

CHAPTER 8

ARMENIAN NEIGHBOURS (600–1045)

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INTRODUCTION

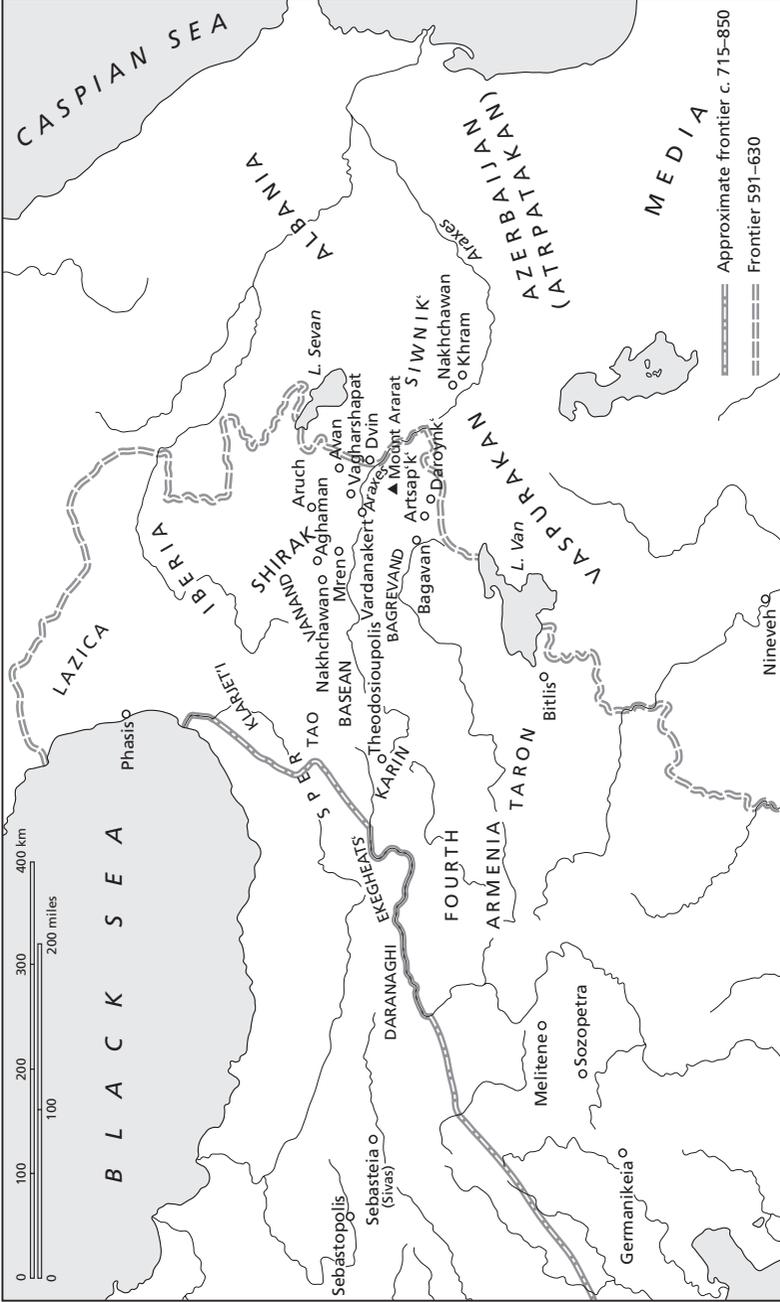
Anyone wishing to unravel the history of the relationship between Byzantium and Armenia from late antiquity into the eleventh century has to confront a series of historical and historiographical challenges. The most immediate, and intractable, of these is one of definition: what does 'Armenia' mean? Although Armenia is used to express a territorial entity in contemporary texts, both Armenian and non-Armenian in origin, its precise meaning varies according to the date and the context in which it is used. Far from finding a single, stable definition of Armenia, one discovers multiple 'Armenias'.¹ Thus a seventh-century Armenian geographical compilation depicts 'Great Armenia' as comprising not only regions currently recognised as Armenian but also those with historic associations.² Successive provinces of Armenia were imposed and superimposed by external powers, each with a particular scope. The kingdom of Armenia, re-established in 884, bore little relation to its Arsacid precursor and increasingly represented only the Bagratuni kingdom centred on Ani, excluding rival kingdoms in Vaspurakan, Siwnik' and elsewhere.

Given the absence of stable territorial boundaries and in the light of significant Arab settlement in certain districts from the end of the eighth century, there have been attempts to construct Armenian identity in terms of a blend of confessional, linguistic and cultural features. Once again the evidence supports a plural and inclusive definition. Instead of a community of believers, united around a single confession and recognising the spiritual authority of a single leader, the Armenian church embodied a spectrum of doctrinal interpretations, revolving largely, but not exclusively, around the acceptance or rejection of the council of Chalcedon.³ This interpretation is at odds with the conventional outline of Armenian church history supplied by the majority of the Armenian sources, which advertise a pronounced anti-Chalcedonian, monophysite character after 600. Yet the faint

¹ Hewsen (2001) offers a comprehensive sequence of maps.

² Anania of Shirak, *Geography*, ed. Soukry, pp. 29–35; tr. Hewsen, pp. 59–70.

³ Garsoïan (1999a) to 700; thereafter Mahé (1993).



Map 16 Armenia 591-850



Figure 21 View from within the walls of Ani, looking south across what was the heart of the flourishing eleventh-century city to the ruined cathedral and beyond to the hills in the Republic of Armenia

impression of a pro-Chalcedonian, and arguably pro-Byzantine, party may still be traced and other schismatic traditions may have survived long after their suppression elsewhere.⁴ Nor is there good evidence for either linguistic or cultural uniformity. Whilst the written form of the Armenian language may once have possessed such a quality, it seems inherently unlikely that contemporary speech was ever uniform. An eighth-century cleric, Stephen of Siwnik', identified seven dialects, all associated with remote, mountainous districts.⁵ As for cultural uniformity, one has only to think of the selective histories, sponsored by princely houses to their own glory and the denigration of others, the multiple versions of the *History* of Agathangelos describing the conversion of Armenia or the different traditions surrounding the relics of Gregory the Illuminator, to appreciate that the past was essentially plastic, at the disposal of contemporary writers to develop and rework as they thought fit.⁶

When one considers the fragmented, isolating topography of the central Caucasus region, the individual districts of varying size, wealth and potential, the harsh continental climate, the dispersed settlement pattern focused upon the village, the frontier status of the region through the period, partitioned between Rome and Persia and then Byzantium and the caliphate,

⁴ Garitte (1960); Arutiunova-Fidanjan (1988–9).

⁵ Stephen of Siwnik', *Meknut'iwon*, ed. Adontz, p. 187.

⁶ See respectively TA; van Esbroeck (1971a); van Esbroeck (1971b).

the lack of organic national political institutions, the long-standing doctrinal divisions within the Armenian church, the presence of different dialects and languages, even the potential for different interpretations of the past, one can only conclude that 'Armenia' and 'Armenian identity' are complex and elusive terms defying concrete definition and characterised by fluidity and plurality. Instead of maintaining the fiction of a united Armenia or a singular Armenian identity, Armenian diversity and incongruity deserve to be highlighted.

A second challenge is the uneven treatment in the primary sources of the relationship between Armenia and Byzantium. At times, it receives significant coverage but more often it remains frustratingly obscure, the periods between 730 and 850, and between 925 and 980 being particularly opaque. This may reflect a genuine lack of engagement. But it is also possible that the outline of Armenian history presented by the majority of Armenian sources is intentionally partial. Arguably, Armenian authors anticipated a similar collective historical experience to that of the people of God in the Old Testament and therefore stressed those contexts which replicated the biblical paradigm, including valiant but ultimately unsuccessful resistance against an oppressive and impious empire, exile and return. A neighbouring Christian polity, particularly one which adhered to a rival confession of faith, did not sit comfortably with this model and its influence was therefore downplayed or ignored. Armenian histories are much more than simple vehicles for the preservation of factual information; rather they are complex compositions which need to be handled with care and exploited only after careful textual criticism. Silence on the subject of Byzantium and the imperial church should not be mistaken for lack of contact.

Finally, insofar as the literary sources record the development of Byzantium's relationship with Armenia, they tend to do so in terms of the principal Armenian political and ecclesiastical leaders. As we shall see, Byzantium cultivated multiple ties with several noble houses at the same time. In a society characterised by intense competition between and within princely families, in which those with ambition and ability attracted followers, acquired lands and amassed wealth at the expense of those who did not, it paid to develop links with as many potential clients as possible. Some of this evidence survives only through contemporary Armenian colophons and inscriptions, sources whose historical potential has not been fully exploited. By drawing on these materials, as well as the twin disciplines of numismatics and sigillography, a more complex, nuanced picture of their relationship begins to emerge.

POLITICAL AND CONFESSIONAL FLUX (591–661)

In 590 the fugitive Sasanian king Khusro II (590, 591–628) appealed to Emperor Maurice (582–602) for military assistance against the usurper

Bahram Chobin, offering generous terms, including substantial territorial concessions in Armenia. These were accepted by Maurice, and after the defeat of Bahram in 591 the frontier shifted eastwards.⁷ The following decade witnessed unprecedented cooperation between the two 'great powers' across Armenia. Maurice and Khusro II set out to strip their respective Armenian sectors of soldiers for service in distant conflicts. Two rebellions from the middle of this decade attest the resulting sense of bewilderment among the Armenian elite.⁸ Only the uprisings in the 770s and the resistance to the forces of Michael IV (1034–41) in 1041 outside Ani reveal a similar desperation. The first of the two rebellions collapsed when threatened by imperial and Persian forces acting in concert. The second ended in bloodshed. An army under the general Heraclius and Hamazasp Mamikonean defeated the rebels, killing the majority and capturing the remainder who were taken back to Theodosiopolis and executed. The only rebel to escape fled to Khusro II but was returned, tortured and killed.

The role of Hamazasp Mamikonean challenges the standard picture of Armenian helplessness in the face of implacable imperial oppression. Here is an Armenian noble serving imperial interests inside Armenia. The suspicion must be that there were other Armenian princes prepared to work with the new regime. When war with Persia broke out after Maurice's assassination in late 602, as Khusro II sought to recover those districts previously ceded, several Armenian princes fought for Byzantium. In 605, the Byzantine forces defending the district of Bagrevand against Khusro were led by the local Armenian lord Theodore Khorkhoruni who entered into negotiations with the Persians only after Byzantine forces had withdrawn.⁹ Significantly, it took at least five seasons of campaigning for the Persians to expel the Byzantine forces from Armenia (603–7). Moreover, the fighting was not restricted to those western districts which had been under imperial control for generations but was concentrated further east, across the districts recently acquired by Byzantium. Such a holding strategy would have been inconceivable without local support.

The decade after 591 also witnessed pressure upon those districts now under imperial control to conform to imperial orthodoxy. Although Catholicos Moses II (574–604) refused to attend a council in Constantinople convened to establish union between the churches and remained in the Persian sector at Dvin, Maurice ordered the council of Chalcedon to be preached in all the churches of the land of Armenia, threatening 'to unite them in communion through the army'.¹⁰ A second catholicos, John

⁷ Whitby, Michael (1988), pp. 297–304. See above, p. 169.

⁸ Seb., chs. 15–18, ed. Abgaryan, pp. 87–90; tr. and comm. Thomson and Howard-Johnston, I, pp. 32–5.

⁹ Seb., ch. 32, ed. Abgaryan, pp. 109–10; tr. and comm. Thomson and Howard-Johnston, I, pp. 60–2.

¹⁰ Seb., ch. 19, ed. Abgaryan, p. 91; tr. and comm. Thomson and Howard-Johnston, I, p. 37. See also above, pp. 169–70.

of Bagaran, was established at Avan, provocatively situated just across the border. John is usually titled 'anti-catholicos' and dismissed as little more than the creature of Maurice with an ephemeral influence upon Armenia. However, there is good evidence for a sizeable body of support for John, at and below diocesan level. After the election of Abraham as catholicos (perhaps in 606, probably in 607), five bishops and nineteen leaders of religious communities, including those linked to the 'holy cathedral' and the church of St Hrip'sime in Vagharshapat, acknowledged their error and returned to the anti-Chalcedonian party.¹¹

Moreover, there were repeated attempts at ecclesiastical reconciliation. In 604, the Byzantine commander in Armenia, Sormen, wrote to the temporary head of the monophysite party, Vrt'anes, noting that they had met and corresponded on this subject many times. Sormen expressed a hope that they could meet 'like fellow brothers, joint heirs in baptism and sons in the faith of our father St Gregory', revealing thereby his own Armenian ancestry.¹² This spirit of compromise, which was not reciprocated, seems to find an echo in the remarkable *karshuni* version of Agathangelos.¹³ This transposes the key events in the original narrative of the conversion of Armenia to different, contemporary locations. Thus of the seventy-seven virgins who accompanied St Hrip'sime, forty are assigned to Dvin and thirty-seven to Avan, thereby establishing the equal sanctity of both sees. Gregory the Illuminator baptises in the western district of Ekegheats'; he meets King Tiridates fifteen kilometres from Theodosiupolis; and he dies in Daranaghi. This radical revision represents a rare witness to the intellectual tradition of the pro-Chalcedonian party in Armenia after 591 and a very subtle development – or rather, subversion – of Armenian tradition.

Even the Byzantines' defeat at Persian hands in Basean, probably in 607, and their subsequent loss of key fortresses, including Theodosiupolis, did not mark the end of operations in Armenia. The following year, a Byzantine counter-attack in the district of Theodosiupolis was repulsed, whilst in 610 the city's inhabitants were transferred to Ecbatana in Persia, suggesting an ongoing threat. In 613, another Byzantine army marched through these districts. When Heraclius (610–41) launched a significant campaign in 624 against Theodosiupolis and then Dvin, he was advancing through districts which had been incorporated into provincial and episcopal structures for generations. Evidently he was looking to attract additional support. In autumn 624, Heraclius appealed to the princes and leaders of the lands of Albania, Iberia and Armenia by letter, urging them to come and serve

¹¹ *Book of letters*, ed. Izmireants', pp. 151–2; ed. Pogharean, pp. 298–9; French tr. Garsoïan, pp. 514–15.

¹² *Book of letters*, ed. Izmireants', p. 90; ed. Pogharean, p. 231.

¹³ van Esbroeck (1971a); Cowe (1992).

him together with their forces but threatening reprisals and subjugation if they refused.¹⁴ It is impossible to gauge the response to his appeal but it seems that many Armenian princes preferred to support Khusro II.¹⁵ Only one late source refers explicitly to Armenians being attracted into imperial service before Heraclius' defeat of the Persian army at the battle of Nineveh on 12 December 627.¹⁶

The years between 624 and 628 witnessed a complex series of military manoeuvres and engagements in the Transcaucasus.¹⁷ Three primary strategic considerations seem to have guided Heraclius. He courted potential allies across the Transcaucasus and from the steppe world to the north. The decisive impact of Turkic forces in 627 and 628 cannot be exaggerated. Secondly, such a strategy drew Persian armies away from Constantinople and into an environment in which logistical pressures dictated that possession of the larger army was no guarantee of success. Thirdly, whether or not instructed by his father, Heraclius had recognised the potential for striking at the centre of the Sasanian kingdom from the north, using Armenia as a bridgehead.¹⁸ Such considerations go a long way towards explaining why Armenia continued to command such attention from successive emperors throughout the seventh century and beyond.

When Byzantine forces were expelled in 607, the monophysite party in the Armenian church was already in the ascendant and remained so throughout the reign of Khusro II. The latter began to favour the expanding monophysite confession across his dominions in preference to the Nestorian church of the east. In the aftermath of Heraclius' triumph and the return of the True Cross to Jerusalem on 21 March 630, the fissures within the Armenian church were reopened. The recently appointed catholicos Ezra (630–41) was invited to attend a church council at Theodosiopolis, probably in early 631, and under threat of the creation of a second catholicos he accepted union. Statements that Ezra was 'a humble and gentle man' and that 'no indecorous word ever passed from his mouth' reflect a partisan opinion.¹⁹ In reality his accommodation with Heraclius is likely to have provoked considerable antagonism, an echo of which may be found in the exile of John of Mayragom, an ardent monophysite whose own catholical ambitions had been thwarted by Ezra's election.²⁰ An inscription commemorating Ezra, partly in Greek and partly in Armenian cryptograms, has been unearthed at Avan; evidently Ezra wished to associate himself

¹⁴ *HA*, II.10, ed. Arak'elyan, p. 132; tr. Dowsett, pp. 79–80. The *History of the Albanians* has been variously, and wrongly, attributed to Moses Daskhurants'i or Moses Kaghankatuats'i; the identity of the compiler is unknown.

¹⁵ Theoph., ed. de Boor, I, p. 311; tr. Mango and Scott, p. 443.

¹⁶ *Chronicon ad 1234*, ch. 99, ed. Chabot, I, pp. 233–4; *Syrian chronicles*; tr. Palmer *et al.*, p. 137.

¹⁷ Howard-Johnston (1999). ¹⁸ Kaegi (2003a), pp. 22–3. ¹⁹ Greenwood (2002), pp. 360–3.

²⁰ Yov., XVIII.15–30, ed. Emin, pp. 77–80; tr. Maksoudian, pp. 99–100.

with the church founded there by John of Bagaran and the confessional tradition espoused by him.²¹

Ezra's choice of Avan was also dictated by political circumstance, since Dvin still lay in the Persian sector. The deposition of Khusro II did not give Heraclius possession of the whole of Armenia. In 628, Khusro II's successor, Kavad II, appointed Varaztirots' Bagratuni as governor (*marzban*) of Armenia. Only under the terms of a subsequent treaty in the summer of 630, between Heraclius and the latest claimant to the Sasanian throne, Boran (630–31), were those districts ceded to Maurice returned to Byzantine control. Even then, Persian influence over eastern and southern Armenia persisted. In autumn 637, the leading Armenian prince, Mushegh Mamikonean, responded to a Persian call-to-arms, raising 3,000 troops whilst Gregory, lord of Siwnik', contributed 1,000.²² Both fell at the battle of al-Qadisiyya on 6 January 638. With the benefit of hindsight, such loyalty to the Sasanian cause might seem misguided, but the success of the Arab conquest of Persia was still far from assured at that time.

The loyalty of Varaztirots' Bagratuni and Mushegh Mamikonean to Sasanian Persia may also explain the promotion of 'new men' to the office of 'prince of Armenia' in the Byzantine sector of Armenia after 630, a title used to denote the principal client. Mzhezh Gnuni and his successors, David Saharuni and Theodore Rshtuni, all came from minor noble houses. Although the narrative sources reveal little beyond this sequence, epigraphic evidence supports the proposition that this decade saw an intense Byzantine campaign to attract a broad spectrum of support. Three inscriptions, recording the foundation of churches at Aghaman (completed 636/7), Bagavan (August 639) and Mren (between 638 and mid-640), all give a regnal year of Heraclius and accord him a laudatory epithet.²³ Contemporary regnal formulae and protocols used in imperial documents and legislation repeat this combination. These inscriptions therefore attest an otherwise lost body of correspondence between Byzantium and Armenia.

The inscriptions at Aghaman and Mren also confirm that imperial honours were distributed and were prized by their recipients. The founder of the small church at Aghaman chose to define himself as Gregory *elustr* – i.e. *illustris*, no more than a middle-ranking imperial title by this time. This reveals a considerable down-reach on the part of the imperial authorities into individual Armenian districts, for Gregory was not the lord of the district in which he sponsored his church. The founder of the church at Mren, David Saharuni, is titled *patrikios*, *kouropalatēs* and *sparapet* of Armenia and

²¹ Greenwood (2004), inscription A.6 and p. 41.

²² Seb., ch. 42, ed. Abgaryan, p. 137; tr. and comm. Thomson and Howard-Johnston, I, pp. 98–9.

²³ Greenwood (2004), inscriptions A.4, A.5 and A.7 and pp. 43–7, 62–78.

Syria. His remit encompassed all Armenia and must postdate the death of Mushegh Mamikonean at al-Qadisiyya in 638. The extension of his command beyond the boundaries of Armenia into Syria is unprecedented and suggests that Heraclius was prepared to make remarkable concessions in his efforts to forge an effective opposition to the Arab invasions after the fall of Syria, one in which Armenian military resources had a leading role to play.

The contention that Heraclius invested heavily in a network of Armenian clients is supported by the numismatic evidence. Seven different issues of silver hexagrams from the reign of Heraclius and four issues of Constans II (641–68) have been discovered in hoards or during excavations in Armenia, the latest issue being struck between 654 and 659.²⁴ This flow of Byzantine silver into Armenia has traditionally been linked to the presence of Byzantine forces; however, in light of the epigraphic evidence and the elite's prosperity, reflected in the numerous church foundations, one is tempted to speculate whether this silver was minted for, and paid to, Armenian clients. Armenia had been integrated into the Sasanian silver-based monetary system for centuries and silver coins would have been familiar to Armenians.

This strategy proved effective during the following decade. When an Arab raiding party advanced from northern Syria through the Bitlis pass in autumn 640 and sacked Dvin, Theodore Rshtuni ambushed the invaders during their retreat, albeit without much success.²⁵ A second Arab raid, attacking from the south-east through Azerbaijan in summer 643, encountered stiff resistance. One of its divisions, numbering about 3,000, was heavily defeated by Theodore Rshtuni outside the fortress of Artsap'k'. The major centre of Nakhchawan in the Araxes valley held out. These operations showed the offensive and defensive potential of Armenia and may have deterred further attacks.

Armenia was not insulated from the political turmoil engulfing Constantinople after the death of Heraclius. The failed coup by Valentinus in 645 seems to have prompted widespread changes in the military hierarchy across Armenia. The new commander, Thomas, was anxious not to damage the agreement established with Khorokhazat, leader of continuing Persian resistance against the Arabs in Atrpatakan (Azerbaijan). Thomas visited him and promised that Theodore Rshtuni would be taken to Constantinople.²⁶ This episode illustrates how the interests of two clients did not necessarily coincide. Khorokhazat faced growing recalcitrance from Albania

²⁴ Mousheghian *et al.* (2000a).

²⁵ Seb., chs. 42, 44, ed. Abgaryan, pp. 138–9, 145–7; tr. and comm. Thomson and Howard-Johnston, I, pp. 100–1, 109–11.

²⁶ Seb., ch. 44, ed. Abgaryan, pp. 142–3; tr. and comm. Thomson and Howard-Johnston, I, pp. 106–8.

and was looking for assistance in deterring Armenian support for dissident elements. In choosing to back Khorokhazat, Byzantium precipitated a crisis in Armenia.

Theodore Rshtuni was soon restored to his command but the relationship was clearly strained. In 652 the governor of Syria (and later caliph) Mu'awiya (661–80) induced him to switch sides, promising *inter alia* that Armenian forces would not be employed in Syria and that Arab forces would not be stationed in Armenia unless invited to repel a Byzantine attack.²⁷ In response, Constans II travelled to Armenia to shore up his support and undermine his erstwhile client. He advanced to Theodosiopolis and there received the submission of a disparate group of Armenian princes and their armed forces. Evidently they believed that it was in their long-term interests to return to imperial service. Constans II moved on to Dvin and stayed with Catholicos Nerses III (641–61). He attended a service with his host in the cathedral church of St Gregory, during which the liturgy was celebrated in Greek and the council of Chalcedon was proclaimed. Only one anonymous bishop refused to participate but this tells us little about the ongoing confessional tensions within the Armenian church; presumably anti-Chalcedonians did not attend.

Constans II did not remain in Armenia long, being forced to return and defend Constantinople in 654. Thereafter Byzantine fortunes fluctuated, imperial forces being driven out of Armenia twice, but by the first half of 656, Hamazasp Mamikonean was securely installed as *kouropalatēs* and prince of Armenia.²⁸ At the same time, honours were distributed to the other princes and treasures to the soldiers, confirming that the benefits of imperial service were not confined to a few but were spread broadly among the elite. Nerses III returned from exile in Tao after 'the lord of Rshtunik' had died and the Arab invasion had come to an end', indicating an earlier date, perhaps 656, than is generally admitted.

Constans II was determined to exploit the unexpected breathing space afforded by the outbreak of civil war or *fitna* across the caliphate. He sought to establish a broad network of clients across the Transcaucasus. Juansher, prince of Albania, and the princes of Siwnik' quickly submitted.²⁹ In autumn 659, the emperor undertook a second progress eastwards lasting several months.³⁰ He ventured into Media, meeting and rewarding loyal clients including Juansher, who requested and received a fragment of the

²⁷ Seb., chs. 48–9, ed. Abgaryan, pp. 164–8; tr. and comm. Thomson and Howard-Johnston, I, pp. 135–42.

²⁸ Seb., chs. 50–2, ed. Abgaryan, pp. 169–77; tr. and comm. Thomson and Howard-Johnston, I, pp. 143–53.

²⁹ Seb., ch. 52, ed. Abgaryan, p. 175; tr. and comm. Thomson and Howard-Johnston, I, p. 153; *HA*, II.19–21, ed. Arak'elyan, pp. 180–2; tr. Dowsett, pp. 115–17.

³⁰ *HA*, II.22, ed. Arak'elyan, pp. 183–6; tr. Dowsett, pp. 118–20.



Figure 22 The southern façade of the palatine church of Aruch, built by Mu‘awiya’s principal Armenian client, Gregory Mamikonean, and his wife Heline in 670. A columned palace has been excavated immediately to the south of the church, attested by the capital in the foreground

True Cross. Constans was also seeking to attract others, including Persians who wished to fight on against the Arabs. He was still in Armenia in spring 660, at Vagharshapat, where he rewarded Juansher a second time. A later text suggests that the emperor was present at the inauguration of the impressive church of Zvart‘nots.³¹ Whilst this cannot be proved, his involvement would have done much to bolster the standing of its founder Nerses III and the pro-Chalcedonian party across Armenia. Intriguingly, the terse inscription commemorating Nerses’ role is in Greek rather than Armenian.³²

In the event, Constans II’s vision of a chain of clients did not survive beyond the conclusion of the *fitna*. As the lynchpin of the network, Hamazasp was swiftly removed and replaced by his brother Gregory Mamikonean, previously a hostage of Mu‘awiya. Juansher transferred his allegiance to the ‘king of the south [Mu‘awiya]’, when ‘the emperor of the Romans [Constans] took the dregs of his forces and hastened across sea and land to cross to the . . . distant islands of the west’.³³ It seems very likely that the principal Byzantine clients had been displaced or turned by late 661 or early 662.

³¹ *HA*, III.15, ed. Arak‘elyan, p. 317; tr. Dowsett, p. 207.

³² Greenwood (2004), inscription A.18 and p. 41.

³³ *HA*, II.27, ed. Arak‘elyan, p. 193; tr. Dowsett, pp. 124–5.

INDEPENDENCE AND INTEGRATION UNDER ISLAM (661–850)

After 661, the limitations of the primary sources make it much harder to trace the interaction between Byzantium and Armenia. The conventional approach has been to treat this dearth of information as evidence for the exclusion of Byzantine influence. Armenian colophons and inscriptions together with isolated textual references collectively support an alternative view, of persistent, wide-ranging Byzantine engagement until 730 but a more limited focus thereafter, concentrated on and operated through those districts bordering imperial territory.

The second sustained period of civil war across the caliphate after 680 afforded a fresh opportunity for Byzantine intervention. According to Lewond's *History*, Armenia repudiated Arab sovereignty by refusing to pay tribute, probably in 682, but it is impossible to prove Byzantine influence lying behind this decision.³⁴ A later Armenian source records how an Iberian prince, Nerses, massacred the Arab forces in Armenia during the time of Catholicos Israel I (667–77).³⁵ The Arab blockade of Constantinople between 674 and 678 supplies an appropriate historical context for just such a diversionary campaign but a Byzantine connection remains conjectural (see also pp. 233, 372).

Constantine IV (668–85) was eager to exploit contemporary disorder across the caliphate. In 685, he invaded Cilicia and threatened northern Syria, compelling the new caliph, 'Abd al-Malik (685–705) to sue for peace on very generous terms on 7 July 685.³⁶ This campaign may have been coordinated with the devastating Khazar raid into Armenia during which Gregory Mamikonean and Nerses were killed in battle on 18 August 685.³⁷ According to Theophanes the Confessor, Justinian II (685–95, 705–711) ratified the truce with 'Abd al-Malik soon after his accession although its term was extended to ten years and an additional provision was inserted, requiring the parties to share the tax revenue of Cyprus, Armenia and Iberia.³⁸ A subsequent passage under the same year entry adds that Justinian II despatched a *stratēgos*, Leontius, into Armenia. He subjugated Armenia, together with Iberia, Albania, Boukrania (probably Vaspurakan) and Media, imposed taxes on those countries and remitted a large sum to Justinian. The changes to the treaty make sense when viewed in the aftermath of this raid. The revenue arrangements may reflect a more fundamental partition, of sovereignty. Gregory Mamikonean's successor as prince of Armenia was Ashot Bagratuni, titled *patrikios*. Since he also brought an icon of the

³⁴ Lew., ch. 4, ed. Ezean, p. 15; tr. Arzoumanian, p. 54.

³⁵ Yov., XX.18–19, ed. Emin, p. 93; tr. Maksoudian, p. 106.

³⁶ Theoph., ed. de Boor, I, p. 361; tr. Mango and Scott, pp. 503–4.

³⁷ Lew., ch. 4, ed. Ezean, pp. 15–16; tr. Arzoumanian, pp. 54–5.

³⁸ Theoph., ed. de Boor, I, p. 363; tr. Mango and Scott, pp. 506–7.

incarnation of Christ ‘from the west’ for his church at Daroynk’, forty kilometres south of Mount Ararat, it seems likely that he was a Byzantine client.³⁹

After Ashot’s death – confronting Arab raiders in the Araxes valley in 689 – a number of Armenian princes switched allegiance. This prompted Justinian II to travel to Armenia in person, as his grandfather Constans II had done in similar circumstances. Justinian summoned the princes to him, taking some of their sons hostage, while rewarding others: he raised Nerses Kamsarakan, the lord of Shirak, to the rank of prince of Armenia and the *patrikios* and exarch Varaz(tr)dat was made prince of Albania.⁴⁰ He then returned to Constantinople, taking with him Catholicos Sahak III (677–703) and five bishops. Theophanes likewise reports Justinian’s visit to Armenia although he places it too early, in his second year, and wrongly associates it with the Mardaites.⁴¹ A remarkable, pro-Chalcedonian account of Armenian ecclesiastical history, which survives only in Greek, records that Sahak and his bishops accepted Chalcedon at a council convened in Constantinople in the fifth year of Justinian II, although on their return to Armenia and under pressure, they reneged.⁴²

This revival in Byzantine fortunes occurred in the context of the second *fitna*. Even before his final victory over his main rival in 691, Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik was turning his attention to Byzantium. Contrary to the traditional view, it seems very probable that it was ‘Abd al-Malik, not Justinian II, who broke the ten-year truce.⁴³ The heavy Byzantine defeat in 692 at Sebastopolis occurred deep inside newly secured Byzantine territory, indicating an Arab offensive (see below, p. 384). Several Armenian clients promptly transferred allegiance but the Byzantine position did not collapse overnight. A colophon confirms that the principal Byzantine client in 689, Nerses Kamsarakan, was still alive in 696 and in contact with Constantinople.⁴⁴ The region of Fourth Armenia also resisted. Although Muhammad bin Marwan, the governor of al-Jazira, campaigned there in 694/5, evidently it had not been subjugated in 701/2 when Baanes ‘Heptadaimon’ switched sides.⁴⁵ Perhaps most surprisingly, in 702 Smbat Bagratuni rebelled and defeated an Arab force at Vardanakert, being rewarded with the title *kouropalatēs*.⁴⁶ A

³⁹ Lew., ch. 5, ed. Ezean, p. 16; tr. Arzoumanian, p. 55.

⁴⁰ ST, ed. Malkhaseants’, p. 101; French tr. Dulaurier, p. 129.

⁴¹ Theoph., ed. de Boor, I, p. 364; tr. Mango and Scott, pp. 507–8.

⁴² *Narratio de rebus Armeniae*, chs. 144–5, ed. Garitte, pp. 46–7 (text), pp. 350–6 (commentary); French tr. Mahé, p. 437.

⁴³ Proposed by James Howard-Johnston in a seminar paper, ‘Byzantium and ‘Abd al-Malik’ (11 March 2003, Oxford).

⁴⁴ Mat’evosyan (ed.), *Hishatakaranner*, no. 28, pp. 21–2; Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical history*, pp. 9–13, 35–40.

⁴⁵ Theoph., ed. de Boor, I, pp. 368, 372; tr. Mango and Scott, pp. 514, 519.

⁴⁶ Lew., ch. 10, ed. Ezean, pp. 31–5; tr. Arzoumanian, pp. 64–6.

parallel account of this uprising, but with a Kamsarakan spin, affords useful corroboration.⁴⁷

The aftermath of this rebellion remains confused. Lewond maintains that Smbat withdrew into Tao and that Catholicos Sahak III negotiated a three-year peace. According to the *History of the Albanians*, however, military operations continued.⁴⁸ Dvin fell to a joint Byzantine-Armenian force whilst the Arabs captured a fortress in Sevan only after a three-year blockade. Both sources agree that a Byzantine force then suffered a heavy defeat. Lewond adds that this occurred in Vanand in the first year of Caliph al-Walid I (705–15). The Byzantine troops fled and the Armenian rebels suffered severe reprisals, with 800 men in Nakhchawan and 400 in Khram being imprisoned in churches and then burnt alive. Ominously, the lord of Shirak, Nerses Kamsarakan, was summoned to Syria in 705; his fate is not recorded. Smbat *kouropalatēs* escaped into Byzantine territory and was settled in the city of Phasis in Lazica. This sequence of events – a rebellion by Armenian princes, contact with Emperor Tiberius II Apsimar (698–705), the despatch of Byzantine forces, a successful counter-offensive by Muhammad bin Marwan followed by the burning alive of Armenian princes – is corroborated by Theophanes.⁴⁹ The only significant difference is chronological. Theophanes records this sequence of events under one year, AM 6195 (702/3) but it seems more likely that they were spread across several years (702–5).

Aside from the failed attempt at union in the time of Justinian II outlined above, relations between the churches after 661 are almost entirely obscure. In 719, however, Catholicos John III (717–27) stated unequivocally that the six catholicoi after Komitas (between 628 and 705) were all Chalcedonian, exempting only his immediate predecessor Elias (703–17) from criticism.⁵⁰ As outlined previously, Ezra, Nerses III and Sahak III all engaged in discussions with the imperial church but none of their correspondence or other writings survives. Indeed the only extant letter between 628 and 705 is a draft Armenian ‘Defence’ of the monophysite position, prepared in 649 for despatch to Constans II.⁵¹ Arguably, no records or letters associated with these catholicoi survive precisely because of their confessional perspective. An exchange between Patriarch Germanos I (715–30) and Catholicos John III from the 720s does survive, defining and defending their respective positions in great detail.⁵² Conceivably this correspondence marks the

⁴⁷ Yov., XXI.1–5, ed. Emin, pp. 95–8; tr. Maksoudian, pp. 107–9.

⁴⁸ *HA*, III.16, ed. Arak’elyan, pp. 317–18; tr. Dowsett, pp. 207–8.

⁴⁹ Theoph., ed. de Boor, I, p. 372; tr. Mango and Scott, pp. 519–20.

⁵⁰ *Book of letters*, ed. Izmireants’, pp. 221–2; ed. Pogharean, pp. 475–6. See now Greenwood (2008).

⁵¹ Seb., ch. 46, ed. Abgaryan, pp. 148–61; tr. and comm. Thomson and Howard-Johnston, I, pp. 114–32; Thomson (1998).

⁵² *Book of letters*, ed. Izmireants’, pp. 358–95; ed. Pogharean, pp. 414–66.

final breach between the churches and was preserved because it articulated the differences. Confessional tensions at the highest level need not have deterred other contacts. Colophons reveal that four patristic works were translated into Armenian in Constantinople between 713 and 717 by David *hypatos* and Stephen of Siwnik.⁵³

After 730, Byzantine influence persisted but on a more limited scale. An inscription on a tombstone located in a crypt at Nakhchawan in Shirak commemorates ‘the blessed lord Artawazd Kamsarakan *apo hypatōn patrikios* and prince of Armenia, son of Hrahat *patrikios* lord of Shirak and Asharunik’.⁵⁴ Artawazd was the grandson of Nerses Kamsarakan mentioned previously. Evidently Byzantine titles continued to be awarded during the eighth century to Armenian princes. Artawazd does not feature in any other source, which is surprising given his rank of ‘prince of Armenia’. His omission is hard to explain unless one views him as a second, rival prince of Armenia and client of Byzantium.

When the third *fitna* erupted, two groups of Armenian princes may once again be discerned. One party, under Ashot Bagratuni, remained loyal to Caliph Marwan II (744–50); the other under Gregory Mamikonean, looked to Constantine V (741–75). Having taken refuge in Tao, ‘they relied upon the forces of the king of the Greeks, who were in the regions of Pontos, because there was a treaty of peace between them, at the command of the emperor Constantine’.⁵⁵ After blinding Ashot Bagratuni, perhaps in 748, Gregory went to Theodosiupolis and broadcast news of his victory. Evidently Theodosiupolis was under his, or Constantine’s, control and he was attempting to attract further support. His success or otherwise in this initiative is not recorded by Lewond, who simply notes that he died in agony at an unspecified date and was replaced for a short time by his brother.⁵⁶ Whether Lewond’s hostility stems from a political (anti-Mamikonean) or confessional (anti-Chalcedonian) perspective is unclear. Again this temporary Byzantine revival in Armenia was halted by the resolution of the strife within the caliphate. In 754, Constantine V transferred the population of Theodosiupolis to Thrace. Lewond adds that many from the surrounding districts also left and ‘placed themselves on the side of the pious king’, a rare favourable view of Constantine V.⁵⁷ This transfer may represent a tactical withdrawal at the end of a series of initiatives in Armenia rather than the original goal.

Armenian princes did not risk rebellion against the dominant, controlling power without support, or expressions of support, from a rival power

⁵³ Ma’evosyan (ed.), *Hishatakaraner*, nos. 31–4, pp. 24–6.

⁵⁴ Greenwood (2004), inscription A.13 and pp. 75–6.

⁵⁵ Lew., ch. 26, ed. Ezean, p. 123; tr. Arzoumanian, p. 120.

⁵⁶ Lew., ch. 26, ed. Ezean, pp. 123–4; tr. Arzoumanian, pp. 120–1.

⁵⁷ Lew., ch. 29, ed. Ezean, p. 129; tr. Arzoumanian, p. 124.

other than in exceptional circumstances. At first sight, the complicated series of rebellions across Armenia in the 770s fall into that category. At no stage do the narrative sources indicate any Byzantine involvement.⁵⁸ Two of the rebel leaders, Artawazd and Mushegh Mamikonean, are said to have begun their uprisings by killing local Arab tax-collectors. New administrative arrangements and fiscal burdens at district level may have precipitated their actions. On the other hand, Artawazd moved into Iberia and later reappears as *stratēgos tōn Anatolikōn* whilst Mushegh's rebellion apparently took the form of a prolonged, and ultimately unsuccessful, siege of Theodosiopolis. This strategy is hard to fathom unless one accepts that Byzantine support was anticipated. No Byzantine campaign is recorded but it may have been planned; in 777 a large Byzantine army, under Armenian commanders, attacked Germanikeia and devastated the surrounding region.⁵⁹

For the following five decades, there is very little evidence for Byzantine involvement in Armenia. In 788 as many as 12,000 people under the leadership of Shapuh Amatuni, his son and other Armenian nobles were granted refuge within the empire by 'the emperor Constantine'. Lewond portrays this as a reaction to hardships inflicted by the caliph and his representatives, specifically the seizure of land.⁶⁰ It is in the last quarter of the eighth century that several quasi-independent Arabic emirates emerged, ruling districts previously under Armenian control.⁶¹ At the same time, members of the Bagratuni princely house exploited their status as preferred Abbasid clients to secure a dominant position. After 775, Byzantine attention was concentrated on potential clients in those districts of Iberia which abutted imperial territory. Ashot Bagratuni, established in neighbouring Klarjet'i, was appointed *kouropalatēs* before 826.⁶² Byzantine strategy towards Armenia came to operate on and through the remote district of Sper which bordered the theme of Chaldia. The first ninth-century Armenian prince known to have been accorded an imperial title was another Ashot Bagratuni, prince of Sper; he was appointed *patrikios* and *apo hypatōn* by Theophilos (829–42).⁶³ Intriguingly, his appointment is recorded in the context of Byzantine operations against Theodosiopolis, Basean and Vanand, all to the south and east of Sper. Although these operations have been compressed into a single campaign and linked to a major Byzantine offensive against Sozopetra, Melitene and Fourth Armenia undertaken in 837, they could equally comprise separate campaigns spread over a number of years.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Lew., ch. 34, ed. Ezean, pp. 137–52; tr. Arzoumanian, pp. 129–38.

⁵⁹ Theoph., ed. de Boor, I, p. 451; tr. Mango and Scott, p. 623.

⁶⁰ Lew., ch. 42, ed. Ezean, pp. 168–9; tr. Arzoumanian, p. 149.

⁶¹ Ter-Ghewondyan (1976).

⁶² Martin-Hisard (2001); Martin-Hisard (2002); Abashidze and Rapp (2004).

⁶³ ST, ed. Malkhaseants', p. 144; French tr. Dulaurier, p. 171.

⁶⁴ Laurent (1980), pp. 249–52.

This targeting of Theodosiopolis and its surrounding districts mirrors the pattern of Byzantine offensives outlined previously, whilst the Khurramite rebellion under Babek afforded a suitable opportunity (see below, p. 390).

Caliph al-Mu'tasim (833–42) responded swiftly to this Byzantine threat. In 838, his forces inflicted a heavy defeat upon Theophilos at Dazimon and captured Amorion. Genesios reports that Armenian forces under the 'Vasparakanites' (presumably the leading Artsruni prince) and the prince of princes (probably Bagarat Bagratuni, prince of Taron) participated in these campaigns.⁶⁵ This represents a rare instance of active service by Armenian forces against Byzantium. It illustrates how closely the leading Armenian princes now identified with caliphal interests and the degree to which Byzantine influence over them had waned.

ARMENIA RESURGENT, BYZANTIUM EXPECTANT (850–1045)

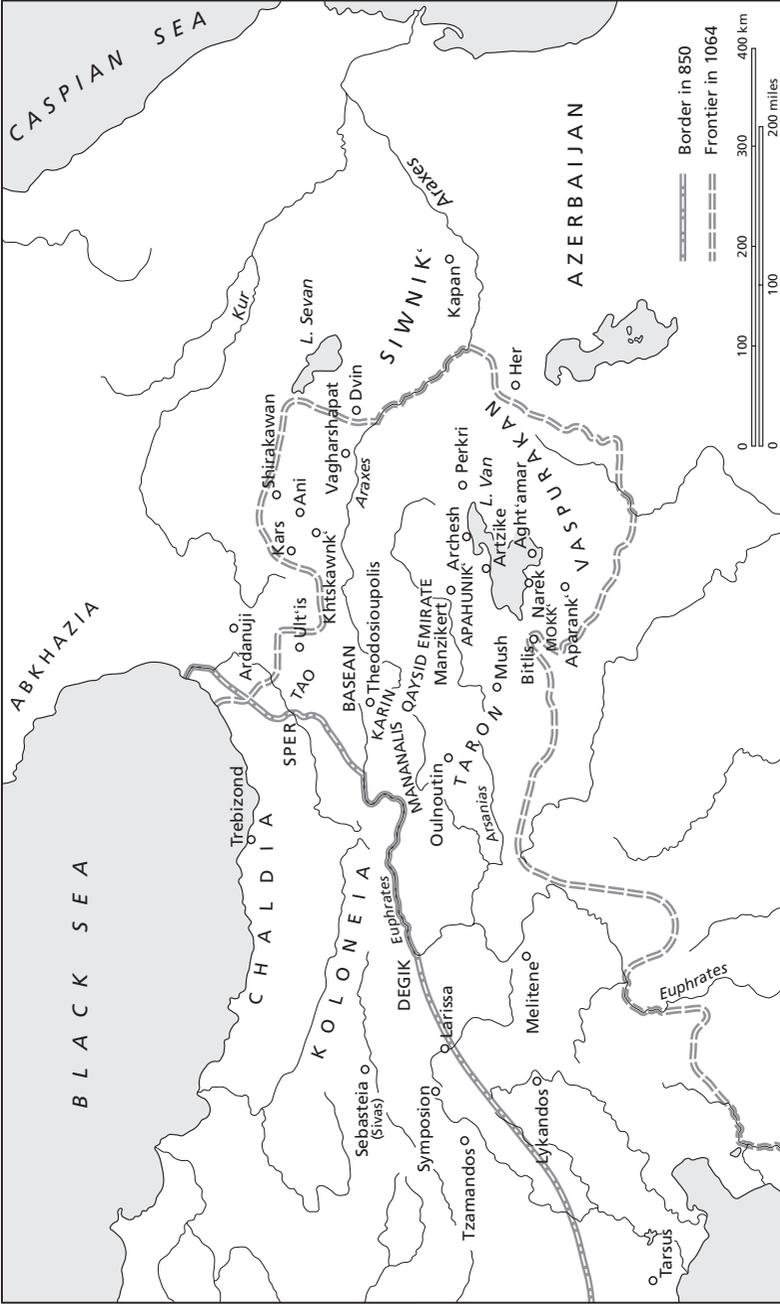
In 850, Caliph al-Mutawakkil (847–61) sent Abu Sa'id Muhammad bin Yusuf to Armenia to collect the so-called 'royal taxes'. Although these were apparently paid, relations between representatives of Abu Sa'id and the principal Artsruni and Bagratuni princes deteriorated rapidly and all parties took up arms.⁶⁶ In 852, Bugha al-Kabir embarked on a series of ruthless campaigns to quash Armenian resistance. The principal noble families were targeted and many leading members were either killed or captured and despatched to the Abbasid capital, Samarra. A few, however, escaped. In 853 or 854, Gurgen Artsruni sought refuge with Gregory Bagratuni, prince of Sper.⁶⁷ Gregory had recently captured an unidentified Byzantine fortress called Aramaneak. When the Byzantine 'general of the east' – an Armenian rendering of *stratēgos tōn Anatolikōn* – attempted to recover Aramaneak, both princes opposed him. He was so impressed by Gurgen's courage that he informed Michael III (842–67), who invited Gurgen to Constantinople. Gurgen declined but he did persuade Gregory to return the fortress and also fought against Bugha's troops when they attacked 'the Greek forces in their fortresses'. This is the first recorded contact between an Artsruni prince and Byzantium for many generations. Significantly it took place in Sper while Armenia was in turmoil.

Nor was this the limit of Byzantine ambitions. In 858, after Gurgen had returned to Vaspurakan, he was confronted by Gregory Artsruni at the head

⁶⁵ Gen., III.13, ed. Lesmüller-Werner and Thurn, p. 47; tr. Kaldellis, pp. 62–3. The prince of princes could have been Bagarat Bagratuni's brother, Smbat Abu'l 'Abbas, at this time.

⁶⁶ TA, ed. Patkanean, pp. 106–212; tr. Thomson, pp. 173–275; Yov., XXV–XXVII, ed. Emin, pp. 113–35; tr. Maksoudian, pp. 116–26.

⁶⁷ TA, ed. Patkanean, pp. 194–5; tr. Thomson, pp. 258–9.



Map 17 Armenia and imperial expansion 850–1045

of Abkhazian and Iberian troops.⁶⁸ Having failed to attract Gurgen, it seems that Byzantium had switched its attention to a second displaced Artsruni prince and backed his bid to seize Vaspurakan. Although Gregory was unsuccessful, the imperial administration evidently had a strategic vision which extended far beyond those districts adjacent to imperial territory.

Therefore when Photios became patriarch of Constantinople in 858 and re-established contact with the Armenian church, he did so in the context of renewed Byzantine engagement across Armenia. The sequence and chronology of the letters exchanged between Photios (858–67, 877–86) and several Armenian correspondents, including Catholicos Zacharias (855–76), remains contentious, as does the authenticity of one of Photios' letters to Zacharias.⁶⁹ Collectively the correspondence attests Photios' determination to heal the long-standing confessional breach. The council of Shirakawan, convened in 862 by Zacharias, represents the first fruits of Photios' initiative.⁷⁰ Canons 13 and 14 respectively condemn two groups: firstly, convinced monophysites who masquerade as Chalcedonians, for personal gain; and secondly, those who have apparently accepted Chalcedon, but still cannot help themselves from adopting the traditional Armenian charge – that the council's ruling on the unity of Christ's person was, in fact, Nestorian. As Jean-Pierre Mahé puts it, 'le cas prévu était la conversion de monophysites au dyophysisme et non l'inverse.'⁷¹ The aftermath of this council is unknown but just before his deposition in 867, Photios observed in an encyclical letter that 'today, the covenant of the Armenians worships purely and in orthodox fashion the Christian faith.'⁷²

By the time Photios was reappointed patriarch on 26 October 877, conditions had altered dramatically. His 'spiritual brother' Zacharias had died and the prince of princes, Ashot Bagratuni, was now entrenched as the pre-eminent client of the caliph and wary of Byzantine initiatives. Although Photios made considerable efforts to engage with Ashot, sending conciliatory letters addressed to 'your most eminent piety', despatching a relic of the True Cross and even reporting that relics of the three most revered Armenian saints had been found in Constantinople, he was unable to recover lost ground.⁷³ The final letters chart the breakdown in discussions with Ashot and his spiritual advisers. Both sides reverted to their traditional positions, defining and rebutting in meticulous detail the doctrinal errors of the other. Although these letters are not dated, the heavy defeats suffered

⁶⁸ TA, ed. Patkanean, pp. 198–9; tr. Thomson, pp. 262–3.

⁶⁹ See Dorfmann-Lazarev (2004) and Greenwood (2006a) for opposing views.

⁷⁰ Akinean and Ter-Pawghosean (1968a), cols. 261–6; Maksoudian (1988–9).

⁷¹ Mahé (1993), p. 495.

⁷² Phot., no. 2, ed. Laourdas and Westerink, I, p. 41, lines 43–4.

⁷³ On the letter, see Akinean and Ter-Pawghosean (1968b), col. 439. On the True Cross, see Mat'evosyan (ed.), *Hishatakaranner*, no. 50, pp. 40–3. On the relics, see van Esbroeck (1971b), pp. 401–4; Greenwood (2006b).

by the Byzantine forces at Melitene in 882 and Tarsus in 883 provide a likely *terminus ante quem* (see above, p. 297). Around 925, Patriarch Nicholas I Mystikos (901–7, 912–925) reflected that Photios had pursued ecclesiastical reconciliation with Armenia without success, implying no correspondence on this subject between the churches in the intervening forty years.⁷⁴

Frustratingly there is no evidence for contacts with the feuding members of the Artsruni house in Vaspurakan after 858. A little more is known about relations with the extended Bagratuni family. Photios acknowledged Ashot Bagratuni's concern for his recent travails and joy at his restoration in 877, suggesting contact before he had regained the patriarchate. Moreover Ashot learned about the discovery of the Armenian relics during an embassy from Basil I (867–86) in 878. In spite of these initiatives, it was not Ashot, prince of princes, who was appointed *kouropalatēs* but his cousin Ashot, prince of Taron, at an unspecified date before 878.⁷⁵ In a final letter, Photios described the Taronites who inhabited Fourth Armenia as orthodox.⁷⁶ It may well be the case that Ashot was rewarded for his orthodoxy. Alternatively the relative proximity of Taron to imperial territory may have influenced the appointment. Either way, Byzantium developed ties simultaneously with several Bagratuni princes.

Three decades of ambitious military and ecclesiastical initiatives beyond the eastern frontier, lasting from 854 to 883, were followed by an era of consolidation. Little-known figures, controlling districts much closer to imperial territory, were induced to acknowledge imperial sovereignty. After the accession of Leo VI (886–912), Manuel, lord of Degik, was given a written guarantee of immunity, taken to Constantinople and appointed *prōtopatharios*.⁷⁷ At the same time, other Armenians were appointed to separate commands along the frontier, usually organised around individual fortresses, and encouraged to expand into adjacent districts. Thus Melias (or Mleh in Armenian) was first appointed turmarch of Euphrateia and Trypia.⁷⁸ In 908, he captured the *kastron* of Lykandos and became its kleisourarch. He then advanced to Tzamandos and constructed a *kastron*. Later he annexed Symposion. In 915 he was appointed *stratēgos* of the newly-created theme of Lykandos. Melias' lordship thereby gained an administrative and legal identity within the Byzantine state. The network of themes created piecemeal along the eastern frontier reflected the local achievements of men such as Melias. Inevitably there were losers as well as winners. For every Melias, there were figures like Ismael 'the Armenian', kleisourarch of Symposion, who was killed by raiders from Melitene.

It would be wrong, however, to assume that this time of consolidation on the frontier coincided with any break in relations with Armenian princes

⁷⁴ NM, no. 139, pp. 450–1.

⁷⁵ TA, ed. Parkanean, pp. 218–24; tr. Thomson, pp. 282–8.

⁷⁶ Phot., no. 284, ed. Laourdas and Westerink, III, p. 94, lines 3194–6.

⁷⁷ *DAL*, ch. 50, pp. 238–9.

⁷⁸ *DAL*, ch. 50, pp. 238–41.

beyond the frontier. Again, several isolated references indicate continued contact with key Bagratuni princes. After Ashot, prince of princes, had been crowned king on 26 August 884 by Catholicos George II (877–97) using a crown brought from the caliph, Basil I acknowledged him as his ‘beloved son’.⁷⁹ Leo VI addressed Ashot I’s son Smbat I Bagratuni (‘the Martyr’) (c. 890–913) in the same way after he succeeded his father in about 890, sending him ‘fine weapons and ornaments and clothing embroidered with gold and cups and chalices and golden belts studded with gems’.⁸⁰ In 892 Smbat captured the city of Dvin and sent its commanders to the emperor in chains, although it seems that this campaign was his own initiative rather than a joint operation.⁸¹ When the prince of Taron, Krikorikios (‘little Gregory’), captured his two cousins in battle in the mid-890s, Smbat wrote to Leo VI, interceding for their release.⁸² Evidently he believed that the emperor could influence the actions of Krikorikios and in this he was proved right.

This incident is reported in chapter forty-three of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus’ *De administrando imperio*, whose importance has long been recognised.⁸³ It describes how several members of the princely family of Taron across two generations were drawn into the political and cultural orbit of Byzantium; the titles, marriages and properties variously granted to them; and the consequences of such engagement for the very existence of the principality. The chapter ends with the *patrikios* Tornikios offering to cede his territories to the emperor, Romanos I Lekapenos (920–44). Although Tornikios died before completing this transfer of sovereignty, he left a will – a Byzantine rather than an Armenian custom – devising the same. His cousins complained to Romanos, who agreed to exchange his inheritance for Oulnoutin, a strategically placed *kastron* in the west of Taron. This chapter reveals much else besides, not least the collection and retention of information gained during diplomatic exchanges; a legal dispute between different members of an Armenian family over title to their property in Constantinople, encouraged if not inspired by the imperial authorities; and complaints to Romanos from three other Armenian princes over payments made to Krikorikios. It is worth remembering, however, that this chapter affords a partial view of diplomatic relations with one particular princely house and the territorial rights conceded to Romanos. The following three chapters trace imperial claims to the Qaysid emirate of Manzikert, to specific districts and *kastra* around Theodosiupolis and to the *kastron* of Ardanuji in Klarjet’i; they do not supply an exhaustive account of relations with every Armenian princely house.

⁷⁹ Yov., XXIX.13, ed. Emin, p. 140; tr. Maksoudian, pp. 129, 272–3.

⁸⁰ Yov., XXXI.2, ed. Emin, p. 158; tr. Maksoudian, p. 138.

⁸¹ Yov., XXXI.9–13, ed. Emin, pp. 160–1; tr. Maksoudian, pp. 138–9.

⁸² *DAI*, ch. 43, pp. 188–91. ⁸³ Shepard (2001).

A better impression of the range of Armenian contacts is supplied by the protocols for imperial correspondence preserved in the *Book of ceremonies*.⁸⁴ The list, which has been dated to between 918 and 922, identifies not only the prince of princes of Greater Armenia and the prince of Vaspurakan, 'who now is honoured as prince of princes', but also seven other Armenian princes. Yet arguably even this list does not do justice to the range of potential correspondents. It identifies only the leading representative of each princely house, but, as we have seen in respect of Taron above, several members of the same house could be in direct relationship with the emperor.

In addition to the activities of Armenian commanders on the frontier, and diplomatic links, Byzantium could also intervene directly using its military forces. A Byzantine force attacked Theodosiopolis as early as 895, whilst in 915 Ashot II Bagratuni ('the Iron') (914–c.928), son of King Smbat I 'the Martyr', returned from exile in Constantinople at the head of a Byzantine army, intent on re-establishing himself in the districts previously held by his father.⁸⁵ In the event, neither campaign was followed up but such apparently isolated actions need to be placed in the context of heavy Byzantine defeats in the Balkans, at Bulgarophygon in 896 and Anchialos in 917. Only after peace had been achieved in 927 were Byzantine forces redirected to the east.⁸⁶ Thereafter key fortresses under Arab control were systematically targeted. Melitene capitulated in 934 and Theodosiopolis in 949, both after years of persistent pressure and blockade. At the same time, every effort was made to ensure that neighbouring Armenian or Iberian princes were not antagonised. Conceivably this strategy was devised after two early reverses. In 922 when a Byzantine army attacked Dvin, it was opposed by the same Ashot II 'the Iron' who had benefited from imperial support seven years before.⁸⁷ Only in exceptional circumstances did an Armenian prince fight against imperial troops. Arguably his own interests had been prejudiced by this advance. Secondly, an attempt was made in 923 to seize control of Ardanuji, located beyond the frontier in Klarjet'i, by infiltrating troops under the guise of a visiting diplomatic mission.⁸⁸ Although this *kastron* had been offered to Romanos I Lekapenos by its prince, the threat by neighbouring Iberian princes to make common cause with local Arabs precipitated a rapid withdrawal.

Frustratingly it is at this very moment, with Byzantium poised to utilise all three approaches – administrative, diplomatic and military – that our source-material peters out. There is sufficient evidence, however, to confirm

⁸⁴ *DC*, II.48, ed. Reiske, I, p. 687; Martin-Hisard (2000).

⁸⁵ *TA*, ed. Patkanean, p. 231; tr. Thomson, pp. 294–5; *Yov.*, LVI.1–4, ed. Emin, p. 292–3; tr. Mak-soudian, pp. 201–2.

⁸⁶ Whittow (1996a), pp. 316–17. See also below, p. 509.

⁸⁷ *ST*, ed. Malkhaseants', p. 170; French tr. Macler, pp. 24–5. ⁸⁸ *DAI*, ch. 46, pp. 214–23.

that the eclipse in Bagratuni power – epitomised by Smbat I's murder in 913 and perpetuated by the long confrontation between Ashot II 'the Iron' and Smbat's nephew, also called Ashot – forced Byzantium to reappraise its position and recognise Gagik Artsruni as the pre-eminent figure.⁸⁹ Shortly after the death of Catholicos John V in 925, Gagik I Artsruni (908–c.943) wrote to Nicholas I Mystikos, seeking to secure the succession for his preferred candidate through a ceremony in Constantinople. Nicholas' reply, addressed to Gagik 'prince of princes', was uncompromising in its defence of orthodox belief, maintaining that Gagik's candidate would need to be instructed in sound doctrine and ecclesiastical government.⁹⁰ At the same time Nicholas noted the 'confession of friendship' by which Gagik was 'attached to our Christ-loving emperor and to our most holy church of God'; his own orthodoxy was not at issue. This relationship had practical implications. According to Ibn al-Athir, in 931 the lord of Vaspurakan, Ibn al-Dayrani (the Arabic version of [Gagik] son of Derenik) proposed and participated in a joint campaign with Byzantine forces against the Qaysid amirs.⁹¹

During the Artsruni ascendancy, Byzantium retained ties with other noble houses. The leading Bagratuni after 929, Abas, held the title of *magistros*, reflecting both the continuing demise of his family's fortunes and a closer link to Byzantium than many commentators have credited.⁹² A letter written in about 933 by Theodore Daphnopates to the bishop of Siwnik', reprimanding him for teaching monophysite doctrine, reveals the spread of Byzantine interest eastwards.⁹³ Yet it is clear that Byzantium did not enjoy a monopoly of influence across Armenia. Mindful of recent Sajid intervention and devastation, Armenian princes remained wary of Muslim powers to the east and south, however ephemeral these proved to be. Thus when Saif al-Dawla, the future Hamdanid amir of Aleppo, marched north through the Bitlis pass to Lake Van in 940, several Armenian princes responded to his summons and submitted, including one of Gagik's sons and Ashot, son of Krikorikios, prince of Taron.⁹⁴ Although the sources contradict one another over the course of his campaign and the identity of the Artsruni client, they confirm that Armenian princes were prepared to recognise the sovereignty of an enemy of Byzantium if they believed this would serve their own interests. Ibn Hawqal offers a second example, listing those Armenian princes who paid tribute to the Sallarid ruler of

⁸⁹ *DC*, II.48, ed. Reiske, I, p. 687.

⁹⁰ *NM*, no. 135, pp. 446–51. A second, unrelated letter from Gagik to the patriarch and the emperor survives: *Book of letters*, ed. Izmireants', pp. 295–301; French tr. Garsoïan, pp. 540–9.

⁹¹ Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil*, in Vasil., p. 153. ⁹² *DAI*, ch. 44, pp. 198–9.

⁹³ Theodore Daphnopates, *Correspondance*, ed. and French tr. Darrouzès and Westerink, no. 10, pp. 108–41. Intriguingly the original letter from the bishop was in Armenian.

⁹⁴ *DAI: Comm.*, p. 169; Whittow (1996a), pp. 319–20.



Figure 23 The southern façade of the palatine church of Aght'amar, constructed by the architect Manuel for King Gagik I Artsruni of Vaspurakan between 915 and 921 on an island in Lake Van. The external walls are lined with figural and decorative sculpture, inspired by biblical and Artsruni history; frescoes, now badly damaged, cover the interior

Azerbaijan, Marzuban, in 955 and the considerable amounts due.⁹⁵ It is unclear whether such sums were actually remitted or whether this liability lapsed after Marzuban's death in 957, but the principle, however short-lived, seems established. By contrast, there is no evidence that Byzantium imposed any financial burdens upon its Armenian clients.

In the event, Saif al-Dawla did not develop a bloc of Armenian support. His victories over Byzantine forces provoked a series of counter-offensives. The successes enjoyed by Nikephoros Phokas after 955 drew Byzantium southwards, into Cilicia and northern Syria, away from active military engagement in Armenia (see below, p. 517). As observed above, campaigns across Armenia had been directed against those emirates and their bases which historically had posed the greatest threat. This strategy concluded with the capture of Theodosiupolis in 949. Although the military focus shifted south, it seems that the nexus of relationships with Armenian princes and clerics continued to be maintained and developed. Admittedly there is very little evidence of Byzantine involvement in Armenia between 935 and 976, but it is during this period that significant confessional tensions emerged within the Armenian church. Catholicos Anania I (943–67) reasserted

⁹⁵ Ibn Hawqal, *Surat*, ed. Kramers, II, pp. 354–5; French tr. Kramers and Wiet, II, pp. 347–8; Minorsky (1953), pp. 519–20.

his authority over the dissident see of Siwnik' at the council of Kapan in 958, but was succeeded by Vahan I of Siwnik' who 'wished to develop friendship and agreement with Chalcedonians'.⁹⁶ Vahan I was deposed in 968 by the council of Ani and sought refuge with the king of Vaspurakan, Apusahl Hamazasp (953/8–72). Byzantine influence in these events may be inferred. A colophon records the visit of a priest named Pantaleon to Constantinople in January 966 at the command of Apusahl Hamazasp, 'king of kings of the house of Armenia'.⁹⁷ The colophon adds that this occurred in the time of Nikephoros, 'emperor of the Greeks, valiant and virtuous, victorious in battles against the heathens'. Pantaleon returned safely 'through the power of the Holy Cross and the prayers of the Holy Apostles and the grace of both our kings, Nikephoros and Hamazasp'. Not only was Apusahl in direct contact with Constantinople; in the eyes of the author, Nikephoros II Phokas (963–9) enjoyed joint sovereignty with the Artsruni king.

Nor is this the only evidence of continued Byzantine engagement. Whilst the four chapters devoted to Armenian and Iberian affairs in the *De administrando imperio* largely recount past episodes rather than present circumstances, their very inclusion is significant. In 966 or 967, after the death of its prince, Ashot, Taron came under Byzantine control. Two years later, Bardas Phokas, nephew of Nikephoros and *doux* of Chaldia and Koloneia, advanced to Manzikert and destroyed its walls.⁹⁸ Thus within fifteen years of the compilation of this work, Taron had been incorporated into the empire and the potential threat posed by Manzikert neutralised.

In 974, John I Tzimiskes (969–76) travelled to Armenia. According to our only source, the twelfth-century Armenian historian Matthew of Edessa, King Ashot III Bagratuni ('the Merciful') (953–77) assembled all the leaders of the countries of the east, including Sennacherim, lord of Vaspurakan, and their forces.⁹⁹ Having opened lines of communication with Ashot, the emperor advanced to Mush in Taron and camped outside the fortress of Aytzik'. His forces came under overnight attack, although the circumstances and outcome are obscure. At some point thereafter, Tzimiskes was handed a letter, apparently from Catholicos Vahan I. This detail is hard to interpret, given Vahan's deposition six years before. The two leaders then made a treaty whereby Ashot III 'the Merciful' supplied 10,000 troops in return for notable gifts. Several elements in this account – specifically the leadership role accorded to Ashot, the skirmishes at Aytzik' and Vahan's letter – may reflect a Bagratuni spin or a conflation of different episodes. Scholars have generally interpreted Ashot's attendance upon the emperor at the head of a large army as a defensive precaution. Yet his conduct also befits a loyal client,

⁹⁶ ST, ed. Malkhaseants', p. 181; French tr. Macler, p. 41.

⁹⁷ Hovsep'yan (1951), no. 51, cols. 117–20.

⁹⁸ ST, ed. Malkhaseants', p. 183; French tr. Macler, p. 44.

⁹⁹ ME, I.17, ed. Melik'-Adamean and Ter-Mik'ayelean, pp. 22–4; tr. Dostourian, pp. 27–8.

responding to an imperial summons and supplying military assistance at a designated location. Tzimiskes' subsequent letter to Ashot 'shahanshab [originally a Persian royal title, 'king of kings'] of Great Armenia and my spiritual son', describing his victorious campaign of 975 into Syria and Lebanon, then becomes apposite.¹⁰⁰

The degree to which Armenian princes had been drawn into the orbit of Byzantium can be seen through their involvement in the rebellions which erupted against Basil II (976–1025) and Constantine VIII (1025–8) after 976. Bardas Skleros had the support of Gregory and Bagarat, sons of Ashot, prince of Taron, and Zap'ranik, prince of Mokk', whilst Bardas Phokas exploited his relationship with the Iberian prince David of Tao – forged while he was *doux* of neighbouring Chaldia – to win him to Basil II's cause.¹⁰¹ In addition to the title of *kouropalatēs*, David received substantial territorial concessions, including the districts of Karin and Apahunik', recently prised from Arab control. The personal ties with Bardas Phokas which caused David to fight for Basil II later prompted him to join Phokas when he rebelled against Basil in 987. All three survived these confrontations. Gregory Taronites, *doux* of Thessaloniki and *magistros*, fought against Samuel of Bulgaria (987/988–1014) after 991 and was killed in 995.¹⁰² Zap'ranik *manglabitēs* was charged in 983 by Basil II and Constantine with transporting a relic of the True Cross from Constantinople to the monastery of Aparank'.¹⁰³ David *kouropalatēs* retained possession of all the lands granted to him previously although these now reverted to the emperor after his death.¹⁰⁴ It is striking, however, that neither Gregory nor Zap'ranik remained in their ancestral districts and that David continued to exercise authority only in the knowledge of inevitable imperial intervention.

Contemporary relations between the churches reveal a similar pattern of increased engagement. As Byzantium pushed eastwards, and significant numbers of Armenians came, or were transferred, within its borders, the respective hierarchies increasingly overlapped. An exchange between Metropolitan Theodore of Melitene and Samuel of Kamrjadzor, responding at the behest of Catholicos Khach'ik I (973–92), confirms that confessional tensions were developing at a local level.¹⁰⁵ Another exchange, between Khach'ik I and the metropolitan of Sebasteia, occurred in 989.¹⁰⁶ Complaints of oppression and torture in Sebasteia were combined with

¹⁰⁰ ME, I.19–20, ed. Melik'-Adamean and Ter-Mik'ayelian, pp. 24–32; tr. Dostourian, pp. 29–33.

¹⁰¹ ST, ed. Malkhaseants', pp. 191–2; French tr. Macler, pp. 56, 59–60.

¹⁰² Skyl., ed. Thurn, p. 341; French tr. Flusin and Cheynet, p. 285, n. 121.

¹⁰³ Gregory of Narek, *Discourses*, ed. Awetik'ean, pp. 9–36; Mahé (1991); Gregory of Narek, *Book of lamentations*; tr. Mahé and Mahé, pp. 78–83.

¹⁰⁴ Skyl., ed. Thurn, p. 339; French tr. Flusin and Cheynet, p. 283, n. 108; ST, ed. Malkhaseants', p. 275; French tr. Macler, p. 162.

¹⁰⁵ *Book of letters*, ed. Izmireants', pp. 302–22; French tr. Garsoïan, pp. 550–79.

¹⁰⁶ ST, ed. Malkhaseants', pp. 201–44; French tr. Macler, pp. 76–123.

observations that the Armenian bishops of Sebasteia and Larissa, and other priests, had removed themselves from the Armenian church and accepted Chalcedon. Yet neither of these sees had previously been described or treated as Armenian. By contrast eleven new suffragan bishops under the metropolitan of Trebizond had been created by the 970s, including those of Mananalis, Oulnoutin and Basean, confirming a simultaneous extension eastwards by the imperial church.¹⁰⁷ This fluidity was recognised by contemporaries. Sargis was appointed catholicos of Armenia in 992 at a council convened by King Gagik I Bagratuni ('the Great') (989–c. 1017) at which there were bishops 'from this country of Armenia and from the side of the Greeks'.¹⁰⁸

Little is known about the contemporary actions or attitudes of leading members of the Bagratuni and Artsruni houses. Significantly, however, the deposit of the relic of the True Cross at Aparank' during Easter 983 was attended by the three Artsruni brothers then ruling Vaspurakan, Ashot-Sahak, Gurgen-Khach'ik and Sennacherim-John. Their presence at this isolated, mountainous site so early in the year for the arrival of an imperial donation implies respect for – and close relations with – Byzantium. Gregory of Narek asserted in his description of the ceremony that

the divine will is clear: it is that the empire of the Romans, spread out like the sky across the vast surface of the whole world, will gather in its ample bosom innumerable multitudes, as a single flock in a single place, a single synod and a single church, the one bride in the bridal chamber, the one beloved in the single dwelling place . . . the one spouse under the one tent of the Covenant.¹⁰⁹

His support for Basil II seems unequivocal.

David *kouropalatēs* of Tao died on Easter Sunday, 31 March 1000. Two sources allege that he was poisoned when receiving the eucharist, although one adds that he survived this attempt and was smothered instead.¹¹⁰ Arguably this reflects a confessional spin, since David 'died' in a spiritual sense when taking wine mixed with water in the eucharist. Basil II was quick to take advantage.¹¹¹ He marched north from Tarsus, meeting and rewarding several prominent princes, including Sennacherim-John of Vaspurakan. He then moved east to the plain of Vagharshapat, but Gagik I 'the Great' failed to attend, 'reckoning it a diminution', and Basil thereupon returned via Ul'tis in Tao and Theodosiupolis to Constantinople. Gagik

¹⁰⁷ *NE*, no. 9, pp. 296–306 (text).

¹⁰⁸ *ST*, ed. Malkhaseants', p. 259; French tr. Macler, p. 144.

¹⁰⁹ Gregory of Narek, *Discourses*, ed. Awetik'ean, p. 11. A colophon of Gregory expresses identical sentiments: Gregory of Narek, *Book of lamentations*; tr. Mahé and Mahé, pp. 777–8.

¹¹⁰ *Arist.*, ed. Yuzbashian, pp. 22–3; French tr. Canard and Berbérian, pp. 2–6; *ME*, I.33, ed. Melik'-Adamean and Ter-Mik'ayean, p. 44; tr. Dostourian, p. 39.

¹¹¹ *ST*, ed. Malkhaseants', pp. 275–8; French tr. Macler, pp. 162–5; *Arist.*, ed. Yuzbashian, pp. 23–4; French tr. Canard and Berbérian, pp. 3–6.

may have viewed David's death as an opportunity to revive Bagratuni hegemony, an ambition that submission to Basil II would have compromised, if not thwarted; other princes had been compelled to lead or contribute large numbers of troops for operations against Bulgaria. Alternatively he may have been influenced by ecclesiastical opinion; both Catholicos Khach'ik and his successor Sargis I (992–1018) were steadfast in their opposition to the imperial church. Whatever the cause, Basil II was prepared to consolidate his gains and bide his time. After more than a century of regular dealings with Armenian princely houses, Byzantium was keenly aware that times of political flux after the death of the leading prince offered the best opportunity for direct intervention, as the rival claimants looked for outside support. Basil could afford to wait.

When George I (1014–27) succeeded his father Bagrat III as king of Georgia in 1014, Basil II asserted his claim to certain districts previously ceded to David of Tao and then Bagrat.¹¹² George rejected this claim and resisted an attempt to occupy them. Basil waited until Bulgaria had been pacified. In 1021 he travelled east, expecting to receive George's submission; but George did not attend. Further negotiations failed and both sides took up arms. Although there is no evidence that any Armenian princes joined George in defying Basil II, he had arbitrated between John-Smbat III and Ashot IV Bagratuni ('the Brave') following the death of their father, Gagik I 'the Great', probably in 1017, and had intervened in their subsequent confrontation.¹¹³ Arguably John-Smbat now saw an opportunity to gain imperial backing. In January 1022, Catholicos Peter I (1019–58) attended upon Basil II at his winter quarters in Trebizond, bringing with him a will from John-Smbat III appointing him as his heir.¹¹⁴ This underpinned the Byzantine claim to Ani after his death in 1041.

John-Smbat and Ashot were therefore pulled back into the imperial orbit indirectly through the conduct of King George I of Georgia. Sennacherim-John Artsruni, however, exchanged his ancestral lands of Vaspurakan for territories in Cappadocia, including the cities of Sebasteia and Larissa, after being attacked by Turkish forces from Azerbaijan. Although conventionally dated to 1016 or early 1017, it may have occurred as late as 1021. After the collapse of a rebellion by Nikephoros Phokas and Nikephoros Xiphias in late summer 1022, it is significant that Basil II campaigned beyond Vaspurakan, attacking the city of Her.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Arist., ed. Yuzbashian, p. 25; French tr. Canard and Berbérian, p. 7. Bagrat III became the ruler of Kartli in 975 and Abkhazia three years later. Under his direction the kingdom of Georgia was established between 1008 and 1010.

¹¹³ Arist., ed. Yuzbashian, p. 27; French tr. Canard and Berbérian, p. 10; ME, I.10, ed. Melik'-Adamean and Ter-Mik'ayelean, pp. 12–14; tr. Dostourian, pp. 22–3.

¹¹⁴ ME, I.50, ed. Melik'-Adamean and Ter-Mik'ayelean, pp. 56–8; tr. Dostourian, p. 46.

¹¹⁵ Arist., ed. Yuzbashian, p. 38; French tr. Canard and Berbérian, pp. 23–4; ME, I.51, ed. Melik'-Adamean and Ter-Mik'ayelean, p. 58; tr. Dostourian, p. 47. See also, p. 696.

Although both Sennacherim-John Artsruni and John-Smbat III had come to terms with Basil II by January 1022, this did not deter Nikephoros Phokas from soliciting support from other family members. It is unclear, however, how far they responded to his appeal.¹¹⁶ In the event, Phokas was assassinated on 15 August 1022, possibly by the son of Sennacherim-John Artsruni. Basil then moved quickly, inflicting a sharp defeat upon George I on 11 September 1022 and coming to terms with him shortly afterwards. Evidently Abkhazian, Georgian and Armenian princes were still tempted to participate in a rebellion fomented in the east by a member of the Phokas family. Basil II was aware of the threat. His persistent involvement with Armenia, and the extension of the empire's frontiers to incorporate first Vaspurakan and ultimately Ani, should be seen in the context of, and as a response to, these rebellions.

During the tenth century, a large number of small 'Armenian' themes were created, consisting essentially of a fortress and its surrounding district.¹¹⁷ By contrast, the themes of Taron (966 or 967), Vaspurakan (c.1021) and Iberia (1022) were organised around existing Armenian principalities ceded to the empire. Tellingly, these were not broken up. Whilst the sigillographic evidence reveals considerable fluidity in the combination of high military commands across these themes during the eleventh century, there is presently little evidence for sustained administrative down-reach within them.¹¹⁸ No more than a skeleton administrative structure can be traced, suggesting that existing social and political structures continued to be employed.¹¹⁹ This 'slim-line' Byzantine presence would prove to be inadequate when faced by sustained Turkish assault after 1045.¹²⁰

Basil II's campaign of 1022 did not mark an end to military operations. In 1023 or 1024 the fortified town of Archesh on Lake Van was captured by Nikephoros Komnenos whilst nearby Perkri was taken in 1035.¹²¹ These were both granted separate thematic status but this is unsurprising, seeing that they had never formed part of Vaspurakan and had been captured from the 'Persians'.¹²² Separate themes of Manzikert (after 1000) and Artzike had also been created.¹²³ This string of small themes fulfilled a long-cherished strategic aim, expressed in the *De administrando imperio*, that if these *kastra* were in imperial control, 'a Persian army cannot come out against

¹¹⁶ ME, I, 51, ed. Melik'-Adamean and Ter-Mik'ayelean, p. 58; tr. Dostourian, pp. 46–7.

¹¹⁷ *LPB*, pp. 264–8, 355–63; Yuzbashian (1973–4), p. 169.

¹¹⁸ On Taron, see Yuzbashian (1973–4), pp. 140–54; on Iberia: Kühn (1991), pp. 187–204; on Vaspurakan: *Zacos*, ed. Cheynet, pp. 93–4.

¹¹⁹ *DOS*, IV, nos. 57.1, 75.2, 75.3, 75.4, 76.1, pp. 148, 166–9; *Zacos*, ed. Cheynet, nos. 37a, 37b, pp. 72–4.

¹²⁰ Holmes (2001), p. 56; Holmes (2005), pp. 538–41; see also, p. 698.

¹²¹ On Archesh, see Arist., ed. Yuzbashian, p. 41; French tr. Canard and Berbérian, pp. 26–7; on Perkri: Arist., ed. Yuzbashian, pp. 48–9; French tr. Canard and Berbérian, pp. 38–40; Skyl., ed. Thurn, p. 388; French tr. Flusin and Cheynet, p. 322.

¹²² On Archesh, see *Seyrig*, no. 168, p. 123.

¹²³ On Manzikert, see *DOS*, IV, no. 67.1, pp. 156–7; on Artzike: Oikonomides *et al.* (1998), p. 44.

Romania.¹²⁴ They also deterred Ashot IV 'the Brave' from expanding southwards into former Artsruni territory.

The literary sources reveal almost nothing about the reigns of John-Smbat III Bagratuni and Ashot IV 'the Brave' between 1022 and 1041. Contemporary inscriptions and colophons, however, confirm ongoing relations with Byzantium, and the numismatic evidence is persuasive. From the reign of Nikephoros II Phokas, Armenia switched from a silver-based coinage to a gold- and copper-based coinage, using exclusively Byzantine issues. During the excavations at Ani, several thousand Byzantine copper coins were found, both loose and in hoards.¹²⁵ In 1979, some 3,539 of Constantine VIII's *nomismata*, equivalent to almost 50 pounds of gold, were unearthed at Nouchevan, near Dvin.¹²⁶ The epigraphic evidence is no less valuable in the historical reconstruction. An inscription at Khtskawnk', dated 1033, refers to 'the reign of Smbat *shahanshab*, son of Gagik *shahanshab*, who had adopted the beloved boy Sargis, during the time of the three kings of the Romans, when he received the triple honour *anthypatos, patrikios, vestēs* and *doux* of the east'.¹²⁷ Aristakes records that John-Smbat's son, Erkat', died young.¹²⁸ This inscription confirms that he had designated Sargis as his successor, and that Sargis had received imperial sanction.

By the time of his death, however, John-Smbat III had apparently changed his mind. A colophon dates the completion of a Gospel book to 1041, 'when Yov[h]an[n]ēs [that is, John-Smbat III] king of Armenia was translated to Christ and gave his kingdom to his nephew Gagik'.¹²⁹ The complex sequence of events between 1041 and 1045, concluding with the Byzantine occupation of Ani, therefore originated in a familiar context, a time of political transition.¹³⁰ Instead of developing ties with both Sargis and Gagik, however, Byzantine policy after 1022 seems to have anticipated only the succession of Sargis. Gagik's unexpected accession thwarted these plans and with Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–55) embroiled in George Maniakes' rebellion (see below, pp. 599–600), Gagik II Bagratuni enjoyed two years' respite.¹³¹ In 1044, however, he was induced to visit Constantinople where he was detained and offered Melitene in return for Ani.¹³² Initially he refused but when the forty keys of Ani were produced, proving treachery on the part of Catholicos Peter, he abdicated and received lands in Cappadocia. Although the leaders of Ani then resolved to entrust their city either to Gagik's brother-in-law, David Dunats'i or to Bagrat IV, king

¹²⁴ *DAI*, ch. 44, pp. 204–5. ¹²⁵ Mousheghian *et al.* (2000b), p. 38.

¹²⁶ Mousheghian *et al.* (2000a), p. 149. ¹²⁷ Kostaneants' (1913), pp. 17–18.

¹²⁸ Arist., ed. Yuzbashian, p. 32; French tr. Canard and Berbérian, p. 16.

¹²⁹ Mar'evosyan (ed.), *Hishatakaranner*, no. 105, p. 86–7. ¹³⁰ Shepard (1975–6).

¹³¹ Arist., ed. Yuzbashian, pp. 57–8; French tr. Canard and Berbérian, p. 46; ME, I.77–8, ed. Melik'Adamean and Ter-Mik'ayean, p. 96; tr. Dostourian, p. 67.

¹³² Arist., ed. Yuzbashian, pp. 61–2; French tr. Canard and Berbérian, pp. 50–1; ME, I.84, ed. Melik'Adamean and Ter-Mik'ayean, pp. 102–4; tr. Dostourian, pp. 71–2.



Figure 24 Part of the southern façade of the cathedral church of Ani, begun in 989 under King Smbat II Bagratuni ('Master of the Universe') (977–89) but completed in 1001 by Queen Katrinide, wife of King Gagik I Bagratuni. It was designed by the architect Trdat who was also commissioned to repair St Sophia in Constantinople following earthquake damage in 989. Katrinide died in 1012 and was buried in a mausoleum close to the church

of Georgia (1027–72), the approach of another Byzantine army precipitated the final surrender of the city.¹³³

CONCLUSION

Although the relationship between Byzantium and Armenia changed repeatedly across these centuries, three particular features stand out. In the first place, relations were continuous – only the period between 790

¹³³ Arist., ed. Yuzbashian, p. 62; French tr. Canard and Berbérian, p. 52.

and 830 lacks evidence for any direct contact, but this mirrors the dearth of information about any aspect of Armenia during these decades. Secondly they were multi-layered. The sources tend to focus upon high-level contacts involving the leading Armenian clerics and princes and treat these as exclusive or representative. In fact, it seems very likely that lesser lords and individual bishops were also in contact with Byzantium throughout this period, although such ties are usually hidden from view. Thirdly they were reciprocal. Byzantium was eager to secure its eastern flank and therefore sought to attract Armenian clients into its service. At the same time, Armenian princes looked to Byzantium to bolster their own status within Armenia through the concession of titles, gifts and money. In a highly competitive, militarised society, there were obvious advantages in gaining recognition from a neighbouring polity, not least in the event of attack, when Byzantium could serve as a far more effective refuge than any mountain redoubt or individual fortress. It is no coincidence that the Byzantine army – and then the state – came to be filled with men of Armenian origin or descent. That, however, is another story.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Garsoïan (1998). See also above, pp. 272, 300.