions, Armenian narratology does not permit defilement of a holy woman set to text. In fact, nowhere in the canon of Armenian historical writing of the fifth to eleventh centuries does such an act appear – the bodies of

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<sup>41</sup> YD LIII, p. 188.

<sup>42</sup> MD II.15, p. 75.

<sup>43</sup> AL II, p. 14.

<sup>44</sup> AL XI, p. 74.

female martyrs remain sexually intact without exception throughout the entire genre, likely so as not to arouse suspicion regarding their purity (both corporal and spiritual). These women become, narratively, virilized by Christ (as explored in chapter II) to such an extent that they are easily able to overpower their lustful attackers—whose physical strength is emphatically pronounced—in combat. Underlying this concept is the implication that a woman’s sexual purity derives less from intention than from its successful preservation; a forcible sex act is considered, irrespective of any effort exerted toward resistance, essentially polluting. This automatic contamination evidently does not, however, apply to the sons born of the Gregorid line, whose repentance is accepted *post facto*.

Female martyrs of the Armenian tradition are, despite the most valiant attempts by the most athletic and able of aggressors, never penetrated sexually amid their torments. Purity constitutes so integral an element of the female martyr archetype that not one of them is violated in this way – their tenacious resistance of even the most vigorous advances codes them as essentially and inviolably pure; their virginity physically cannot be compromised by any Earthly force. Each of Armenia’s textually celebrated female martyrs retains her virginity and ascends to martyrdom intact and unblemished. By contrast, unsanctified women—those who exhibit few virtues or perhaps even infract against established expectations of femininity—become vulnerable to sexual defilement. The voyeuristic male gaze so ubiquitous to other hagiographical traditions is eluded by the Armenians, whose female martyrs are never raped or otherwise sexually violated for

the erotic stimulation of the male reader.<sup>45</sup> Martyred women in the Armenian tradition are not once sexualized in text, nor literarily gazed upon as erotic objects excepting exclusively P‘arandzem, who receives not a martyr’s death but a conversely inglorious one commensurate with her narrative malignment. Even her extraordinarily violent death by sexual assault is not conveyed in voyeuristic detail but, rather, measured narrative removal. An argument could be advanced that Hrip‘simē is similarly objectified within the eroticizing discourse of Armenian literature’s inescapable male gaze. Hrip‘simē, however, surmounts through her righteousness the lechery of both her imperious assailant and that of the aroused reader by the narrative’s conclusion, which reconstitutes her from eroticized object and icon of visual pleasure into pious virgin whose moral (and necessarily corporal) virtue qualifies her for the honor of martyrdom.

Rape as a weapon of conquest is well documented in the Armenian histories, most graphically in texts dating to the fifth century. The *Buzandaran* vividly documents the execution of P‘arandzem, by that time queen of Armenia, at the hands of the Persian king Shapuh: “And he ordered a device for debauchery erected in the public-square and had the woman thrown into it. And he delivered Queen P‘aranjem to foul and beastly copulation. And in this fashion they killed P‘aranjem the queen.”<sup>46</sup> P‘arandzem is not accorded the literary dignity of a nondescript demise. She is raped to death by an unspecified number of attackers. The public nature of her execution additionally alludes to a national catharsis on the part of the Armenians. The woman inculpated in the most obscene scandals of the royal Arshakuni house (at this time sovereign monarchs and *de*

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<sup>45</sup> For the male gaze and eroticization of female martyrdom in western Christianity, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1990).

<sup>46</sup> BP IV.lv, p. 176.



*facto* representatives of the Armenian people) is surrendered to the enemy, not only executed but publicly and sexually humiliated in the process. The Armenian nation is thus semiotically cleansed of her sins, its atonement received through her sacrifice. Finally, there appears a polemicized aspect to her death in that it parallels the actions wrought upon her child, Pap, through her own complicity with the demonic. That P'arandzem and the son she has bedeviled are the only two named figures in the entirety of this canon to be sexually penetrated, and whose penetrations are graphically documented in text, must not be dismissed. This dissertation submits the debatable position that the rectal penetration of St. Gregory by foreign object (to be discussed below) was not inherently sexual as were the experiences of Pap and P'arandzem.

The preservation of P'arandzem's ignominious death for posterity in the Armenian record derives potentially from several motivations: A collective renunciation of P'arandzem as queen and kin by the Armenians due the infamy of her son's crime and the culpability imposed upon her for his malevolence; A textual maneuver to further portray the Persians as sexually deviant; Or perhaps to unambiguously distinguish P'arandzem from her more righteous archetypal analogues. In contrast to those martyred, whose bodies are preserved from the sexual attacks of foreign monarchs, P'arandzem is delivered to death at the hands of the heretical Persian king and in a state of sexual compromise unbecoming righteous women. While Hrip'simē and her companions are shielded from sexual violation through the supernatural intervention of Christ, their moral virtue demonstrably meriting such protection, penetration becomes the very vehicle of P'arandzem's destruction. Her nefarious actions have relieved her of the insulation of faith, exposing her to destruction of the same order from which the Gayianeank' stand

defended through Christ. P'arandzem has, as the compiler illuminates, invited her ruination upon herself through a slew of her transgressions: her initial rejection of the king due his aesthetic unattractiveness and her revulsion at his appearance (telegraphing her contravention of circumscribed femininity), the subsequent murder of her rival—a Greek wife taken by King Arshak following his marriage to P'arandzem—and, finally, her collusion with demons and the dedication of her son, heir to the Armenian throne (and, thus, personification of Armenian nationhood), thereto. Her subversion of the marital covenant and surrender of the infant Pap substantiate her inaptitude as both woman and sovereign, presenting as dereliction of domesticity, of church, and of nation.

Also made manifest in this gruesome account of P'arandzem's death is an unmitigated abhorrence of sexuality in all domains. This is not limited to the *Buzandaran*: not once in the seven centuries under investigation is the act of intercourse connoted positively. Moreover, literary accounts of sex acts are, with the singular exception of the *Buzandaran*, entirely absent from Armenian literature through the Bagratuni Kingdom. While rape by foreign invader is often cited as a tactic of military conquest, no other named figure is written to engage—consensually or otherwise—in any coital act. Further, P'arandzem is the only named figure in medieval Armenian literature whose death is precipitated directly by a sexual assault, and the only documented and identified woman who fails to repel the sexual trespasses of any aggressor, be he foreign or native. The failure of P'arandzem to resist the assault of a foreign king (and, potentially, a company of participants in the carnage) translates directly into her unworthiness of preservation therefrom and inversely parallels her incapacity to resist the sacrilege of occultism for personal and political advancement – the latter corruption

promoting her and the former reactively extinguishing her. P‘arandzem is thus ejected from the Armenian nation both in spirit and in body.

The insinuation upon which these portrayals are constructed is that sex and sexuality are innately violent and destructive. The only other suggestions of intercourse are those documenting the conception of St. Gregory and the descendants in his family line. These passages deign not to acknowledge the coital act itself but evasively euphemize that his mother “conceived.” A tradition developed among medieval Armenian historians to locate the conception of St. Gregory upon sacred ground, absolving the sexual act of its inherent sin and thereby rendering it the only sanctioned sex act in any medieval Armenian text. Movsēs Khorenats‘i writes in the fifth century that Anak, the father of Gregory, “...happened to spend the night by the grave of the holy apostle, [which was] under the innermost bed of his tent. And there they say the mother of our holy and great Illuminator conceived.”<sup>47</sup> The detail is repeated in the tenth century by Ȩovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i: “Through divine ordinance the site of his camp happened to be located on the grave of the holy apostle [which was] in the nuptial chamber of the tent. It is said that Saint Grigor’s mother conceived him at this place.”<sup>48</sup> It is additionally present in that of the Pseudo-Ȩovhannēs Mamikonean, who makes explicit the connection between the legacy of Thaddeus and the assignment of the newly conceived Gregory: “Now [some] say that when Anak was coming from Persia, in the *gawar* of Artaz, at the tomb of the holy apostle, T‘adēos, the conception of [Anak’s son],

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<sup>47</sup> MX II.74, pp. 217-218.

<sup>48</sup> YD VIII, p. 79.

the holy Grigor had occurred, so that Grigor would be the successor to his [T‘adēos’] work.”<sup>49</sup>

That sexual intercourse atop a hallowed gravesite would imbue the resulting progeny with inborn holiness, or that a procreative act over the remains of the anointed would facilitate the conception of a righteous child destined for patriarchal eminence, accords to the values of a medieval Christian sensibility. Proximity to or contact with the relics of saints operates at a foundational level throughout several origin narratives of revered and canonized Armenian figures, as well as among those of neighboring Christian cultures. The conception of the infant Gregory over the grave of Thaddeus additionally draws a direct line of descent through the apostolic and Gregorid lines, connecting the legacy of the apostle Thaddeus, who introduced Christianity to Armenia, to the very provenance of Armenia’s illuminator.<sup>50</sup> The fusion of the two lines, then, bequeaths the mantle of patrimonial authority from Thaddeus to Gregory. Insinuated here is that the Illumination of Armenia is the inheritance of St. Gregory and his descendants. The legitimacy of the Gregorid line as rightful hereditary guardians of the Armenian Church is then reified through the explication that the line itself was instantiated in taction with the relics of the faith-bearing apostle.

More peculiar is the implication that a sex act upon the site of a grave—especially that of a sanctified individual, and one so exalted as the very bringer of Christianity to Armenia—would not constitute an act of blasphemy. That coitus even within the marital context does not desecrate the grave over which it is performed—especially considering

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<sup>49</sup> Ps. Y. III, p. 71.

<sup>50</sup> I am grateful to my friend and colleague Dr. Daniel Kelly for identifying this connection.

the Armenians' pervasive censure of sex even within the lawful confines of consecrated marriage—appears unique to those conceived of the Gregorid line. The house of Gregory, then, has evidently received a degree of narratological immunity, due its illustrious progeny, from the consequences of sexuality so liberally assigned to other characters of medieval Armenian literature. That each of these conceptions occurs after only a singular act of coition reasserts the conjugal union not a celebrated aspect of marital enjoinder, as in surrounding cultures, but an Earthly chore to be begrudgingly fulfilled. An outwardly professed reluctance toward the task presents as a signal of virtue, and necessarily accompanies the act as a performance of piety. The noisome obligation of intercourse can be, thus, immediately discontinued, much to the relief of the virtuous spouse repulsed by its primitive carnality, following impregnation. Each generation of Gregorid sons birthed precedes the marital estrangement of its begetters, allowing each of the sequential couples the mercy of expeditious release from their conjugal burden. All other mentions of penetration are invariably destructive and occur tangentially to invasion, destruction, and slaughter.

Returning to the grisly fate of P'arandzem, the compiler insists that the Persian encroachers to Armenia exacted such humiliations as punitive rape not only to advance their conquest but, moreover, to sate the impulses of their contempt for the Armenians, declaring that Shapuh "...wished to insult the race of the realm and kingdom of Armenia...."<sup>51</sup> It seems this manner of execution is ceremonially reserved for P'arandzem due her identification as both sovereign and woman, made vulnerable both by her misdeeds and, more directly, in the absence of her husband. The nondescript mass

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<sup>51</sup> BP IV.lv, p. 176.

of generalized women, along with the men, Shapuh dispatches in a more uniform manner that generates substantially less spectacle: “Then Sapuh king of Persia ordered all the adult men trampled by elephants, and all the women and children impaled on carriage-poles.”<sup>52</sup> Movsēs Khorenats‘i, who produced his text concurrently to the *Buzandaran*, does not acknowledge this method of extermination. Rather, he tempers its sensationalism by omitting the specificity of P‘arandzem’s death in any such “device,” (rendered from *մեքանիզմ*, “mechanism,” in the *Buzandaran*) incorporating the death of P‘arandzem into that of the generic mass of women. Movsēs effectively de-sexualizes the death of P‘arandzem in this way, sanitizing the narrative provided in the *Buzandaran* and deflecting the attention of the reader from P‘arandzem’s disgrace to the savagery of the Persians: “Taking them captive with the treasures and Queen P‘arandzem they brought them to Assyria. And there they massacred them by impaling them on wagon poles.”<sup>53</sup> In the eleventh century, Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i reports that P‘arandzem was killed not by King Shapuh but, rather, by the notorious Armenian defector Meruzhan Artsruni. Step‘anos follows Movsēs in excluding the account of P‘arandzem’s death by rape, substituting the odious details contained in the *Buzandaran* with the conjecture of mechanical impalement offered by Movsēs: “And Meružan besieged the fortress of Artagers; he seized it and impaled P‘aranjēm, according to the Persian custom, between the shaft of a wagon.”<sup>54</sup> The intertextual transformation of this item perhaps provokes inquiry about the comfort of this auctorial cohort writ large to entertain such graphic imagery applied to an Armenian noblewoman, disgraced though she may be.

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<sup>52</sup> BP IV.lviii, p. 178.

<sup>53</sup> MX III.35, p. 289.

<sup>54</sup> ST II.1, p. 140.

Curiously, the ethnoreligious exogenous are not the exclusive executors of sexual violence toward Armenian women in the *Buzandaran*, as its most vehemently vilified kinsman is depicted commanding that precisely such atrocities be carried out against assemblages of sequestered Armenian virgins. Further expounding upon the iniquity of St. Nersēs's assassin—the narrative humiliation of Pap being a favored device of medieval Armenian traditors, particularly within the *Buzandaran*—the compiler documents the destruction of the great patriarch's legacy, including the demolition of convents (*լիւսսսսսսսսսսս*) and the detainment of the virgins dwelling therein so that they might be delivered into “foul intercourse” (*խսսնսսլիւթիւն*).<sup>55</sup> On the translation of this term, David Zakarian suggests forcible marriage rather than orgiastic violence (which a literal reading may intimate) or sex trafficking (as suggested by Nina Garsoïan), citing the observation that the preponderance of women residing in these monastic complexes would have been of necessarily noble station in order to access these spaces, their elevated status precluding the judicial administration of any such obscenity as sexual punishment or trafficking.<sup>56</sup> The Shahapivan Canons substantiate this estimation, the fifth-century legal code characteristically affording aristocrats immunity from the more extreme methods of justice routinely applied to criminals of common station, assigned instead lesser penalties of more tolerable quality – corporal violence toward the princely class is, without exception, decisively prohibited. Zakarian therefore concurs with Pogossian's reading of the passage (which considers linguistic parallels with Agat'angeghos), both at variance with Nina Garsoïan's contention that these celibate

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<sup>55</sup> BP V.xxxi, p. 211.

<sup>56</sup> Zakarian, *Women, Too, Were Blessed*, 118; Nina G. Garsoïan, “Introduction to the Problem of Early Armenian Monasticism,” *Revue des Études Arméniennes* 30 (2007): 209.

women were, in Pap's cruel and ironic vindication, trafficked into prostitution.<sup>57</sup> The original text supplies only that these virgins were subjected to a vulgar and obscene “mixing” or “coupling” (*խառնակցութիւն*) and provides no further context for its interpretation.<sup>58</sup> This dissertation, then, does not assume a scholarly position in agreement with any of the academic assessments at issue, finding each of them congruently valid. That Pap remains the most demonized of native characters in the Armenian canon, a pattern derived from his notorious assassination of St. Nersēs, coheres across the genre of Armenian historical writing. More astonishing, in general, is the depiction of any endogenous kinsman—and one of Armenia's celebrated royal aristocracy at that—ordering so obscene a violation of Armenian collective ethics, sexual and corporal inviolacy standing paramount among its values. This indicates an estimation of Pap as not only fundamentally defective of moral character but, further, characterologically extrinsic to the Armenian nation as an ethnonational corpus united by a common morality.

The *Buzandaran* continues to detail the manner in which Shapuh degraded the Armenian women as a means of national humiliation:

As for the wives of the *azats* and *naxarars* who had fled, he ordered them brought to the racecourse of the city of Zarehawan. And he ordered all these noblewomen stripped naked and seated here and there on the racecourse. And King Šapuh himself rode out on horseback, galloped among the women, and took for himself one by one whichever of them caught his eye for foul copulation. For his tent had been erected near the racecourse [and] he entered into it to perform his iniquitous acts. And he treated the women in this fashion for many days.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Pogossian, “Female Asceticism,” 188-189; Nina G. Garsoïan, “Introduction to the Problem,” 209.

<sup>58</sup> See BP V.xxxi in MH vol. 1, p. 399.

<sup>59</sup> BP IV.lviii, p. 178.



Narrative parallels will be later observed in the reports of similar abuses at the hands of Muslim invaders. Recollecting the initial series of Islamic invasions, Ghewond writes of Arab soldiers "...torturing the men for exaction of taxes, and trying to rape the women in a most detestable and obscene manner, in accordance with their iniquity."<sup>60</sup> In a later chapter, the same author laments the fate of defiled virgins—whose assaults he considers especially tragic, their cherished purity ravaged by the opponents to Christianity—during the caliphate of Marwan: "Likewise, the girls who knew not the beds of male [sic] were taken into captivity with the rest of the mixed mob."<sup>61</sup> Writing in the late eleventh century, Aristakēs Lastiverts'i will similarly grieve the destruction of virginal purity, this time at the hands of the Seljuq Turks: "Virgins fell dishonored, newly-married women were separated from their men and led into slavery."<sup>62</sup> That these young women are deprived of their husbands—which medieval Armenian texts as saliently as the sixth-century annals of Ghazar and Eghishē, among others, regard as the most dire plight to befall a woman—evokes a sympathetic affect. Aristakēs continues to ruminate upon this theme throughout his text, mourning later the "...fresh and prosperous virgins and women fallen in disgrace, led away into slavery on foot."<sup>63</sup> In a later chapter, he refers again to the motif, citing that amid a subsequent Seljuq invasion "...the attractive women and girls who had been reared in comfort were disgraced."<sup>64</sup>

Rape as an instrument to attack paternal integrity appears insinuated in two additional contexts. The apostate Meruzhan Artsruni is quoted in the *Buzandaran*

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<sup>60</sup> Ghewond 5, p. 56.

<sup>61</sup> Ghewond 25, p. 116.

<sup>62</sup> AL XVI, p. 96.

<sup>63</sup> AL XII, p. 85.

<sup>64</sup> AL XXI, p. 138.

boasting to his troops, “Tomorrow at this time Manuēl will be captured, chained, and thrown down by me, and his wife Vardanojš will be dishonored in front of him.”<sup>65</sup> That the wife of his enemy would be “dishonored” before him suggests a violation of a sexual nature will ensue, and that the affront to Manuēl’s wife will cause him social and patrilineal damage concomitantly (and correspondently) to his military defeat. The classical Armenian from which “dishonored” (*խայտառնուկեաց*) is rendered does not translate into any particular act or genre of offense. As in English, the word can convey dishonor of multifarious connotations, including but not limited to sexual vitiation. The term may allude to implicitly sexual degradation by non-penetrative act or to generalized violence of an entirely non-sexual nature. Similarly, according to the tenth-century Pseudo-Hovhannēs, Vahan Mamikonean taunts his Persian opponent Vakhtang with an inferential threat of sexual violence against the latter’s wife: “If you have come to make peace, why have you brought your wife with you? Do you seek sons from our loins?”<sup>66</sup> Indicated once again is the entanglement of female purity and domestic integrity (“domestic” applying here both to familial and national units), any sexual violation of women menacing genetic dilution as well as the implied vandalism or expropriation of female property.

Of the doctrinal assessment of rape, Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i registers several qualifying considerations. Dawit‘ decrees that if a woman is raped by a “Kurd” or a “Sodomite,” she herself is to be considered “innocent.”<sup>67</sup> She must, however, “for the sake of purity,” repent for an interval of three years.<sup>68</sup> Dawit‘ adjudges coequally the

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<sup>65</sup> BP V.xliii, p. 225.

<sup>66</sup> Ps. Y. p. 131.

<sup>67</sup> DG 18, p. 17.

<sup>68</sup> DG 18, p. 17.

sexual coercion of a servant by his or her master: "...if a maidservant or a manservant [is violated] by their master, they are innocent."<sup>69</sup> The same duration of repentance is to be imposed. Finally, this item reveals a value perhaps unique in its dispensation of liability – the enhanced accountability of the male offender. Rather than assign culpability to the female party for inflaming the sexual instincts of her attacker, Dawit‘—citing anatomical and perhaps identifiably medical reasoning—determines that a male attacker must be held to greater account due the mechanical logistics of the sexual act: "...a man is considered more [culpable] than a woman, for a man has the means of freeing himself."<sup>70</sup> Dawit‘ again demonstrates awareness of the reproductive process and its anatomical mechanisms in a way that visibly opposes him to his counterparts in the *vardapet* class. This appears to be the first instance in the Armenian record of such an idea, the *Anonymous Story-Teller*’s casual dismissal of the deacon Derēn Artsruni’s transgression providing a notable contrast.

### Sodomy

Armenian texts of this period refer copiously to rectal penetration, though only two figures in the entirety of the literature under investigation are depicted amidst being actively sodomized. All other such references contain not narrated episodes but, rather, acute condemnations against the act whether legislative or instructive. Notably, the canon laws issued by St. Nersēs expressly prohibit “sodomy and effeminacy.”<sup>71</sup> The circumstances that characterize the two documented sodomies diverge at polar extremes

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<sup>69</sup> DG 18, p. 17.

<sup>70</sup> DG 18, p. 17.

<sup>71</sup> BP IV.iv, p. 114; lit. *Չարուազիտույթիւնս և զիգույթիւնս*, roughly “knowledge of a man and womanliness,” their textual adjacency implying an act homosexual in nature – see BP IV.iv in MH vol. 1, p. 316.

from one another: the first incident is inflicted forcibly in persecution, the second initiated voluntarily for pleasure. The two recipients, further, are characterologically diametrical: one a sinner, the other a saint – quite literally.

The earliest account of sodomy in the Armenian record appears amid the martyrdom of St. Gregory as preserved in the *History of Agat'angeghos*, whose text recounts the conversion narrative of the Armenians to Christianity. Enumerating the tortures inflicted upon Gregory, Agat'angeghos writes: “The king, even more incensed, ordered his feet to be bound with cords of wineskins and him to be hung upside down. And he had a funnel placed in his bottom and had water poured from a wine-skin into his belly.”<sup>72</sup> The penetration of St. Gregory by foreign object, while not explicitly commensurate with sodomy to the Biblical comprehension that entails the definitional elements of hedonic pleasure, sexual gratification, and penetration by incarnate phallus rather than by insentient device, is nevertheless designed to ridicule his Christian religion whose scriptures explicitly proscribe anal intercourse. The method effects both sexual and internal discomfort as one phase in a protracted process by which Gregory's Zoroastrian torturers distend his body, at varied orifices, with a miscellany of liquids both caustic and benign. Prior to anal insertion of the funnel with its aqueous contents, Gregory is subjected to nasal insertion of another device containing a decidedly more noxious substance: “And he ordered salt and borax and rough vinegar to be brought, and for him to be turned on his back, his head to be placed in a carpenter's vice, and a reed tube to be put in his nose, and this liquid to be poured down his nose.”<sup>73</sup> Echoes of this

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<sup>72</sup> Agat'angeghos § 109, p. 123.

<sup>73</sup> Agat'angeghos § 106, p. 121.

technique appear in the earlier portion of the text attributed to Movsēs Daskhurants‘i, dated approximately to the seventh or eighth century, in which the Aghuan King Vach‘agan persecutes the heretical cult of the “finger cutters” as follows: “He even commanded that a mixture of scalding vinegar and borax be poured into their ears until their eyes turned white like the moon.”<sup>74</sup>

That only water was funneled into the rectum—by contrast to the nasal infusion of borax—may indicate advanced medical knowledge. The large intestine being highly absorbent, exponentially more efficient is to administer fluids rectally than by mouth. Substances introduced directly to the colon via the rectum will enter the bloodstream far more rapidly than those ingested orally, which are then routed to the stomach for digestion before entering the porous large intestine. Rectal administration of borax—if the substance attested is indeed that understood to comprise modern borax, or sodium tetraborate—would have caused immediate organ failure followed swiftly by death. Nasal infusion of the compound, however, would have initiated organ damage of a more protracted progression (in addition to instantaneous nasal irritation and efficacious discomfort) that would enable Gregory’s captors to prolong his torture. If indeed the purpose was to torture rather than to kill Gregory, intranasal entry of the substance would have been preferable to rectal insertion, which would almost certainly induce instant death. Extant medical sources do not clarify whether this was known to medieval practitioners. Technical awareness of these dynamics, however, is irrelevant. Across

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<sup>74</sup> MD I.18, p. 23.

centuries of its observed application, this physiological mechanism would have become apparent in practice if not in theory.

Intriguingly, the only martyr corporally penetrated in the historical text of Agat'angeghos is not a woman, but a man – further evidencing an impulsion to preserve the inviolability of sanctified women in medieval Armenian cognizance. It is, thus, not Hrip'simē but Gregory who is penetratively sacrificed to a medieval Armenian somatology that insists upon the sexual depravity of its suzerains. Accounting, however, for the totality of Gregory's tortures, the rectal insertion of a funnel does not appear necessarily sexual (albeit deliberately degrading). As an exposed orifice, the rectal cavity invites violation just as does any other (as this chapter will continue to substantiate). The nasal, vaginal, otic, and oral cavities are similarly transgressed in texts of persecution, and so intrusion of the rectum need not carry any inordinate sexual connotation not inherent to that of other bodily orifices. Perplexingly, tortures of this modality are never again attested by an Armenian text during the dynastic period.

By contrast, the second incidence of sodomy in medieval Armenian literature unequivocally does address anal penetration of a sexual nature, and concerns the iniquitous King Pap, son of the now-scandalized P'arandzem, whom the *Buzandaran* and others profess ample motivation to malign. His notoriety derives primarily from his having assassinated Armenia's beloved patriarch Nersēs, who inscribed the canons for the very values so stridently espoused in Armenian literature, by poisoning. P'arandzem, rhetorically chastised by the compiler for her rejection of King Arshak, is written to have committed her son at birth to demonic forces. The text illustrates the influence of these

demons over Pap from childhood, simultaneously evincing the iniquity of both the impudent P‘arandzem and her sacrificed son:

Pap, the son of Aršak, was born from P‘aranjem of Siwnik‘, who had been the wife of Gnel whom King Aršak had killed and taken his wife P‘aranjem as his own wife. And she bore him a son, who was named Pap. And when his mother gave birth to him she consecrated him to the *dews* since she was an unrighteous person who had no fear of God. And many *dews* dwelt in the child and governed him according to their will.<sup>75</sup>

As a result of his demonic contamination at the hands of his mother, Pap develops into a young man governed by his sexual depredations instead of the virtues incumbent upon virtuous Armenian mothers to instill (as explored in chapter II): “He was nurtured, grew, and committed [many] sins: fornication, foul acts, sodomy, bestiality, and abominable turpitude, but above all else, sodomy. He turned himself into a woman for other men, and wallowed in filth in this manner.”<sup>76</sup> It is significant that the text identifies sodomy as the foremost of Pap’s enumerated sins, suggesting a venality of anal sexual contact surpassing that even of heterosexual fornication. It is, according to the values proposed by the compiler, categorically more transgressive to engage in anal intercourse than in extramarital relations of any other quality. This attitude will evidently vanish from Armenian corporal philosophy by the time of Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i, who codifies in his twelfth-century reference text a largely inverted morality in which it is not the gender

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<sup>75</sup> BP IV.xliv, p. 164.

<sup>76</sup> BP IV.xliv, pp. 164-165; The term Garsoïan renders as “sodomy” is the more specific *արոնագիտություն*, which translates literally to “knowledge of man,” rather than the more ambiguous *սոդոմ*-, which appears rather referential of the city of Sodom and the generalized moral corruption that it has come to connote for Christian cultures. It appears likely, then, that the compiler intends to communicate the specific act of anal intercourse rather than the more generalized vices of Sodom. Cf. the discussion on this topic in chapter V, note 99, of the present dissertation. The term rendered as “bestiality”—*անասնագիտություն*—translates literally to “knowledge of animals,” which does suggest (as does “knowledge of man”) sexual activity with animal species as opposed to, simply, animalistic behavior – an ambiguity which an English translation may naturally introduce.

arrangement of the participants that warrants penalty but a variety of unrelated factors pertaining to the activity itself committed (discussed previously in chapters IV and V). Furthermore, the compiler's testimony that Pap "turned himself into a woman for other men" reinforces the notion that reception during intercourse is essentially feminine, to the extent that to be penetrated is to be effectively feminized or transfigured (however rhetorically) into a woman and thereby relinquish one's masculinity.<sup>77</sup> Hence, medieval Armenian gender identity is constructed not only from behavioral and aesthetic qualities, as explored in chapter I, but also from one's role in the sexual act. The act of intercourse, then, is as determinant a factor in the assignment of gender as one's phenotypic attributes and moral conduct. While Armenian sexual sensitivities considered more offensive to announce one's more normative aesthetic attraction to feminine features than to overtly appreciate the masculine physique—as argued in chapter I—to be rectally penetrated and, thus, reduced to an effeminate actor far exceeded in gravity the celebration of male beauty.

Contrite and distraught, P'arandzem attempts to intercede and deliver her son from the perdition that she herself has inflicted upon him. Rather than avenge the tribulations that have befallen her—the murder of her husband (the most consequential of traumas for a medieval Armenian woman), the culpability projected upon her thereafter, and her subsequent remarriage to a man whom she finds visually repulsive—the demons to whom she appeals for vengeance have instead defamed her house and forevermore tarnished her bloodline. This miscalculation identifies her not only as an ineffective

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<sup>77</sup> BP IV.xliv, p. 165.



queen but also an incompetent mother –the most egregious contravention to Armenian femininity (as previously submitted in chapter II).

And once when his mother learned about his sodomy and could not tolerate the outrage of this infamy, she told to her son's *senekapet*: 'Whenever he summons those men with whom he is accustomed to perform foul acts, call me in.' And so, when young Pap had already gone to bed and summoned the men to foul acts, his mother came in and seated himself in front of her son. Then the youth began to scream and wail and said to his mother: 'Get up, go away! For I shall die, I shall burn, I shall be consumed, I shall burst, if you do not get up and go from this house!' But his mother said: 'I shall not go out of this house.' But he screamed over and over again and intensified his wailing. And his mother looked and saw with her own eyes white serpents which were wrapped around the feet of the couch [*gahoyk*'] and were twisting themselves over young Pap as he lay there. He remained on the bed wailing and calling to the youths with whom he was accustomed to have intercourse, but his mother understood and remembered those to whom her son had been devoted at birth. She knew that they were the ones who were twisting themselves around her son in the shape of serpents. [And] bursting into tears, she said: 'Woe is me, my son, for you are possessed and I knew it not!' And she rose up and went out, leaving the place to the fulfillment of his desires. In this fashion he was governed by the *dews*, and to such acts did Pap the son of Aršak abandon himself all the days of his life until his [very] death.<sup>78</sup>

Significantly, the employment of the word "abandon" (*niḥnūtkuḥ*) implies a dereliction of somatic discipline in exchange for the sensory pleasures of the temporal – a severe violation of the corporal morality by which Armenian Christianity governs its constituents. The *Buzandaran* later reasserts the iniquities of King Pap and his persistence in debauchery throughout his reign: "And King Pap wallowed in filth—sometimes, becoming a woman for others, he submitted to intercourse, and sometimes he turned others into females and foully copulated as a male, and sometimes he copulated

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<sup>78</sup> BP IV.xliv, p. 165.

with animals. And in this way he was ruled by *dews* who dwelled in him all the days of his life.”<sup>79</sup>

That Pap engages in both the penetrative and the receptive aspects of sodomy offers further evidence of his moral turpitude. He is, as these details elucidate, so indiscriminating in his erotic selections that even animals arouse his appetites. In assembling these particulars, the compiler divests Pap of his humanity and reduces him to the moral capacity of an animal. Pap’s sexual deviancies, then, directly evidence his characterological unfitness to preside over a polity governed by Christian values. Initially condemned by the canon laws of St. Nersēs, bestiality will again fall under the reprimand of Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i in the early twelfth century as inexorably repugnant. Further, the association of humans to animals, amid a context not sexual but transformative, will be maligned in similar terms by Agat‘angeghos, who ridicules the porcine metamorphosis of King Trdat as a similar confiscation of humanity. This the compiler designs to satirize the forfeiture of one’s human responsibilities—those to control the flesh and contain its sinful urges through the disciplined exercise of restraint—as a demotion in both spirit and body.

A specific victim of or participant in sodomy is never again identified in the medieval Armenian record through the eleventh century, though T‘ovma Artsruni alludes to the practice in relation to a group of returned Armenian hostages who had temporarily apostatized during their captivity in Muslim custody. T‘ovma maligns the apostate princes despite their professed reversion to Christianity upon release, chiding their

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<sup>79</sup> BP V.xxii, p. 203.

cowardice and fragility of faith. To further deride them, T‘ovma intimates their engagement in such debaucheries as fornication and homosexuality, which are again connected as they were by the compiler of the *Buzandaran*:

For although they openly came back to the worship of Christ our God, yet they did not carry out the due canonical regulations—not only Ashot but also all the Armenian princes who had returned from captivity. They put aside the cowardice of their apostasy but remained outside the canonical statutes, leading scandalous Christian lives in debauchery and drunkenness, in adultery and lewdness, engaging in revolting and horrible homosexual acts which exceeded the foul bestialities of Jericho and Sodom, man shamelessly lusting for man and piling up infinite flames from heaven that surpass the devastating destruction of the flood. For they were mad for women, copulating with the daughters of Cain, and were destroyed by water; while the men who worked infamous deeds with men were consumed by fire mixed with sulphur, enduring in themselves the token of the eternal fire.<sup>80</sup>

The implication operant to T‘ovma’s rebuke is that even a momentary lapse in their faith, however fleeting, has left the princes vulnerable to carnal temptation—resistible only through the spiritual resilience that they themselves have surrendered—and in a state of perdition from which they could not be redeemed. The association of sexual libertinism with the demonic is made explicit in the example of Pap, and implied in T‘ovma’s suggestion that those afflicted “were destroyed by water” – a property commonly ascribed to demons in early Christian literature, as discussed previously in chapter VI.<sup>81</sup> While the *Buzandaran* testifies that Pap committed such acts under the influence of (and even in participation with) demonic entities, T‘ovma suggests that the

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<sup>80</sup> TA III.18, p. 280 – it appears to be from *սրուսսյղծույթեանքք*, “man filthiness,” that Thomson renders “homosexuality.” This term, however, is not as directly referential of homosexual activity as the more commonly employed *սրուսսյղիտույթիւն*, “knowledge of man;” see TA III.18 in MH vol. 11, pp. 227-228.

<sup>81</sup> TA III.18, p. 280; the aversion of demons to water is frequently correlated to Matthew 12:43 – the association of the malevolent to an absence of water accords to the desert location of early Christianity, wherein potable water would have been scarce and precious, while dry and inhospitable climates inaccessible to water would congruously represent malignancy.

apostate princes, rather, transubstantiated into demons. Further, T'ovma draws a distinction between the demon-possessed men who commit carnal improprieties with women while under demonic influence (or perhaps in a consummate state of demonic transmogrification, as T'ovma implies in stating that these men themselves were “destroyed by water”) and, opposite these, cognizant men who commit sodomy of their own conscious volition (the latter banished in consequence to Hell). Unique to T'ovma's posture is that gendered distinctions between carnal offenses factor into their method of punishment. Both circumstances produce an explicit association of illicit sex to the influence of demons, and these creatures appear to specialize in the persuasion of humans to sexual depravity. In addition, T'ovma's identification of the “daughters of Cain” as the objects of uncontained lust indicates the religious alterity of both these women—genealogically distinct from the line of Noah, from which the Armenians claim ethnic descent—and the incontinent men who impetuously copulate with them, Cain representing to an Armenian sensibility a Biblical transgressor of unrivalled magnitude.

Dawit' Gandzakets'i will in the twelfth century betray, however inadvertently, that the Armenian penitent engaged habitually in digital stimulation of the rectum. This behavior was apparently pervasive enough that an item in Dawit's text is devoted to its counsel.<sup>82</sup> Dawit' will further condemn marital sodomy: “If any in the course of fornication or coition with his wife perform sodomy, he is considered worse than [those who perform it with] men, for the [normal?] satisfaction of his passion was at hand.”<sup>83</sup> To advise his clerical associates and subordinates of the proper rites of atonement for these

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<sup>82</sup> DG 49, p. 38.

<sup>83</sup> DG 52, p. 41.

infractions, Dawit‘ delineates several factors that may mitigate or escalate one’s punishment, opining (as does T‘ovma Artsruni in the above-quoted passage) that in adjudicating the willful commission of sodomy, “...the wife is considered worse on account of her corruption of the [marriage] crown and the desecration of the virtue of cleanliness.”<sup>84</sup> Dawit‘ proposes a spectrum for punishment, which in auxiliary considers whether the act is performed forcibly by an “evil husband” or if either partner is “deceived” into participation.<sup>85</sup>

### Oral Trauma

Oral trauma appears to be, according to the Armenian sources, a favored tactic of the Persians. It figures prominently in accounts of tortures applied to the Armenians—specifically, upon the illustrious among them—by Persian aggressors, and accordingly recedes into literary oblivion after the arrival of the Arabs and the recession of Zoroastrian hegemony in the region. No Armenian record substantiates an Arab exaction of oral trauma. In particular, graphic accounts of dental damage suffuse Armenian testimonies of buccal injury, exposing a preoccupation with the teeth and mouth as a site of received violence. Penal torture by trauma to the mouth first appears amid the martyrdom of the Gayianeank‘ as set by Agat‘ angeghos, its first apparent victim being the abbess Gayianē. Due her verbal encouragement of the martyr Hrip‘simē to persevere in virtuous defense of her virginity against the iniquitous King Trdat, Gayianē is administered repeated strikes to the mouth, resulting in severe dental trauma: “When they realized what advice she was offering, they brought stones and struck her mouth until her

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<sup>84</sup> DG 52, p. 41.

<sup>85</sup> DG 52, p. 41.

teeth were knocked out, and they tried to force her to tell (Rhipsimē) to do the will of the king.”<sup>86</sup>

Defiant, Gayianē continues to embolden her young acolyte. Her disobedience is once again requited at the mouth – the very source of her antagonism. “And when they heard everything that Gaianē had said to her protégée, they took her away from the door. And although they frequently beat her and struck her face with stones, and knocked out her teeth, and broke her jaws, yet she did not change her speech or say anything different to the maiden.”<sup>87</sup> Alluding perhaps to the spiritual fortitude of Hrip‘simē, the *Buzandaran* includes an episode depicting a battle between the Persian king Varazdat and the Armenian *sparapet* Manuēl Mamikonean in which the latter’s teeth are violently ripped out. The text communicates that Varazdat “...drove his lance with all the strength of his arm into the mouth of the commander-in-chief Manuēl. But Manuēl seized the lance, tore off its point, dragged it through his cheek, pulling out many teeth, and wrenched the lance itself from the king.”<sup>88</sup> The sacrifice of Manuēl’s teeth may reference the sufferings endured by Hrip‘simē and her companions, correspondently dental in nature, at the hands of a similarly idolatrous king – each assailant a Persian monarch aggressing to reassert the Zoroastrian alterity upon the newly Christian Armenian nation that has narrowly escaped its orbit.

Buccal injuries sustained by martyrs are not limited to the teeth. Agat‘angeghos informs his reader that Hrip‘simē’s persecutors “...bound her hands behind her back, and tried to pull out her tongue. But she willingly opened her mouth and offered her

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<sup>86</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 184, p. 193.

<sup>87</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 190, p. 197.

<sup>88</sup> BP V.xxxvii, p. 219.

tongue.”<sup>89</sup> Following the execution of Hrip‘simē, the tongues of Gayianē and her acolytes are likewise excised among other tortures before they themselves are dispatched.<sup>90</sup>

Movsēs Khorenats‘i narrates the same fate of a Bagratuni nobleman identified as Asud, whose tongue is removed at the command of King Tigran II for the crime of “dishonoring the images” following Tigran’s attempted reversion of Armenia to paganism.<sup>91</sup> The item is repeated in the tenth century in virtually identical language by Ukhtanēs of Sebastia.<sup>92</sup>

In the sixth century, Ghazar reports identical tortures inflicted upon a group of Armenian martyrs: having enraged their Zoroastrian persecutors, the Persian vizier Mihrnerseh “...commanded the executioners to strike the mouths of the blessed ones violently with chains, until their mouths were full of blood which flowed out.”<sup>93</sup> The tactic appears to be employed almost exclusively by Persians in Armenian textual rendering, though a singular exception appears in the tenth-century chronicle of T‘ovma Artsruni. The Armenian nobleman Mukat‘l, identified only by his jurisdiction in the province of Vanand, is martyred at the hands of the Abbasid general Bugha (Bugha al-Kabir, d. 862, whose reputed brutality amasses great literary momentum as a subject of gratuitous editorializing in Armenian texts). T‘ovma narrates the fate of Mukat‘l as follows:

“Immediately the angry tyrant ordered that first the saint’s tongue be cut out so that he could not further insult the caliph, their legislator [Muhammad], and himself.”<sup>94</sup>

Considering that this is the only documented incident of an Arab actor inflicting palatoglossal violence, it is conceivable that the detail is fabricated by T‘ovma as a

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<sup>89</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 197, p. 205.

<sup>90</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 205, p. 213; Agat‘angeghos § 208, p. 215.

<sup>91</sup> MX II.14, p. 150.

<sup>92</sup> Ukhtanēs I.29, p. 42.

<sup>93</sup> Ghazar II.44, p. 127.

<sup>94</sup> TA III.11, pp. 250-251.

device to liken Armenia's Arab suzerains to the Persians who preceded them in both power and persecution. Following the histories of Ghazar and Eghishē, whose accounts of the Battle of Awarayr fused to comprise the standard template of Armenian historical writing thereafter, Armenian annals abound with this literary technique. To transfer the persecutory methods of the Persians onto subsequent series of invaders (and to thereby metonymize Persian agents into Islamic ones) endured as a popular device among Armenian historians, their employment of which has been previously addressed. Absent supporting testimonies that might corroborate Arab employment of the practice, it is likely that T'ovma has most likely contrived the detail from the fabric of previously established Persian methods (as his familiarity with such pre-Islamic texts as those of Movsēs Khorenats'i and Eghishē has been thoroughly documented).

That women incur considerably more substantial (and more graphically illustrated) damage to the mouth than do men supplies valuable insight about Armenian attitudes toward the bodies, behaviors, and decorum of women. Such narratives reify Armenian notions of female loquacity and the virtues of reticence scripted for female emulation, exemplified by such interjections as Movsēs Khorenats'i's portrayal of the noblewoman Khosrovidukht as "a modest maiden, like a nun," who "...did not at all have an open mouth like other women."<sup>95</sup> It must also be observed, however, that this phenomenon is limited to literature of the fifth century, and, curiously, does not appear in that of later Armenian chroniclers. While each of the women tortured by her heathen captors sustains significant oral damage, appreciably the most extensive is delivered to Gayianē, who leads the women in both faith and resistance. Her teeth "knocked out," her

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<sup>95</sup> MX II.82, p. 228.



tongue resected, and her mandible fractured, she is silenced both physically and symbolically, the vehicle of her resistance—exclusively verbal—extinguished. The tortures that accompany these buccal traumas will similarly translate into latter accounts of persecution at enemy hands to follow in later centuries.

### Dermal Violence

Primary among ungendered tortures—those applied indiscriminately to both men and women—is the excision of dermal tissue. Excarnation as an act of persecution is inflicted congruently upon men and women, beginning with the Gayianean<sup>96</sup> – a number of whom, including Hrip<sup>97</sup>simē and Gayianē, are flayed alive. While the punishment is not applied to St. Gregory who precedes them in the narrative of Agat<sup>98</sup>angeghos, it is to numerous male martyrs to follow. The *Buzandaran* thrice documents the practice, each iteration testifying that the victim was flayed alive and subsequently “stuffed with straw.”<sup>96</sup> This particular detail is not corroborated or replicated in any account to follow. Movsēs Khorenats<sup>97</sup>i alludes to the flaying of the Armenian soldier Pargev, writing that he was “blown up like a wine skin” on the orders of the Persian prince Artashir.<sup>97</sup> Movsēs Daskhurants<sup>98</sup>i will document in nearly identical verbiage the persecution of two princes, one Persian and the other Georgian, at the hands of the Khazar king: “With bitter tortures he strangled them to death, then flayed the skin from their bodies, stretched it, stood it up, filled it with straw and hanged it from the top of the wall.”<sup>98</sup> Significantly of this passage, not only the aggressor but, as well, the victims are of foreign extraction, suggesting perhaps that the danger hazarded by the newly arrived Turkic exogeneity, like the Arab

<sup>96</sup> BP III.xxi, p. 99; BP IV.liv, p. 173 (“filled with straw”); BP V.ii, p. 188.

<sup>97</sup> MX III.50, p. 310.

<sup>98</sup> MD II.14, p. 70.

threat that preceded it, had surpassed that of the Persians. Movsēs's text implies in this instance that excarnation occurred postmortem, unlike all other documented iterations of the practice. Movsēs Daskhurants'i's text will later record an episode of criminality punished by live flaying.<sup>99</sup> Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts'i will imply a similar tactic by invading Arabs under the command of the *ostikan* Yusuf: "Having seized their chief priests, he gave orders to turn them into casks and suspend them from the bastions of the fortress in order to inspire fear to the onlookers."<sup>100</sup>

Certainly the most graphic of these accounts is located in the first book of Movsēs Daskhurantsi's *History*, cautiously dated by scholarly consensus to the late seventh or early eighth century (though skepticism prevails that the work in its entirety may descend from the tenth or perhaps as recently as the early twelfth).<sup>101</sup> The author introduces a cult of "finger-cutters" active in Aghuank', synthesizing the testimony of a witness to its ceremonies. At the direction of a demon, the text relates, three men are to be ritually excarnated pursuant to a standardized sequence of procedures: "These men are not to be pierced or killed, but while still living the skin and thumb of the right hand is removed and pulled with the skin over the chest to the little finger of the left hand. Then the little finger is cut and broken off inside. The same is done to the feet while the man is still alive. Then he is killed. The skin is removed and placed into a basket."<sup>102</sup> The presiding demon then inspects the degloved skin and severed fingers of the sacrificial victims. In the absence of a human sacrifice, the demon will command that "...the bark from a tree be stripped off and that an ox or sheep be sacrificed in front of him. Then he eats and

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<sup>99</sup> MD III.21, p. 138.

<sup>100</sup> YD L, p. 179.

<sup>101</sup> MD – see translator's preface, pp. i-iv.

<sup>102</sup> MD I.18, p. 23.

drinks with his evil servitors. A horse, saddled and harnessed, is held ready. Mounting the horse he gallops around until the horse stops by itself. Then [the demon] becomes invisible and disappears. He does this every year.”<sup>103</sup> Movsēs’s depiction of alterity through carnage, like those of preceding Persian aggressors, emphasizes without subtlety the magnitude of contrast between Armenian and foreign somatologies. While the Armenian texts exhibit so resolute a value for corporal integrity, as submitted in chapter VI, actors external to Armenian somatic sensibilities (as these texts present them) celebrate the ritualized fracture of the body. The destruction of the body in liturgical ceremony then essentially contraposes practitioners of foreign orthodoxies to the Armenians, and is thus positioned by these traditors to directly antithesize an Armenian somatic axiology which reveres the intact body as a temporal virtue (and one to be preserved in the eternal).

A similar account is found in the *History* of Aristakēs Lastiverts‘i, who recounts the infliction of this procedure by the advancing Seljuqs upon the native Armenian populace – not for ritual purposes, as in the scenario of the “finger-cutters” of Movsēs Daskhurants‘i, but in persecution. Aristakēs relates: “As for the stout and corpulent, they were made to go down on their knees, and their hands were secured down by stakes. Then the skin together with the nails was pulled up on both sides over the forearm and shoulder as far as the tips of the second hand, forcibly removed, and [the Saljuqs] fashioned bowstrings out of them.”<sup>104</sup> That Aristakēs specifies the phenotype of those selected for this particular torment, and identifies them as “stout and corpulent,” may

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<sup>103</sup> MD I.18, p. 23.

<sup>104</sup>AL XVIII, p. 127.

evinced a dogmatic bias on the part of the author. His blatant orientation toward asceticism and pursuant disdain for carnal immoderacy, consistent with the worldview of his literary peers both past and present, would certainly account for his estimation of the “stout and corpulent” as perhaps more deserving of punishment – especially one entailing such sensory intensity. Again the Armenian esteem for slenderness emerges in its literary products, revealing by default a conspicuous contempt for the dietary intemperance that manifests as physical rotundity. Aristakēs continues to narrate that clergymen were excarnated in a similar manner to that detailed by Movsēs Daskhurants‘i: “Their skin was flayed from the breast upward, over the face, and then twisted around the head. And only after so torturing them did [the Saljuqs] kill them.”<sup>105</sup>

Other dermal tortures commonly attested in the Armenian record include shredding and burning of the skin. Agat‘angeghos narrates that St. Gregory was, amid his tortures, cast naked onto a layer of “iron thistles” spread over the ground: “His flesh was pierced all over. They dragged and buried and rolled him in the ‘thistles’ until every part of his body was torn, leaving no place intact.”<sup>106</sup> A similar fate betides a cohort of Armenian noblemen martyred at the hands of their Persian captors: “They pulled and tore them as they dragged them across the rocky places, so that not a bit of flesh remained on the saints’ bodies.”<sup>107</sup> Movsēs Daskhurants‘i attests comparable violence exacted upon the Hrip‘simēan analogue T‘aguhi, whose face and body were “lacerated” by “cruel thorns from the forest thickets.”<sup>108</sup> Both Hrip‘simē and Gregory are, according to Agat‘angeghos, burned and administered injuries of otherwise thermal quality. King

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<sup>105</sup> AL XVIII, p. 127.

<sup>106</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 112, p. 125.

<sup>107</sup> Yehishe VII, p. 210.

<sup>108</sup> MD I.29, p. 47.

Trdat orders that Gregory be scalded with molten lead dispensed from “iron cauldrons.”<sup>109</sup> Ukhtanēs of Sebastia will reiterate this item of Gregory’s torments in his tenth-century text.<sup>110</sup> Hrip‘simē, similarly, is applied the heat of flaming torches, “...burning and roasting her flesh with their fire.”<sup>111</sup> Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i relates, c. 925, the demise of an (apparently fifth-century) Armenian defector called Vndoy who has ordered the construction of a Zoroastrian temple in the Armenian city of Dvin. His apostasy is punished at the hands of the fabled war hero Vardan Mamikonean—an epic figure inflated to legendary proportions by the time of Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i—who immolates the apostate Vndoy in the sacral fire of his own temple.<sup>112</sup> This fanciful account is the only preserved iteration of this event.

### Mutilation

Armenian sources of the Early Middle Ages contain graphic accounts of mutilation. Most frequently its victims are martyred Christians or prisoners of war, the damage inflicted almost exclusively to the face (as previously established in chapter VI). While mutilation is most often intended to brand a victim as a heretic, captive, apostate, or criminal, occasionally it will occur postmortem as a method of tabulating slain enemy combatants. Ghewond writes in the eighth century of the caliph Abū’l-‘Abbās as-Saffāh branding the necks of subjugated Armenians to evidence his cruelty.<sup>113</sup> Following the initial Seljuq incursions, Aristakēs Lastiverts‘i writes of an Armenian insurrection that included the facial branding of six Islamic clerics “...with the sign of a fox, so that

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<sup>109</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 119, p. 131.

<sup>110</sup> Ukhtanēs I.62, pp. 77-78.

<sup>111</sup> Agat‘angeghos § 198, p. 205.

<sup>112</sup> YD XV, p. 90.

<sup>113</sup> Ghewond 28, p. 123.

eternally that would serve as a notice to them, clear and recognizable to all, so that no one in ignorance would commune with them, but rather that they be hounded by all as evil beasts.”<sup>114</sup> This punishment is attested in the Armenian textual tradition as early as 444 in the nineteenth canon issued at the Council of Shahapivan, which stipulates: “If an elder, a deacon or one of the solitaries is found in a filthy act, his priesthood will be annulled. He will be branded on the forehead with the sign of a fox and he will be placed in solitude to do penance.”<sup>115</sup> The same canon applies this punishment to men, women, and even children found in heresy.<sup>116</sup> Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i will later attach the same penalty to practitioners of witchcraft and sorcery, whom he identifies with the heretical Paulician movement: “Such poisoners are to have a fox branded on their foreheads....”<sup>117</sup>

In particular, religious persecution at the hands of the Persians often entails cropping and/or rhinotomy (generally performed in simultaneity). Leila Ahmed notes the penal application of cropping to lower-status women such as prostitutes and slaves caught “illegally veiling” in attempts to fraudulently dissemble an elevated status.<sup>118</sup> Islamic tradition further documents that Hind bint ‘Utbah personally severed the noses and ears of her father’s killers and fashioned them into jewelry.<sup>119</sup> Utility of this custom by Persians is attested in Armenian as early as Eghishē, who writes in the sixth century of a Persian executioner torturing Christian captives: “He interrogated them, but they did not agree to worship the sun. ... He cut off their noses and ears, and had them taken to

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<sup>114</sup> AL XXIII, p. 155 – Aristakēs describes these clerics as men “styled the *vardapets* of that wicked and foul religion,” the closest Islamic approximation to a *vardapet* being likely an imam.

<sup>115</sup> Hovhannessian, *The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan*, 92.

<sup>116</sup> Hovhannessian, *The Canons of the Council of Šahapivan*, 92-93.

<sup>117</sup> DG 53, pp. 41-42.

<sup>118</sup> Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 14.

<sup>119</sup> Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 53; El Cheikh, *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity*, 21.

Asorestan to be set to labor on the royal estates.”<sup>120</sup> The following century, Sebēos documents the punitive mutilation of a group of conspirators by the emperor Heraclius, who commands in response that “...the nose and right hand of them all be cut off.”<sup>121</sup> Similarly, Ghewond notes the stigmatizing disfigurement-by-rhinotomy of Justinian prior to his exile.<sup>122</sup> The refusal of Armenian traditors from across the medieval record to document the application of such torments to women—which nevertheless occurred with veritable certainty, and which Leila Ahmed’s Arabic sources evince no such neurotic compulsion to sanitize—again evinces Armenian hesitation to discursively engage with the female body, further rhetorically estranging them from the adjacent cultures and literary traditions that cast no such modesties around the female body. It is this reluctance that the Armenian historians insinuate as literary refinement correspondent to its copious condemnations of foreign receptivity to topics of female anatomy.

Ḥovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i reports on several occasions in his tenth-century text that Arab soldiers and officials implemented the same tactic, often extending their mutilations to the amputation of fingers, while Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i documents that the *sparapet* Smbat delivered, perhaps as tribute or trophy, the severed noses of invading Arabs following a failed campaign “...to the emperor of the Greeks.”<sup>123</sup> Step‘anos later states of the caliph Marwan’s siege of Damascus that Arab soldiers planed local inhabitants’ faces “...with the tools of a carpenter....”<sup>124</sup> In addition, the Armenian source texts contain numerous references to the punitive or persecutory amputations of

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<sup>120</sup> Eghishē VII, p. 229.

<sup>121</sup> Sebēos 41, p. 93.

<sup>122</sup> Ghewond 5, p. 55.

<sup>123</sup> ST II.4, p. 188.

<sup>124</sup> ST II.4, p. 192.

eyes, hands, and feet – these procedures are performed consistently by virtually every documented aggressor, including even the Armenians themselves upon their own enemies.

Perhaps the most curious text, in this regard among others, is that of the self-identified Hovhannēs Mamikonean, who writes—singularly and exhaustively—of mutilation to the face as well as to the phallus. Persecutory circumcision as a literary subject is exclusive to the Pseudo-Hovhannēs throughout the eras of (and between) Armenian sovereignties, and appears to be a phenomenon of his own invention. The author first states that following a defeat of Persian invaders, the Armenian soldiers under the command of Vahan Mamikonean “...took count on that day and found six thousand heads, minus two. And he ordered that the noses of all of them be cut off, and their foreskins, and thrown into a sack.”<sup>125</sup> The practice appears to function as a technique to calculate enemy casualties. It is twice again employed for this purpose in another incident recorded by the Pseudo-Hovhannēs. Of an Armenian military contingent under the command of an official identified as Smbat, Pseudo-Hovhannēs relates that the soldiers “...slaughtered those they found who spoke Persian. And after they had cut off their noses and had strung them together, they brought them to Smbat. And having counted the noses, they found the number of Persians—men, women, and children—killed was twenty-four thousand.”<sup>126</sup> The Pseudo-Hovhannēs later tells of Armenian soldiers pursuing Persian combatants, during the course of which “...they cut off their foreskins; and there were one thousand six hundred and eighty in number.”<sup>127</sup> A particularly

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<sup>125</sup> Ps.Y. VI, p. 122.

<sup>126</sup> Ps.Y. VII, p. 137.

<sup>127</sup> Ps.Y. VIII, p. 151.



gruesome episode from this text depicts an altercation between Vahan and his Persian counterpart, Mihran, at a “banqueting hall” wherein the two “became intoxicated with wine.”<sup>128</sup> Vahan drunkenly brandishes the bag in which have been collected the noses and foreskins of his Persian adversaries: “And Vahan had taken up the sack in which were the noses and foreskins and had ordered his servant to bring it before him. Now, when Mihran saw it, he became terrified and said: ‘What is that? Tell me!’”<sup>129</sup> Infuriated, Mihran engages Vahan in combat by sword, during the course of which Vahan overpowers Mihran. What follows is among the most unusual passages in the entirety of the medieval Armenian record: in humiliating Mihran, Vahan “first cut off his foreskins and placed them in his mouth ... And after he had cut off his nose, he displayed it before his eyes then after he had lacerated his stomach, he ordered his servant to remove [Mihran’s] liver and to place it in his mouth. And he thrust the knife into his stomach, and he left him impaled.”<sup>130</sup>

While this episode boasts the distinction of containing the only known testimony of forcible ingestion of the foreskin, similar incidents appear in medieval Armenian literature involving internal organs. In addition to the foreskin, Vahan orders that Mihran’s liver be resected and inserted into his mouth. Consonantly, Ḥovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i reports that Arab invaders would dissect the Armenians alive, lacerating their abdomens and extracting their livers.<sup>131</sup> Ḥovhannēs notes that the livers were not placed into the mouths of the Armenians from whom they had been excised but,

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<sup>128</sup> Ps.Y. VI, p. 124.

<sup>129</sup> Ps.Y. VI, p. 124.

<sup>130</sup> Ps.Y. VI, p. 124 – The Armenian text makes clear that it is Mihran’s own mouth into which his foreskin is inserted; see Ps.Y. VI in MH vol. 5, p. 1072. I am grateful to my friend and colleague Dr. Jesse Siragan Arlen for his help with this passage.

<sup>131</sup> YD LI, p. 181.

rather, "...distributed among themselves, as if in fulfillment of the impious [precepts] of their religion."<sup>132</sup> Hovhannēs implies that the livers are not to be consumed, but perhaps utilized in an Islamic ritual, exaggerating in narrative the barbarity of their attackers' religion (which Hovhannēs and others consistently denigrate as "bloodthirsty"). The following century, Aristakēs Lastiverts'i will record a similar tactic employed by the Seljuqs. By contrast, however, and resonating the savagery depicted by Pseudo-Hovhannēs, the Seljuqs coerce their incapacitated Armenian victims to ingest their own organs: "As for the severely wounded, [the Saljuqs] mercilessly tore out their intestines and livers, stuck them in their mouths and forced them to eat while they yet lived."<sup>133</sup>

The medieval Armenian fixation on tortures of a hepatic nature inherits a context from surrounding cultures that held the organ in high anatomical and ritual regard. Ancient Mesopotamian somatology advanced a hepatocentric conceptualization of the body – one that centered the liver and identified the organ as the source of blood as well as the locus of "...life, soul, emotions, and intelligence."<sup>134</sup> In locating these dimensions within the liver, ancient cultures privileged the organ above the heart and brain, which would not acquire somatological centrality until centuries later. Indeed the liver is an organ significant for its profusion of blood – a quality intuited by the Babylonians as well as their Greek and Roman inheritors.<sup>135</sup> The Greek physician Galen postulated that the liver mediated the circulation of blood between the heart and brain, while the humorist ontology espoused by Hippocrates contended that the organ contained and produced

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<sup>132</sup> YD LI, p. 181.

<sup>133</sup> AL XVIII, p. 125.

<sup>134</sup> Michele Augusto Riva et al, "The City of Hepar': Rituals, Gastronomy, and Politics at the Origins of the Modern Names for the Liver," *Journal of Hepatology* 55, no. 5 (2011): 1133.

<sup>135</sup> Riva et al, "The City of Hepar," 1133.

yellow bile, synonymous with generative heat and fire (associated by these cultures with vigor, vitality, and masculinity).<sup>136</sup> Ancient Greek and Roman medical philosophy subscribed to this conception, supporting a linguistic association between Greek appellations for both the liver and “pleasure.”<sup>137</sup> Mediterranean societies as early as the Babylonians engaged in a practice known as hepatomancy – augury by inspection of the liver of a sacrificed animal.<sup>138</sup> This method of divination was practiced by the Etruscans and later adopted by the Romans.<sup>139</sup> Notably, the liver would be examined for its smoothness or corrugation (the latter qualified by a “rough and shrunken” appearance) to ascertain whether the sacrifice had been accepted and received auspiciously by the gods.<sup>140</sup> Later Islamic paradigms of the body would promote notions of the liver as an anatomical site of ritual importance. In addition to severing the noses and ears of her Muslim enemies in the aftermath of the Battle of Uhud, Hind bint ‘Utbah is reputed to have “cut out the liver of the man who had killed her father.”<sup>141</sup> Intending to ingest the organ, she chewed upon and attempted, unsuccessfully, to swallow it.<sup>142</sup> Further, Islamic medical theory of the Middle Ages retained the centrality of the liver, even locating sexual health and libido within or radiating from the organ. Ali ibn Sahl al-Tabari professed a connection between the liver and uterus, indicating belief in a hepatic function to reproductive health and possibly prenatal development.<sup>143</sup> Along this premise,

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<sup>136</sup> Riva et al, ““The City of Hepar,”” 1133.

<sup>137</sup> Riva et al, ““The City of Hepar,”” 1132-1133.

<sup>138</sup> George Sarton, *Ancient Science through the Golden Age of Greece* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952): 76.

<sup>139</sup> Riva et al, ““The City of Hepar,”” 1133.

<sup>140</sup> Lindsay G. Driediger-Murphy, “Unsuccessful Sacrifice in Roman State Divination,” in *Ancient Divination and Experience*, eds. Lindsay G. Driediger-Murphy and Esther Eidinow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 180-183.

<sup>141</sup> Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 53.

<sup>142</sup> El Cheikh, *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity*, 21.

<sup>143</sup> Pernilla Myrne, *Female Sexuality in the Early Medieval Islamic World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019), 23.

the tenth-century Muslim physician Ibn al-Jazzar asserted that sexual arousal emanates from the liver.<sup>144</sup> From these accounts is evident that a hepatocentric corporality, to some measurable degree, characterized the somatic cultures of the ancient and medieval Mediterranean over an extensive chronology encompassing several centuries of both medical and spiritual philosophy and across a multifarious religious landscape in continuous development from Mesopotamian polytheism to the nascence of Islam. Quite visibly, the remnants of hepatocentrism manifest in the literary artifacts of medieval Armenian chroniclers.

While the Pseudo-Ḥovhannēs is unique in its visceral vulgarity (often approaching even a dimension of absurdity), torture applied to the phallus does appear in other literary products of the Armenian Middle Ages. Ḥovhannēs Draskhanakertts'i writes of the tortures endured by King Smbat at the hands of the Abbasid *ostikan* Yusuf, which included "torments on his privy parts."<sup>145</sup> The same author later writes of the carnage inflicted upon the Armenians by masses of Arab invaders: "They inserted rods into the sexual organs of some, while they pierced the posterior of others with pieces of sharp wood, and poured ashes taken from furnaces hot with fire down their bosoms and heads. They tied the privy parts of some with thongs, and suspended them from tall balconies until their parts were torn off."<sup>146</sup> That the author orients his attention to genital tortures exclusively to those inflicted upon men contributes to a peculiar phenomenon: there appears in the medieval Armenian literature not a single reference to the mutilation or torture of women's sex organs. Even amid the lurid accounts of women's martyrdoms,

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<sup>144</sup> Myrne, *Female Sexuality*, 24.

<sup>145</sup> YD XLIX, p. 177.

<sup>146</sup> YD LIII, p. 188.

not a single reference to female genitalia occurs, suggesting that the medieval Armenian reluctance to directly address female beauty applies symmetrically to all aspects of the female body. If such acts were indeed inflicted upon women, certainly they were considered too profane for recorded posterity. Equally plausible is that the producers of medieval Armenian literature—almost exclusively celibate men of clerical pedigree—lacked the familiarity necessary to comment on female sex organs, much less on violence administered thereto.

It appears also that torturous operations to male genitalia are applied exclusively to the phallus and evade the testicles, which the source texts never explicitly mention. Though the testes are never specifically designated objects of torture, the *Buzandaran* attests a decree issued by King Shapuh of Persia to castrate the young boys of the Siwni Dynasty—incidentally, that from which P'arandzem originates—so as to exterminate the house.<sup>147</sup> It is significant that orchiectomy in this instance is performed not as a means to purposefully deliver pain, nor to mutilate, nor to persecute (though humiliation of the fractious Siwni likely factors into its enactment); rather, its singular objective is demographic. A similar punishment is accorded Anak the Parthian in retribution for his treachery, as reported by Ukhtanēs of Sebastia.<sup>148</sup> In place of castration, however, the Armenian princes ensure the extermination of the house of Anak not through the sterilization of its prepubescent boys but through the immediate and summary annihilation of all women and children thereof.<sup>149</sup> Evidence suggests that the punitive castration of adult men was largely abandoned by the Byzantines by approximately the

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<sup>147</sup> BP IV.lviii, p. 178.

<sup>148</sup> Ukhtanēs I.55, p. 66.

<sup>149</sup> Ukhtanēs I.55, p. 66.

tenth century.<sup>150</sup> This discontinuation appears (from an examination of the primary source texts) far earlier in Armenian practice – the procedure as criminal (or captive) penalty is never again attested in an Armenian chronicle after the fifth century.

That circumcision has acquired so derisive a connotation among the Armenians as to amount to persecution derives from its Biblical significance. The apostle Paul wrote extensively about the superfluity of the practice, condemning its persistence as a relic of Mosaic Law (at this time under ecumenical contention) and a *de facto* rejection of the New Covenant. To circumcise oneself or one's child was, in essence, to defy the tenets (and to question the legitimacy) of the New Covenant and to retain practices made expressly obsolete by the death and resurrection of Christ. According to some Armenian priests, doing so—along with adhering to other Mosaic tenets invalidated by the New Covenant such as certain dietary abstentions—amounted to pagan heresy. To forcibly circumcise a man, then, translated into the physiological denial or confiscation of his Christian inheritance, or else was inflicted to deride the heresy of a non-believer. The Pseudo-Hovhannēs contains frequent references to malicious circumcision as a device for communicating the buffoonery and heresy of Persian recipients who are, at the hands of Armenian victors, circumcised by force. The practice also emerges as a topic of debate in the reproduced exchanges between Leo and 'Umar. According to Ghewond's eighth-century *History*, 'Umar reportedly criticizes the Armenian Christian commutation of “circumcision into baptism” among other protocols.<sup>151</sup> Leo's response contains an extended analysis of circumcision as a commandment and its transformed context

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<sup>150</sup> Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant*, 62.

<sup>151</sup> Ghewond 13, p. 71.

between the Old and New Testaments: “As for us, we have not received any command to circumcise our exterior members, but our heart . . . announcing the introduction of a new covenant. Indeed, if Christ, the Master of the true Law, had not eliminated circumcision, . . . what new covenant could He be promising?”<sup>152</sup> Leo later ridicules that it is only through the deception of Satan that Muslims have reverted to the antiquated Mosaic laws and adhere in futility to circumcision.<sup>153</sup> The text then supplies the first—and only—reference in medieval Armenian literature to the Islamic practice of female genital mutilation: “In the ancient law God ordered every male to be circumcised on the eighth day after birth, whereas among you, not only the males but also the females, at no matter what age, are exposed to this shameful act.”<sup>154</sup> The reply of Emperor Leo to the caliph ‘Umar in Ghewond’s eighth-century rendering evinces a presumption that Muslims at this time practiced both circumcision and clitoridectomy (or other mutilations to the vulva) intended to deter promiscuity. Further, this account suggests that female genital mutilation occurred at a later age, likely approximating the onset of puberty, rather than at birth as had the circumcision of boys.

Nadia El Cheikh ascertains that by the ninth century, Islamic writers comment on the Byzantines’ refusal to circumcise women and ascribe to this reluctance hypersexuality among them.<sup>155</sup> El Cheikh also discerns this attitude in earlier Islamic texts which associate the clitoris with promiscuity and other behavioral improprieties, citing the “large clitoris” of Hind bint ‘Utbah in attesting to her libidinousness.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Ghewond 14, p. 96.

<sup>153</sup> Ghewond 14, p. 103.

<sup>154</sup> Ghewond 14, p. 96.

<sup>155</sup> El Cheikh, *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity*, 84-85.

<sup>156</sup> El Cheikh, *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity*, 21-26.

Irrespective of the veracity of these exchanges, the alleged duplications transposed into Ghewond's *History* evince an Armenian awareness (or assumption) of this practice as Islamic custom as early as the eighth century. Reference to such rituals does not again appear in the Armenian record through, at minimum, the collapse of the Bagratuni Kingdom, and there exists no indication that the Armenians ever adopted the practice.

### Conclusion

Across several centuries of Armenian writing about violence, there appears to develop a pronounced sensory emphasis on literary gore. With the conspicuous exception of the Hrip'simēan martyrs, the experience of virtuous corporeal suffering by literary proxy applies exclusively to the torture of men, with whom cultivated male cleric-scholars more readily identify. The model avoids virtually all references to the torture of women excepting the gender-neutral experiences empathetic even to male observers – those that center the universal concern of reproduction. The male gaze and its impulse to eroticize is, then, transferred onto the more reproductively dispensable and more familiar male body – as demonstrated in variant contexts throughout this chapter and its antecedents. This conforms to the medieval Armenian orientation, heretofore thoroughly documented in the present study, toward a morality that tacitly prohibits literary attention to women's bodies and instead displaces all physiological, anatomical, and aesthetic descriptors onto the more familiar and, thus, less scandalizing male body. This approach abides for generalized descriptions of human bodies in their physiological functions, qualities, properties, and maladies, as well as the postmortem treatment of gendered and (narratively) ungendered bodies.



Depictions of violence informed and construed Armenian conceptions of gender—and its absence or experiential neutrality—through the communication of gendered vulnerability. A body mangled, tortured, and desecrated would experience these actions along gendered spectra, which in turn establish the channels through which violence, the body, and gendered anatomy interact. Violence in this way communicates vitally the gendering of the medieval Armenian body. The body’s gender anatomy dictates the violence it will endure, particularly in its reproductive dimensions, which accounts for the overrepresentation of phallic injury, forcible sterilization, and persecutory rape among depictions of violence throughout the medieval Armenian canon. The rectal penetration of King Pap functionally demotes him from masculine to feminine, rescinds his regnal legitimacy as leader of a righteous Christian nation, and implicitly defiles him with the impurity of semen (as the compiler unambiguously avers that Pap “turned himself into a woman for other men”), which will connote pollution well through the eleventh century.<sup>157</sup> His active sodomization of male partners further advances his depravity in literary legacy and depicts of him an impious and erratic king – one who defiantly rejects the customary laws (*awrēnk’*) of the Armenian nation and viciously persecutes its most devout adherents. Similarly, the sexually violent death of his mother P’arandzem doubly defiles her as both a woman divested of her sexual inviolability—a privilege extended to such pious women as Hrip’simē, Hamazaspuhi Mamikonean, and the “living martyrs” of Awarayr, and which P’arandzem is construed to voluntarily abdicate upon abandoning her ancestral customs through such heresy as occultism—and as representative vessel for the Armenian nation reduced to sex object. Her gruesome

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<sup>157</sup> BP IV.xliv, p. 165.

demise, necessarily sexual so as to correspond in quality to her transgressions, functions as both moralizing device and allegorical female sacrifice. It is only through her destruction that her sins upon the land of Armenia are expurgated, the darkness visited upon the Armenians by her house dispersed in atonement.

The protections afforded by inclusion within the sacrosanct category of righteous Armenian femininity do not extend to P'arandzem. The inherently masculine institution of Armenian historiography holds P'arandzem culpable, by extension, for her son's assassination of St. Nersēs. She is literarily requited for the perceived maternal failings that engendered Pap's corruption. P'arandzem is, then, semiotically expelled from the Armenian nation, legitimizing her subsequent literary treatment as an outsider – her illicit behavior has qualified her among those extraneous to the Armenian community. Sexual attention to any element of the female body, as this dissertation has consistently presented, applies acceptably only to members of foreign races and never to the Armenians. P'arandzem is, thus, unobjectionably dispatched in so vulgar and salacious a manner as to accord only to the exogenous other. Her gruesome demise could not be effected upon such exemplary women as the martyrs of the Gayianeank', who in confession maintain their inclusion in the Armenian nation. Violence is, thus, variably sexualized where it performs a political function.

The reproductive body as a locus of persecution is one of national significance, as it was the reproductive dimension of the body that proliferated Armenian nationhood and the national church that it preserved and advanced. Generic and desexualized episodes of violence, by contrast, reflect more individual tortures and persecutions. Through the initiation of pain and injury to the individual site of sensory experience, rather than to a

site of national experience and magnitude such as the reproductive anatomy, the endurance of violence is communicated as an individual burden as much as a communal tribulation. Violence in medieval Armenian subjectivity was, thus, distributed across a spectrum from the individual to the national, each representing a facet of temporal distress defined in relation to a malevolent alterity and the hazards (both physical and spiritual) associated with mundane exposure thereto. The Armenian body, then, is conveyed through its receipt of and response to violence, which further fragment along the fissures of gendered experience.

The receipt of violence, moreover, exposes the mechanics by which these Armenian traditors interpret and introduce the body as a site of religious persecution. To endure persecutory violence becomes not only morally virtuous but nationally righteous. The preponderance of these episodes depict violence administered to pious Armenian bodies at the hands of a savage ethnoreligious other. To endure this aggression is to suffer virtuously the consequences of adhering to one's national faith – faith and nation across the Armenian Middle Ages having tightly coiled around one another along their historical development. The Armenians having established the world's premier national church, observance of Christianity becomes a proxy for Armenian identity in opposition to a multitude of ethnoreligious rivals. The corporal violence endured by the newly Christian Armenians, then, comes to proxy for all hostility directed at the new Abrahamic faith in the image of which an ancient culture has reinvented itself and asserted its singularity within the region. In this way, the administration of corporal violence is not only gendered but ethnicized. Violence, thus, reifies medieval Armenian notions of identity

and alterity, relocating them between the bodies of Armenian victim and foreign aggressor.

## Conclusion

By the mid-eleventh century, a series of Turkic invasions and Byzantine reconquest campaigns had so profoundly damaged Armenian sovereignty in the Highland that it became, by 1045, irretrievable. Beginning with the extortionary annexations of Bagratuni-held Taron in 966 and the Artsruni kingdom of Vaspurakan in 1021 at Byzantine aggression and culminating in the 1071 Seljuq conquest of Manazkert—which flanked the enormously momentous annexation of Ani in 1045, concluding two centuries of Bagratuni reign and nearly half a millennium of the family’s eminence among the Armenian dynastic houses—the *nakharar* kingdoms did not survive to witness the dawn of the twelfth century. In consequence, the Armenian population once cohesively insulated in the *nakharar* kingdoms and principalities scattered across the Near East, settling new communities (or expanding existing ones) in Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and the Levant. Armenians remaining in the Highland fell under a series of exogenous usurpers, all episodically but continuously challenging one another as rivals to imperial hegemony in the south Caucasus. The decline and ultimate collapse of the Armenian *nakharar* polities and their endogenously stabilizing (though inter-dynastically tumultuous) authority engendered a parallel transformation in Armenian literary activity, as traditional histories once commissioned by prominent *nakharar* houses and statically centralized ecclesial authorities now fell into dereliction and obsolescence, to be gradually supplanted by the more syncretic works of the itinerant literary or the Cilician chroniclers patronized by their own nascent noble houses in distant lands.

This resurrected system of Armenian nobility, detached though it may have been from the Armenian *nakharar* houses original to the Highland, adapted in dynamic response to its new environments and their miscellaneous conditions and demands. Unlike the traditors present at the incipience of Armenian literary culture in the Highland, those inheriting the Armenian literary mantle from their dislocated precursors and in their depopulated topographies were not obligated to or dictated by the capricious and limiting demands of a politically invested party or patron.<sup>1</sup> The genre of historical chronicle, profusely employed during the period of dynastic sovereign kingdoms, now fell into decrepitude and evolved in dispersion and expatriation, much of it removed from the center of Armenian indigeneity along the terrestrial frontiers where the Armenians constructed for themselves new kingdoms, new homelands, and new communities.

This transitory period in Armenian history provides an organic cadence for the present investigation, as the disruption to a stable Armenian presence in its own indigenous terrain engendered a congruous disruption in literary culture and its production. Though Armenian literary activity continued to flourish both in the Highland and in the satellite communities the Armenians reconstructed for themselves as they scattered in flight of the chaos that radiated from the seismic pulses of serial invasion, it experienced dramatic changes in tenor, content, origin, and character. Its patronage now transferred (where not absent) and its rhetorical style in transition—evident even as early as Aristakēs Lastiverts‘i, whose own work the present study examines so as to observe this genre in motion as it evolved between dynastic and succeeding cultural climates—by

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Cowe, “Medieval Armenian Literary and Cultural Trends (Twelfth-Seventeenth Centuries),” in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times: Volume I: The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 305-306.

the turn of the twelfth century Armenian literary culture had transformed radically. A genre formerly dictated by ascendant noble houses with the means to employ, commission, and regulate scribal activity, Armenian literary culture improvised in acclimation to novel surroundings that necessitated innovative approaches to the written record. Its contents determined now more by the volition of its auteurs than by the impositions of a royal patron or the agenda of an invested party, post-dynastic Armenian literary production responded robustly to the dynamic and kinetic demands of its prismatic cultural atmosphere.

Historical writing was in this way particularly affected, absent a noble house to ingratiate or a sanctioned narrative to legitimize. As circumstances and conditions changed, so too did perception of events and phenomena. As such, the literary environment shifted in its response to gender, sexuality, and the body. It is for this reason that the present study has harnessed for its source material almost exclusively the literary histories of *nakharar* Armenia under dynastic sovereignty on its own indigenous geography, as this provides the foundation of Armenian perceptions of the body in its incipient (or earliest detectable) expressions. All following interpretations and depictions of the body evolved from templates identified herein. The transformative events of the mid-eleventh century mark a significant transition in power, population, demographic, and, thus, culture.

Following these massive developments, Armenian attitudes about sex and the body adjusted accordingly. Exposed to novel ideas, genres, and systems of thought by the chaotic introduction of diversity to the region during the period between Seljuq and Ottoman hegemonies, an Armenian literary attitude toward such matters as sex and the

body progressed from one characterized by puritanical moderacy to one identified more by a scientific curiosity – as early texts of this period such as that by Dawit‘ Gandzakets‘i begin to divulge. This curiosity would continue to advance well into the period of Ottoman ascendancy, as evidenced by texts so radically contraposed to their medieval predecessors as the “Secrets of Women” authored by the archbishop Hovhannes and a pair of sixteenth-century manuscripts that similarly approach the female body with an academic scrutiny informed by and conducive to newly invigorated values of scientific inquiry – discourse scandalously impermissible by the earlier medieval standards as asserted throughout the course of the present study.<sup>2</sup>

In evaluating medieval Armenian sexual and somatic cultures, this dissertation has presented the following:

The opening chapter submits that medieval Armenian traditors constructed masculinity in opposition not to femininity but to ethnonational and ethnoreligious alterity. Masculinity was purposefully formulated to reinforce the Armenian ethnic ideal in opposition to those of intruders both religious and territorial. This chapter introduces the argument that expressive depiction of female aesthetics was tacitly prohibited and disdained, and all inclinations to construct and construe such opinions redirected and displaced by their auteurs onto more socially acceptable outlets and templates – male forms, imaginary visuals, and insensate objects of nature. It further explores the complex relationship between gender assignment and aesthetic beauty and identifies several

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<sup>2</sup> Cowe, “Medieval Armenian Literary and Cultural Trends,” 303.



conventions employed by medieval Armenian writers in setting and casting particular gender qualities to narrative.

Chapter two extensively examines constructions of femininity and posits that, contrary to masculinity, femininity functioned not only to delineate gendered and ethnocentric standards but, further, to preserve them intergenerationally both within and across dynastic lineages. These standards were thus continuously transmitted and recirculated through the labors of a purposive femininity instituted so as to perpetuate the values of Armenian identity and nationhood through the typologically feminine domains of wifedom and motherhood. The activities of this operationalized femininity included the conscientious performance of lamentation and eulogy for the preservation of familial and dynastic prestige, virtuous endurance of privation, moral and spiritual instruction of children in preparation for their inheritance of nation and church, and obedient adherence to the gendered values of visual aesthetics and public conduct. In this way, femininity was similarly activated to reinforce Armenian identity in moralized defense against the exogenous, and was strategically installed as matrimonial support and maternal nurturance to achieve this purpose.

Chapter three submits that in response to the above gendered bifurcations of national obligation, several archetypes of righteous conduct began to emerge across medieval Armenian literary products, each of them parameterizing acceptable sexual conduct as well as, secondarily, establishing the containment of dietary, emotional, and other carnal impulses as moral imperatives. These characterological archetypes mobilized a gendered morality that uniformly applied and enforced standards of sexual purity, dietary moderation, and emotional continence in addition to a miscellany of variable

ideals that refracted along the chronological, local, and even personal preferences of their authors. The values articulated and reinforced in the deployment of these archetypes reflect their continuity as static indicators of Armenian moral rectitude across the period under investigation, while the incremental modifications thereto and transgenerational reconstitutions thereof aver their adaptability, resilience, and omneity as paradigms mapped onto the somatic template.

The fourth chapter explores the legalistic and legislative processes by which a medieval Armenian judicial apparatus prescribed, regulated, and enforced conformity to a gendered, sexualized, and somatic morality as delineated in the preceding three chapters, commencing with the codification of Armenian canon law in 444 and continuing through such developments as the compilation of legal codes in the eighth century and the reiteration of these values, largely unaltered but modestly updated to reflect transformed cultural conditions, in the early twelfth. This dissertation's most recent source chronologically, the confessional and arbitrational compendium of Dawit' Gandzakets'i, copiously recalls and replicates the Canons of Shahapivan, attesting to the emergence of the fifth-century canons intact from the collapse of Armenian sovereignty in the Highland. As is demonstrated on numerous occasions and in multivarious contexts throughout the present study, these values exhibit remarkable continuity across time; this chapter in particular examines this continuity and stasis against such radical transformations as the arrival of ethnic exogeneities, interfaith pollination and syncretism, and the resulting geopolitical volatility. The precepts formatted onto the somatic canvas, legislated initially at Shahapivan, radiated throughout the Mamikonean interregnum to be revived under the Bagratuni restoration. From the textual products that preserve these

legislative campaigns can be detected consistent circumscriptions of licit, illicit, and transgressive sexual behavior.

Chapter five investigates Armenian literary representations of sex and sexuality as they inform, and are reciprocally informed by, the material realities and lived experiences of their actors and participants. It examines sexually oriented institutions such as concubinage and prostitution, the development of these institutions across time and in response to political transformation and intercultural exposure, and the significance of each amid the local and legal context in which it was situated. This chapter examines the transcendence of sexual morality from a corporeally and sensorially located temporal to a disembodied and insensate extratemporal conducted by the *ad-mortem* release of the discarnate essence from the carnal encumbrance. In so doing, the chapter illuminates the fragmentation of an Armenian corporal morality along eschatological axes and a conception of sexuality as a necessarily temporal and somatic phenomenon to be relieved upon entry to an idyllic afterworld devoid of such malignancies as carnal impulse or, indeed, carnality as a condition (which is definitionally constrictive, dysfunctional, and dolorous – the primary temporal obstacle to salvation). Thus, the chapter further evinces an attitude of Armenian chroniclers toward sexuality as one of aversion, contempt, and mortal anxiety.

Following this, the sixth chapter interrogates the insecurities and vulnerabilities that, as introduced in the previous chapter, characterize the somatic experience as medieval Armenian texts present it. These anxieties include demonic possession, pathogenic compromise, and corporal fracture, illustrating an image of corporality as inescapably hazardous, painful, and degenerative, and as an experience aspiring toward

comprehensive purity of body and spirit. Compromise in one domain results invariably in contamination of the other. The chapter delineates the distribution of these corporal anxieties along gendered and ethnicized indices. The diversification of these insecurities, as each of the cardinal categories of affliction exhibits a sexualized component, further illustrates Armenian anxieties about sex and sexuality as primary domains of exposure and vulnerability. In identifying these pillars of medieval Armenian somatic anxieties, as well as their gendered and sexualized variants, this chapter posits that the corporeal experience of temporality defined both identity and alterity to Armenian comprehension, as each of these areas further fragments into native and foreign experientialities.

Chapter seven introduces the complex relationship between gender, morality, and anatomy, and analyzes the impact of gendered anatomy on the conveyance, communication, and performance of righteous conduct. Through deconstructing the medieval Armenian paradigm of gender as an anatomized abstraction exhibiting its own complex axiology, the chapter displays the filtration of the somatic morality introduced in previous chapters into gendered typologies and explores the response of these gender distinctions to fluctuations in their cultural environment. Each of the gender categories identified is uniquely responsive and reflexive to the stimuli that continuously regenerate and reconstitute the Armenian gender spectrum, and over the course of the centuries under investigation discloses dynamic adaptations in response to newly arrived populations and their novel somatic cultures. The chapter further submits that gendered morality, as a somatically externalized performance, was assessed for both conduct and conformity. For this reason, the eunuch—divorced entirely from the gender binary not by mediality (as predicted) but rather by masculine extremity—emerges as an ominous and

malignant figure to be suspected and estranged from the community of safely detectable gender conformists. The chapter submits that gender, in this way, functioned as an accessorial utility in the regulation of morality both public and private and of the somatic expressions of that morality.

The eighth and concluding chapter observes the function of violence in construing the body as the locus of identity and alterity. This final chapter emphasizes the synergy of gender, morality, sexuality, anatomy, ethnic identity, and corporal vulnerability which in totality constructed an image of Armenian ethnic selfhood against a violently hostile alterity that was, in turn, physically incarnated in somatic opposition to the Armenian body. The body, to the preserved cognition of these medieval Armenian chroniclers, is most lucidly assimilated through its experience of violence – through its reception of and responsivity thereto, through its gendered and sexualized (or desexualized) modifications, and through the selectivity with which it is deployed. Sexuality and violence are often integrally entangled, the hostile other frequently depicted in sexual violation of the Armenian body. The receipt of persecutorial violence, then, defines Armenian ethnic endogeneity, while its delivery is positioned as the exclusive prerogative of the exogenous.

Synthesized collectively, these observations and conclusions establish decisively that medieval Armenian traditors regarded the physical body as the locus of identity and alterity—ethnic, national, sexual, and religious—and the vehicle that navigated it through a precarious temporality defined necessarily by its cumbersome sensory hazards. The Armenian body was, moreover, distinguished from those of its ethnoreligious opponents by its supernatural ability to resist, restrain, and contain the carnal urges to which

exogeneities and trespassers to the Armenian cultural and terrestrial realm so predictably and characteristically succumbed. It was this prodigious capacity for continence that elevated the Armenian body as a superior anatomy to those who would challenge its sovereignty both individual and national. An Armenian literary conception of the body adapted in response to the introduction of foreign populations, its literary and cultural accommodations thereof reflecting these conversations (and even the selective absorption of exogenous somatologies such as those from Zoroastrian and Islamic cultures) across the centuries under investigation. Armenian notions of alterity and identity are, thus, articulated through the medium of the incarnate (and discarnate) body and continually developed over this textual tradition across time. Gender further fractures these complex constructs into masculine and feminine extensions, each manifesting specialized corporal, sexual, and behavioral functions. Deviants from the gender binary (eunuchs primary, though not exclusive, among them) are severely degraded in narrative, their summary dismissal as characterologically defective indicating the gravity with which medieval Armenian society approached gender conformity. The somatic—and unequivocally gendered—experiences of sex and violence, then, ultimately delimit the most superficial transmissions of extratemporal morality to the sensory dimension. Along this paradigm, only the exceptionally righteous are rewarded in eternity by blissful liberation of the more perfect immortal essence from the excruciating carnal integument that encumbers it. The body, moreover, acts as the conductor through which justice is applied in response to righteous or unrighteous conduct. The body then assumes the experience of temporality and acts as sensory conduit between the incarnate spirit and the eternal plane to which it aspires to admission. It is through this corporeal point of contact that the mundane is

experienced as a series of sensory obstacles, both its pleasures and its pains obstructing and negotiating the soul's precarious passage to the celestial.

The major contribution of this dissertation to the field of medieval Armenian history is its application of somatological methodology and focus on corporality as an axis for historical inquiry – a severely underutilized modality with potential to yield rich and revolutionary discoveries. The historical profession has been until recently disadvantaged by the dismissal and exclusion of the body from academic discourse as a domain of legitimate inquiry. This dissertation has contributed to the remedy of this problem by introducing somatological discourse to the study of medieval Armenian history. An awareness of the body's crucial role in cultural history supplies rich opportunities for supplementary analysis, exposing prospects in such diverse disciplinary fields as military, legal, and economic history as well as among studies of gender, material culture, and the creative arts. This research has introduced critical methodologies already employed in the adjacent fields of Classical and Islamic history as well as in theology, all of which have been enriched by academic study in somatology particularly as it pertains to sexuality. This dissertation is the first substantial attempt to introduce such methodology to historical study of medieval Armenia. In so doing, it has decisively situated the body within the orbit of scholarly approaches from which to legitimately examine medieval Armenian history and, in conformity to previous advancements made in tangential disciplines, delivered the body from its academic relegation to impropriety within Armenian historical study. While academic study of medieval Armenia has already been well served by methodological approaches that center material and visual culture, textual transmission, political and economic history, and geography, the major

objective of this dissertation has been to apply thereto somatological methodology and to demonstrate the importance of the body to medieval Armenian culture. Further, it invites continued research into the function of the body in establishing, reorienting, and continuously reconstituting Armenian identity across myriad historical settings and against various political and cultural exogeneities.

The future of this research may well consist in the investigation of the above referenced texts (VII-XVI centuries), at present inaccessible to the author. A critical assessment, harnessing the foundations identified in the present study, of Armenian texts following the conquest of Manazkert and through the formative decades of Ottoman consolidation is the logical continuation to this line of inquiry. Such a study could exploit source material as early as the medical texts of such figures as Mkhit‘ar Herats‘i, the “father of Armenian medicine,” and other Armenian scholars of the natural sciences as well as translations of the exoteric medical and scientific texts that influenced and conversed with Armenian somatology. The Armenian texts of these following centuries will further expose, scaffolding upon the discoveries of the present investigation, the magnitude to which the Armenians were intellectually and culturally entangled with Islamic discourse about sex and the body and how these intellectual entanglements transpired across late medieval and early modern cultural geographies. The extent and profundity of the Armenians’ misconceptions about Islam and its sexual culture deliver startling insight into their interactions and mutual interpretations of each other’s values and comportment. The conversations between the two, at least as far as the Armenian literature attests (whether in reproduced exchanges or, more subtly, in editorialized accounts), evince robust epistemic development across centuries. Armenian literary



culture appears to have gradually integrated both Zoroastrian and Islamic corporal cultures into its own comprehension and transmission thereof (often as an instrument of identity differentiation), and this trajectory continues through the early modern period. Later texts corroborate the indelible impact of these anxieties upon the sexual and somatic consciousness of the Armenians for centuries following the Seljuq conquest.

The impressions of gender, sexuality, and the body inscribed during the period under investigation would continue to suffuse Armenian intellectual production across and beyond the Highland long after the dissolution of Armenian sovereignty, diffusely permeating the atmospheres of the relocated, displaced, and external reconstitution of Armenian population centers. These ideas self-sustain across several centuries in remarkably preserved continuity. In many ways, conscious literary preservation of and steadfast commitment to these established traditions, and their continuous recirculation across time, perhaps functioned to insulate the Armenians as a distinct element in the region and to assert their identity against veritably insurmountable military and cultural challenges, ensuring the Armenians' survival in the Caucasus over the next thousand years.

**Table 1: Chronology of Significant Events**

- 301:** Armenian national conversion to Christianity
- 387:** Partition of the Armenian realm into Persian and Roman spheres
- 405:** Creation of Armenian alphabet by Mesrob Mashtots
- 428:** Arsacid monarchy abolished
- 444:** Council of Shahapivan and legislative enshrinement of its twenty canons
- 451:** Battle of Awarayr
- 640:** Rashidun conquest of Armenia
- 705:** Umayyad massacre of Armenian nobility (*nakharars*) at Nakhijewan
- 884:** Abbasid installation of Bagratuni Dynasty as hereditary sovereigns of vassal Armenia, restoring Armenian sovereignty to the Highland after an interregnum of over four centuries (during which time the ascendant Mamikonean Dynasty functioned as *de facto* sovereign house)
- 908:** Abbasid coronation of rival Artsruni Dynasty in neighboring Kingdom of Vaspurakan
- 966:** Byzantine recapture of Taron
- 1021:** Collapse of the Kingdom of Vaspurakan
- 1045:** Collapse of the Bagratuni Kingdom
- 1071:** Seljuq victory at the Battle of Manazkert, establishing Seljuq domination over eastern Anatolia and consequently dispersing Armenian populations and cultures across and beyond the Highland

## Table 2: Chronology of Primary Texts

This dissertation refers extensively to primary texts by the following authors, ordered chronologically:

**Agat‘angeghos:** Historical and hagiographical text produced in the fifth century, chronicles the national conversion of Armenia to Christianity. Purports Arshakuni patronage, though recent scholarship has determined this to be inaccurate.

**Buzandaran Patmut‘iwnk‘ (“Epic Histories”):** Historical chronicle compiled in the fifth century and formerly attributed to “Faustus of Byzantium;” chronicles pre-Christian and early Christian Armenian history under Zoroastrian dominion ending with the 428 abolition of the Arshakuni Monarchy. No known patron, though consistently glorifies the Mamikonean and (to a lesser extent) Arshakuni Dynasties.

**Movsēs Khorenats‘i:** Historical text commissioned under Bagratuni patronage and, thus, evincing strong bias toward the Bagratuni Dynasty. Dated most commonly to the fifth century (though scholarly controversy surrounds a proposed eighth-century dating by translator Robert W. Thomson). Movsēs is often referred to reverently by his successors as, simply “the historian.”

**Ghazar P‘arpets‘i:** The first of two extant narratives to center the Battle of Awarayr in medieval Armenian historiography, dated to the late fifth or early sixth century. Allegedly commissioned by Vahan Mamikonean.

**Eghishē:** The second of two Awarayr-centered historical narratives, dated to the early sixth century; together with that of Ghazar, these narratives established a template for subsequent Armenian chronicles onto which later events and historical figures would be calqued. Commissioned by Vahan Mamikonean.

**Sebēos:** Produced in the seventh century by the bishop of the Bagratuni House; the first known Armenian-language text to identify the prophet Muhammad and chronicle the Islamic conquests. Its over bias toward the Bagratuni suggest the patronage of this house in commissioning Sebēos’s narrative, though the author does not identify his patron.

**Movsēs Kaghankatuats‘i/Daskhurants‘i:** Significant as the earliest known Armenian-language text to chronicle the history of a foreign land and its people. Consists of three books, the first two dated by scholarly consensus to the seventh-eighth centuries and the third to the tenth (though controversy remains about its precise authorship). No patron identified.

**Ghewond:** Produced in the eighth century at the commission of Shapuh Bagatuni; primarily chronicles the Islamic domination of Armenia and contains one of few surviving recensions of an important epistolary exchange between Byzantine emperor

Leo and Umayyad caliph ‘Umar II (extensively analyzed in chapter V of the present study).

**T’ovma Artsruni:** Produced in the early tenth century (c. 904-907 CE) by a cleric of the illustrious Artsruni Dynasty and under the patronage of Grigor Derenik Artsruni; attempts to recast the Dynasty more favorably amid the (by this time) already well-established genre of Armenian historiography.

**Ḥovhannēs Draskhanakertts‘i:** Produced c. 925 CE under the (largely) autonomous auspices of the Armenian Church; no patron is identified though the author carefully balances his praise between the ascendant Bagratuni and Artsruni rivals to Armenian sovereignty during his lifetime. Primarily chronicles Abbasid supremacy over the Armenians and is often cross-referenced with TA.

**Ḥovhannēs Mamikonean:** A fanciful romance purporting to be a historical chronicle by the (otherwise unattested and likely fictitious) Hovhannes Mamikonean (often called “Pseudo-Hovhannes” for this reason); purports a fifth-century dating for its initial component (“Pseudo-Zenob”) and a seventh-century dating for the remainder, though now believed to be a work of the late tenth century (c. 966-988 according to translator Levon Avdoyan) in its entirety. Contains numerous anachronisms and dramatic inventions, written in a more popular and less erudite style than its predecessors in the historical genre.

**Ukhtanēs of Sebastia:** Dated to c. 980s, divided into three books (the third of which is now lost), relies extensively on MX and recycles much of its information; valuable for examining the historical memory of the events chronicled in MX over the intervening five centuries. Commissioned under Anania Narekats‘i, the text was not formally attached to any particular noble house (though would have been obliged to the Artsruni House, by this time invested sovereign, on whose territory Narekavank‘ stood).

**Anonymous Story-Teller/Anonymous Chronicle:** A more secular and popular cycle believed compiled by various authors between the ninth and fifteenth centuries; contains numerous historical inaccuracies and conflation. Displays use of various linguistic and stylistic forms (notably the emergent dialect of Western Armenian); useful for examining the secular assimilation of historical and contemporaneous events, especially the role and character of Muslims.

**Step‘anos Tarōnets‘i:** Unique in chronicling the “universal” history not just of Armenia but of the known world; penned c. 1004-1005 (according to translator Tim Greenwood) under the ecclesial commission of katholikos Sargis Sewants‘i. Notable for its revival of Persianate elements in Armenian historiography.

**Aristakēs Lastiverts‘i:** Surveys Armenian history across the eleventh century, concentrating on the arrival of the Seljuqs; dated to c. 1072-1079 by translator Robert

Bedrosian. Its content, like its title (*History Regarding the Sufferings Occasioned by Foreign Peoples Living Around Us*), indicates acute hostility toward incursive exogeneities to Armenia, demonstrating equal disdain to the contemporaneous Byzantine and Seljuq antagonists.

**Dawit' Gandzakets'i:** Penitential text dated to early twelfth century. Designed and distributed for local pastors to administer standardized penances to errant parishioners, it is an invaluable source for illuminating the common sins, behaviors, and somatic cultures of the common laity during the period under investigation who might require expiation of their myriad sins; one of few medieval Armenian texts to disclose information about the *ramik* rather than limit its scope exclusively to the aristocracy.

**Figure 1:** “Armenia in the Early Bagratid Period, 884-962” (Robert H. Hewsen, cartographer)<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Robert H. Hewsen, “Armenia in the Early Bagratid Period, 884-962,” <http://www.attalus.org/armenian/ydmap.htm>



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