

## Negotiating the North: Armenian perspectives on the Conquest era

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Over the last fifty years, the *History* attributed to Sebēos has attracted a good deal of scholarly attention. Meticulous research undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s underpinned the creation of a critical edition, published by Abgaryan in 1979 and it was from this that Thomson prepared his translation for publication alongside Howard-Johnston's commentary in 1999.<sup>1</sup> Thirty years before, Kaegi noted that Sebeos "the late seventh-century Armenian historian" had interpreted the appearance of the Arabs through the prophecies of Daniel 7 and called for further research.<sup>2</sup> This arrived in 1977 via Crone and Cook's *Hagarism*, in which the 'Armenian Chronicle written in the 660s and ascribed to Bishop Sebeos' was given a brief but prominent role in the opening chapter.<sup>3</sup> Its inclusion in this "wonderfully provocative" book, as it has recently been termed by Vacca,<sup>4</sup> established the *History* attributed to Sebēos firmly within the contours of the methodological debate on the use of non-Arabic-Islamic sources for studying the nature and development of Islam in the formative period, whether in conjunction, in comparison, or instead of Arabic-Islamic sources. The many twists and turns of this debate shall not be treated here, beyond noting that all historical compositions reflect the intellectual, social and cultural contexts in which they were created; even contemporary sources tell their own stories in their own ways and for their own purposes, reporting, reshaping and reimagining as required. Instead, it is the wider visibility which this debate afforded to this Armenian composition which proved to be significant, launching it into broader scholarly discourses. By virtue of its date of compilation – now generally accepted as 655 CE with brief updating scholia extending its coverage to the conclusion of the first *fitna* in 661 – its unaltered state, and its remarkable breadth of historical vision, the *History* attributed to Sebēos is now treated as one of the principal sources for the study of the seventh-century Middle East.<sup>5</sup> It features in many historiographical surveys and has also contributed to a wide range of specific studies, including recent research into eschatology, governance and construction activity in Jerusalem, and the composition of Sasanian royal history.<sup>6</sup> Its popularity shows no sign of waning.

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<sup>1</sup> Sebēos, *Patmut' iwn*; Thomson and Howard-Johnston, *Sebeos*. Since the translation includes the page numbers of Abgaryan's edition, only the edition will be cited.

<sup>2</sup> Kaegi, Byzantine reactions 146-9.

<sup>3</sup> Crone and Cook, *Hagarism* 6-8.

<sup>4</sup> Vacca, Fires of Naxčawan 324.

<sup>5</sup> Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses* 70-102.

<sup>6</sup> Shoemaker, *A prophet has appeared* 62-72; La Porta, Sense of an Ending 364-72; Hoyland, *Kings of the Persians* 15-18.

The recent attention paid to the *History* attributed to Sebēos, however, has not resulted in a raft of new studies analysing Armenia in the Conquest era. Manandyan's reconstruction of the series of campaigns and counter-attacks which characterise the years after 640 CE remains essential reading but it is now over seventy years old.<sup>7</sup> In 1982, Martin-Hisard supplied an outline narrative in a study which is notable for its contention that Armenians benefited from the new world order since their territories were no longer partitioned between Rome and Persia: "les conditions de la domination arabe étaient incontestablement plus légères que celles de tout autre régime antérieur."<sup>8</sup> Ter-Lewondyan's 1986 article dealt briefly with the first raids but the principal focus of his research was caliphal Armenia in the eighth and ninth centuries.<sup>9</sup> Kaegi's chapter "Byzantium, Armenia, and Armenians" from 1992 remains the latest sustained treatment and its perspective is self-evident.<sup>10</sup> There has been no Armenian analogue to Robinson's comparative study of the conquest of Khuzistan and recent surveys by Kennedy and Haldon do not offer specific studies of Armenia in the Conquest era.<sup>11</sup>

The situation may now be changing. In 2017, Vacca published a ground-breaking monograph in which she examined the construction of the caliphal North primarily in terms of its Sasanian legacy as represented through Arabic and Armenian literature composed in the later ninth and tenth centuries.<sup>12</sup> The major exception is provided by the Armenian *History* of Lewond which is treated as a work of the late eighth century and accorded particular value. Her research explores "how people reading and writing in Arabic and Armenian wanted the North to be understood, not to describe the North as it actually was."<sup>13</sup> Indeed Vacca observes judiciously that "Writing the history of the conquest- and Sufyānid-era North *wie es eigentlich gewesen* ... needs to start with a close look at the expectations, goals, and concerns embedded in our sources" and this monograph does much to stimulate this research.<sup>14</sup> Shunning narrative in favour of a thematic approach allows Vacca to examine Arabic, Armenian and Georgian sources in comparison and explore how and why traditions about the same episode changed over time, without having to prefer one over another. Vacca is interested in their individual representations of the past rather than trying to establish what happened. As a result, her research expands our knowledge of ninth- and tenth-century attitudes to, and perceptions of, the history of the caliphal North and Armenia's place within it. At the same time, however, it reduces – at least for the present – the history of Armenia in the Conquest era to "a few simplified generalisations that find support in both Armenian and Arabic historical traditions": the arrival of Muslim troops in the Rāshidūn period; the peace treaties which left the North as "a tributary neighbor, loosely affiliated

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<sup>7</sup> Manandyan, *Invasions arabes*.

<sup>8</sup> Martin-Hisard, *Domination* 216.

<sup>9</sup> Ter-Lewondyan, *L'Arménie*.

<sup>10</sup> Kaegi, *Byzantium* 181-204

<sup>11</sup> Robinson, *Khūzistān*; Kennedy, *Arab conquests*; Haldon, *Empire*.

<sup>12</sup> Vacca, *Non-Muslim provinces*.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 18.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 19.

on and off with one of its two powerful neighbors, the Caliphate or Byzantium”; and the incorporation of Armenia as caliphal territory following the reforms undertaken during the caliphate of ‘Abd al-Malik at the turn of the eighth century.<sup>15</sup>

This paper accepts that the sources for the history of Armenia in the Conquest era present multiple challenges. They were composed at different times and in different social, cultural and intellectual contexts, shaping the past in various ways and for various purposes. None of them are simple vehicles for the preservation of neutral reports on what happened; all are freighted with individual meanings. Nor should we accept that contemporary sources necessarily offer greater historical accuracy than later accounts; as observed above, they possess their own interpretative frameworks and conform to attitudes and genres of the day. Furthermore, the recent tendency to classify sources on the basis of language has served to conceal important connections between them. By way of illustration, although the Armenian character and language of *History* of Lewond imparts an exotic flavour to the text for modern scholars, and hence an impression of otherness, this composition was influenced by both Armenian and non-Armenian historical traditions.<sup>16</sup> Far from being conceived and written in historiographical isolation, therefore, this work should be treated as a product of cross-cultural engagement and acculturation. In other words, simply being in Armenian does not guarantee independence from other literary cultures; the Armenian witnesses may not be the independent controls they have sometimes been treated as.

It is certainly not the intention of this paper to advance a new narrative of Armenia in the Conquest era. As Vacca observed, the state of research on the individual sources precludes such a work, at least for the present. At the same time, however, there may be ways of expanding the brief outline supplied by Vacca, particularly if we are prepared to accept that correspondence between the Arab and Armenian historical traditions, whilst significant, is not the only criterion that may be applied. Other histories of Conquest-era Armenia may be constructed if we employ different variables to determine selection. This paper takes one such approach. It introduces a body of contemporary Armenian-language sources, some familiar, others little known, to demonstrate the range of available materials and proposes that these could be used to construct such a history. It then utilises these sources in the preparation of two case studies. The first analyses relations between Armenia and Iran in the 630s and 640s; the second assesses the treaty established in 653 CE between Mu‘āwiya and T‘ēodoros, lord of Rš̄tunik‘ and preserved exclusively in the *History* attributed to Sebēos. If the first illustrates the potential of this material, the second reveals some of its challenges.

Before defining the sources, let us start by acknowledging that far from being a single event, the Arab-Islamic conquest of Armenia was a complex process which spanned seven decades, from the first attested raid, probably in the autumn of 640 CE, down to the eclipse, although not exclusion, of

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>16</sup> Greenwood, *History* of Lewond 102.

Byzantium from Armenia in the years after 705 CE. This complexity has several dimensions. Some parts of Armenia were the focus of multiple campaigns, often in quick succession as the struggle for control ebbed and flowed, and this complicates attempts to establish a definitive chronology, especially in the 640s and 650s. Raiding parties advanced from Syria as well as from north-western Iran, at different times and almost certainly independently of one another. Moreover Armenia was a world of local lordships characterised by tension and conflict within as much as between the individual noble houses. It should come as no surprise therefore to discover that local lords fought for and against the raiders from the very start. We are informed by the *History* attributed to Sebēos that the first raiding party came from Syria and entered the region of Tarōn through the Bitlis pass.<sup>17</sup> It was guided by Vardik, the prince of Mōkk'. Since the district of Mōkk' lay on their route into Armenia, Vardik's actions may have been determined by self-preservation as much as anything else, although we have no way of knowing what motivated his decision to assist rather than resist. It is likely that the Armenian elite fractured during every campaign thereafter, even if the specific details largely elude us. We can also see that Armenian nobles switched sides as circumstances changed. By way of illustration, Hamazasp Mamikonean was the son-in-law of T'ēodoros lord of R̄štunik', one of the leading figures in Armenia after 628 CE, and was with him on the island of Ałt'amar in 653 CE after T'ēodoros had deserted Constans II and transferred allegiance to Mu'āwiya.<sup>18</sup> Barely two years later, however, Hamazasp switched back to Constans II, receiving the title of *curopalates* and authority over Armenia as the principal client of the Romans.<sup>19</sup> Conversely his nephew Mušeł Mamikonean submitted to Constans II in the city of Karin/Theodosiopolis in 653 as the emperor rushed eastwards to shore up his support following the defection of T'ēodoros but had gone over to the Ishmaelites (as they are termed in the text) by early 655, reportedly because four of his sons were being held hostage.<sup>20</sup> Hamazasp's brother was also being held hostage but evidently this was not enough to sway his allegiance. This level of detail is exceptional but it demonstrates the fluidity – and vulnerability – of the elite at this time, individuals twisting this way and that to protect themselves and perhaps obtain advantage over rivals. The zig-zag patterns of submission and betrayal by Hamazasp and Mušeł Mamikonean seem to be mirror-images of one another, although it is not possible to determine which of them took the lead forcing the other to respond. With details like these almost always hidden from view, and mindful of the other complexities noted above, it is never going to be possible to work out exactly what happened and establish a comprehensive narrative history of Armenia in the Conquest era. On the other hand, we do possess a range of contemporary Armenian sources which report on this period. Where should one start?

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<sup>17</sup> Sebēos, *Patmut' iwn* 138.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 169.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 175.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 165, 173, 175.

As Howard-Johnston and others have shown, the two richest Armenian historical compositions for the study of Armenia in the Conquest era are the *History* attributed to Sebēos and the *History of Aḷuank' /Caucasian Albania/* attributed variously to Movsēs Dasxuranc' i or Movsēs Kaḷankatuac' i.<sup>21</sup> Since the first of these histories has been discussed above and is the more familiar of the two, we will focus on the latter. Although this work reached its present form in the tenth century, it is now widely accepted that it is a compilation of several sources, including several dating to the seventh century. There is however no consensus on the number or nature of these underlying components, nor when they were pieced together. Akopyan identified four postulated sources – a history of Viroy, the Catholicos of Aḷuank', who died in 629; a *History to 684*; a panegyric on prince Juanšēr; and an account of the mission of bishop Israyēl to the Huns and their leader Alp' Iit'uēr in the winter of 681–2 CE.<sup>22</sup> Howard-Johnston also proposed four clusters of material, although he defined the sources somewhat differently.<sup>23</sup> He also maintained that all the material had been collected together by a single compiler active in the late seventh century in a work which he titled the *History to 682*. While the individual components remain contested, prevailing scholarly opinion holds that they were all composed in the seventh century.<sup>24</sup> Garsoïan, amongst others, has observed that the Albanian focus of this composition limits its value for studying Armenian history.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless its record of contemporary conditions across the Caucasus should not be underestimated for comparative purposes and there are in any case important insights into Armenia. By way of illustration, when prince Juanšēr switched allegiance from Constans II to Mu'āwiya, probably in 664/5 CE, he travelled to and from Damascus via Grigor Mamikonean, who at the time was the leading prince in Armenia and Mu'āwiya's principal client.<sup>26</sup> It is striking that he is not described as attending upon an Arab governor or *ostikan*, arguably because this predates the creation or appointment of such a figure. Most discussion of the *History of Aḷuank'* for the study of this era has centred on the contents of Book II but it is worth noting that Book III also preserves valuable documentary records from the first decade of the eighth century.<sup>27</sup> These reveal the circumstances and the decisions of the Council of Partaw/Bardh'a, convened in 705 CE, and attest interventions by both the Armenian Catholicos Eḷia and 'Abd al-Malik. The *History of Aḷuank'* therefore has much to contribute to our understanding of Conquest-era Armenia.

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<sup>21</sup> Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses* 70-128. For once, the remarkable collection of early medieval Armenian ecclesiastical correspondence and documentation known as the *Girk' T'it'oc'* or *Book of Letters* has nothing to contribute. So vital for earlier and later eras, it lacks records dating from the century after 608 CE.

<sup>22</sup> Akopyan, *Albania-Aḷuank'* 197-207.

<sup>23</sup> Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses* 108-13; Howard-Johnston, *Caucasian Albania* 357-8.

<sup>24</sup> Zuckerman, *Khazars* 407-10.

<sup>25</sup> Garsoïan, *Interregnum* xiii.

<sup>26</sup> Movsēs Dasxuranc' i/Kaḷankatuac' i, *Patmut' iwn* II.27.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* III.3-11.

On the other hand, the third Armenian historical narrative usually consulted when approaching the conquest of Armenia, the *History* of Lewond, merits more circumspect treatment.<sup>28</sup> Whether it is a product of the late eighth century or the late ninth century, this composition is separated from the start of the Conquest era by at least a hundred and fifty years.<sup>29</sup> Recent research has confirmed that its version of events in the 640s and 650s derives from the narrative preserved in the *History* attributed to Sebēos.<sup>30</sup> Rather than supplying a simple précis, however, it constitutes a sustained reworking of that material in which the chronological sequence of the raids has been altered and much of the specific detail suppressed. Conversely, the description of the assault on Duin has been developed and elaborated. It has been proposed that these changes had two principal aims: to establish from the outset the untrustworthiness of Byzantium in its dealings with Armenia; and to represent the experience of the citizens of Duin during the Conquest era as normative for all Armenians. Forgetting Byzantium and reimagining the role of Duin therefore lie at the heart of Lewond's record of the conquest era. His *History* therefore constitutes a much more sophisticated work than has previously been acknowledged. Many studies in the past have utilised Lewond's account when establishing their own conquest narratives but they have treated it as a simple record of what happened. Although their versions of events will remain embedded in the scholarship for many years to come, this uncritical approach can no longer be sustained.

Two of the three historical compositions should therefore be placed at the heart of any study of seventh-century Armenia. There are, however, several other sources which offer valuable insights and this paper will introduce three of them. Perhaps the least studied comprises a set of Armenian church canons recording the decisions of a council held in Duin “in the fourth year of Constans, emperor and pious king of the Romans...” (644/5 CE).<sup>31</sup> This addressed a series of pastoral rather than theological issues, including the seizure of church property by the *azatk'*, a term defining those members of the lay elite who enjoyed exemption from certain taxes. Three hold particular significance for this study. Canon 12 contemplates with dismay the billeting of the *azatk'* and cavalymen in village churches and religious communities and their pollution of the hallowed places of God with “minstrels and dancers”.<sup>32</sup> Evidently these sacred spaces had become sites of entertainment, of storytelling, performance and dance, presumably accompanied by feasting. Canon 7 acknowledges that many men and women had been taken captive when the country was seized by enemies and sets a seven-year rule for those wanting to remarry, with financial penalties and penance for those who remarried before the seven years had elapsed; it also admits the possibility that captives might return.<sup>33</sup> In addressing

<sup>28</sup> Lewond, *Patmabanut' iwn*. For a recent French translation, see Martin-Hisard, *Discours*. A new English translation by Vacca and La Porta is eagerly awaited.

<sup>29</sup> Martin-Hisard, *Discours* 237-60 for the traditional dating; Greenwood, *History* of Lewond 104-21.

<sup>30</sup> Lewond, *Patmanbanuti' wn* cc. 2-8; Greenwood, *History* of Lewond 133-42 and 150-3.

<sup>31</sup> Hakobyan, *Kanonagirk* ii, 200-15, at 200: Յաւնի չորրորդի Կոստանդիանոսի կայսեր բարեպաշտ թագաւորի չոռնոնց... They lack a published translation.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 212: գոսանաւք և վարձաւիւրք

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 205-6.

the issue of lay confiscation of church property, Canon 9 observes that the soil and water belonging to the holy Church had also been declared to be free, just as that belonging to the *azatk'*.<sup>34</sup> It further explains that during the lordship of the Persians, although the houses of the priests had been established in the *diwan* – here meaning state archives created for fiscal and administrative purposes – this had only been for the purpose of providing services, *hask'*, to the royal estate and it is implied they were otherwise free. It seems therefore that although Armenian communities had been disrupted in various ways, included the presence of armed contingents in the countryside, the solutions offered by the bishops looked to precedents from the past, when Armenia had been under Persian hegemony. Evidently this past was still meaningful and relevant.

Two other types of literary evidence also merit consideration. Firstly there is a small corpus of nine seventh-century inscriptions commemorating the foundation of churches between 629 and c. 695 CE.<sup>35</sup> Three of them are dated by reference to regnal years of Heraclius and on the basis of the epithets applied to the emperor, it seems that these derived from the protocols employed in imperial correspondence.<sup>36</sup> These inscriptions therefore imply the despatch and retention of imperial correspondence in Armenia. One inscription, at Aruč is dated by reference to the 29<sup>th</sup> year of Constans II, which equates to the year 669/70 CE.<sup>37</sup> This church was founded by Grigor Mamikonean, the same figure who was the principal client of Mu'āwiya, making the choice of chronological marker intriguing. Furthermore five of the inscriptions, including the latest in the sequence at T'alın, indicate that the founders chose to identify themselves and sometimes others by reference to specific Byzantine honorific titles.<sup>38</sup> This evidence challenges Łewond's projection of an ineffective and distant Byzantium, quickly forgotten; instead it seems that generations of Armenians obtained status within Byzantium, together with the gifts and wealth attendant on that relationship, and used imperial regnal years for dating purposes. And secondly, there is one colophon, preserved in a thirteenth-century manuscript containing a collection of twenty-six homilies and seven letters of Basil of Caesarea.<sup>39</sup> Having recorded eighteen homilies, at fol. 156a, the manuscript contains the following:

Davit' Tarōnec'i, a translator, turned these homilies from Greek into the Armenian language, in the city of Damascus, at the command of Hamazasp *curopalates* and lord of the Mamikoneans.

The reference to Hamazasp Mamikonean as *curopalates* dates Davit's presence in Damascus to between 655 and c. 660 CE, and so within a decade of Juanšēr's visit to the same city, discussed above. One can only speculate why Damascus, Mu'āwiya's centre of operations and place of residence, was chosen as the place to look for these works for translation. It is not a recognised or

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 209-10: *և ազատն էին արքայ կկտնկցւոյ հող և ջուր*

<sup>35</sup> Greenwood, Corpus.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. A.4 (Ałaman), A.5 (Bagawan) and A.7 (Mren) and 44-7.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. A.11 (Aruč) and 48-50. The dating of the Council of Duin to his fourth year was noted above.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. A.4, A.7, A.8 (Naxčawan), A.11 and A.12 (T'alın).

<sup>39</sup> Mat'evosyan, *Hišatakaranner* 16. The manuscript is M822 (Matenadaran).

otherwise attested site of Armenian translation activity and Davit‘ may have had other reasons for being there.

Having introduced a selection of contemporary Armenian sources, let us now turn to the first case study, examining the relationship between Armenia and Iran in the 630s and 640s. Despite the widely recognised hegemony of Sasanian Iran across four-fifths of the districts of historic Armenia from the second quarter of the fifth century – punctuated by brief periods of Roman ascendancy notably between 590 and 607 CE – there has been little research into Iranian engagement with Armenia after the demise of Khusro II in February 628. Instead attention has been focused on two other perspectives: the expansion of Roman influence and control into Armenia during the reigns of first Heraclius and then Constans II, and the advent of the Arab-Islamic raids. This study contends that the Armenian elite continued to engage with the world of Iran and that elements within the Iranian elite continued to engage with Armenia, at least until the early 640s.

These relationships are charted in several densely-packed passages preserved in the *History* attributed to Sebēos. The first of these reveals that Khusro II’s successor, Kavād II, appointed Varaztiroc‘ Bagratuni as *marzpan* of Armenia as well as recognizing him as *tanutēr*, head of the Bagratuni house with control over the ancestral lands, acting in effect as the head of a family trust.<sup>40</sup> Indeed the notice in the text offers an important gloss on the legal significance of being appointed as *tanutēr*, commenting that Kavād “sent him to Armenia [with authority] over all his ancestral possessions.”<sup>41</sup> This occurred in spring or summer 628, before Kavād’s untimely death in September. His appointment as *marzpan* is confirmed by an inscription at Bagaran which records that the church was completed on 8 October 629, while Varaztiroc‘ was *marcpan* [sic.] and *aspet* of Armenia.<sup>42</sup> His tenure therefore extended for at least one year and did not end with Kavād’s death. On his arrival in Armenia, the *History* attributed to Sebēos tells us that Varaztiroc‘ set about appointing a successor to Komitas as Catholicos of Armenia, just as his father Smbat had overseen the appointment of Abraham, bishop of Rštunik‘, as Catholicos on his return to Armenia in 607 CE.<sup>43</sup> We learn that K‘ristap‘or, a relative of Abraham, was appointed through the direction or leadership of T‘ēodoros, lord of Rštunik‘. This is the first reference to T‘ēodoros and it is significant that he is depicted acting in concert with Varaztiroc‘. We learn from a later passage that T‘ēodoros and Varaztiroc‘ had been brought up together at the court of Khusro II and greeted one another with tears of friendship, when they met in Constantinople after Varaztiroc‘ was brought back from exile.<sup>44</sup> Arguably, therefore, when Varaztiroc‘ was sent to Armenia as *marzpan* in 628, he was accompanied by, or renewed his relationship with, T‘ēodoros; it seems clear that they worked together. If this is correct, T‘ēodoros’ political career began in service to Sasanian Iran; later, he transferred allegiance, first to Constans II

<sup>40</sup> Sebēos, *Patmut‘iwn* 128-9.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 129: *սրճաւլէ ի Հայս հաւնդերձ ասննայն ընչիք հայրենի*

<sup>42</sup> Greenwood, Corpus A.3. The variant form of *marcpan* is unique.

<sup>43</sup> Sebēos, *Patmut‘iwn* 129 (Varaztiroc‘); 100 (Smbat).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 143.



in and finally Mu‘awiya. This career profile matches that of Juansēr, prince of Atuank‘, although the chronologies are different.

The *History* attributed to Sebēos does not reveal exactly how long Varaztiroc‘ remained *marzpan* of Armenia, nor if a successor was appointed. We are told that he refused to submit to the great prince of Atrpatakan Xořox Ormizd/Farrukh Hormizd.<sup>45</sup> This title appears to be an Armenian rendering of the Middle Persian *spāhbed kust ī Ādurbādagān*, one of the four principal military commands of the late Sasanian era, now securely attested through sigillographic evidence.<sup>46</sup> Farrukh Hormizd briefly served as *hramatar* (MP *framādār*), the chief minister of queen Bor/Bōrān following her accession in 630 but he was murdered within a year.<sup>47</sup> Nor did T‘ēodoros submit to Farrukh Hormizd’s son Rōstom/Rustam who succeeded him as *spāhbed* of Ādurbādagān. Sebēos’ narrative refers to a great altercation between Varaztiroc‘ and Rustam, although no further details are provided.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless it seems highly likely that these events occurred during the civil war which convulsed the Iranian state and that Varaztiroc‘ and Rustam were supporting different claimants. Intriguingly, the Roman commander Mžēž Gnuni is alleged to have antagonised the situation, slandering Varaztiroc‘ to Rustam and suggesting that he should be removed; there is no way of knowing if this was the case. Rustam sent his brother (later named in the narrative as Xořoxazat/Farrukhzād) to go and winter in Duin as *darik‘pet* (MP *darīgbed*, head of the palace) in the course of which he was instructed to seize the *aspet* Varaztiroc‘.<sup>49</sup> Farrukhzād’s precise responsibilities remain unclear but underlying this appointment is the assumption that Armenia was under Rustam’s control. When Varaztiroc‘ was warned of his imminent arrest – apparently he was informed that he would be seized the following day, implying that he was resident in the city of Duin when Farrukhzād took up his appointment – he fled with his wife and children westwards to the district of Tarōn. Following assurances of safe conduct, he then went to meet Heraclius in person in northern Syria. In the winter of 630/31, Heraclius was in Hierapolis (modern Manbij) negotiating with Athanasius the miaphysite patriarch of Antioch, and this supplies a credible date and location for this meeting.<sup>50</sup> Following the meeting, Varaztiroc‘ and his family travelled to Constantinople where he was honoured with residences, silver thrones and riches but was not sent back to Armenia. We do not know if he was accompanied by T‘ēodoros, lord of Rštunik‘; indeed the latter’s whereabouts, actions and loyalties remain unknown for the rest of the decade.

This first phase therefore opens in 628 CE with the appointment of Varaztiroc‘ as *marzpan*, at a time when there was a recognised *šahanšah*. It ends in early 631 with Varaztiroc‘ withdrawing from

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 132: *իշխանին մեծի որ յԱտրպատական աշխարհիս*

<sup>46</sup> Gyselen, *Géographie* 269-77.

<sup>47</sup> Sebēos, *Patmut‘iwn* 130.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 132.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 132. For the title, see Gyselen, *Géographie* 264-5. The title *darīgbed* is remarkably similar in meaning to the Greek *curopalates*. For another contemporary reference, presenting the *darīgbed* as the leading figure at the royal court, see Greenwood, *Mathematical* 165.

<sup>50</sup> Howard-Johnston, *Last Great War* 375.

Armenia and seeking refuge with Heraclius. It would, however, be wrong to assume that Iranian connections with Armenia ended at this time. The *History of Ałuank'* offers important insight into a second phase. It records the circumstances in which a young Albanian prince Juanšēr went to war in the service of the Sasanian *šahanšah* Yazdgird III in the autumn of 637. It tells us that when he reached the common ground where thousands were mustered with his contingent of Albanian cavalry, he discovered that he had arrived before the prince of Siwnik' and the *sparapet* of Armenia.<sup>51</sup> Armenian, Siwnian and Albanian forces were assembled in one location, placed under the command of Rustam, the *spāhbed* of Ādurbādagān and led south, first to Ctesiphon and then on campaign to confront the Arab-Islamic invaders. It is only through the *History* attributed to Sebēos that we learn that the Armenian general who attended on Rustam was Mušeł Mamikonean, with three thousand fully armed men, and that he was joined by Grigor lord of Siwnik' with a further one thousand troops.<sup>52</sup> In the subsequent battle, at Qādisiyya on 6 January 638, Rustam, Mušeł and Grigor were all killed, together with two of Mušeł's nephews and one of Grigor's sons, while Juanšēr was seriously wounded in the fighting.<sup>53</sup> It seems therefore that this general mobilization of Caucasian military power was an organised and familiar process. Following a call to arms, contingents were raised and sent to a common meeting place for onward transit under Persian command. Even if this is not the case, and the description reflects what should have happened or what the author imagined to have happened, the passages show that Armenians, Siwnians and Albanians fought and died for Yazdgird III in early 638. The *History of Ałuank'* maintains that Juanšēr fought for seven years and only returned home after the defeat at Nihāvand, in late 642 or early 643. Evidently members of the Armenian and Albanian elite were still integrated into the political structures and military processes of Sasanian Iran. Despite the internal conflicts at the start of the 630s, at least some features of the Iranian state were still being exercised in Armenia and Albania in 637.

Yet even the disaster at Qādisiyya does not mark the end of Iranian engagement with Armenia, as a third passage in the *History* attributed to Sebēos reveals.<sup>54</sup> This third phase in the narrative is entangled and some elements are presently unresolved – was T'ēodoros the Armenian prince who is titled the Greek commander the same person as T'ēodoros, lord of Řštunik' or were there two figures called T'ēodoros?<sup>55</sup> The dating of events is also hard to establish. At some point early in the reign of Constans II – usually identified as during his fifth year, so 645/6, but perhaps as early as 642/3 – one T'umas was sent to Armenia. He united all the Armenian princes and went to the

<sup>51</sup> Movsēs Dasxuranc'i/Kałankatuac'i, *Patmut'awn* II.18: *Որոյ արեւայ զգունդն ի հարէն նախքան զիշխան Միւնէաց եւ զայսրասպետն Հայոց յառաջէր հասանել ի հանաչխարհական յայն բիրտաոր ժողովս:*

<sup>52</sup> Sebēos, *Patmut'awn* 138.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 138; Movsēs Dasxuranc'i/Kałankatuac'i, *Patmut'awn* II.18.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 143-5.

<sup>55</sup> Most commentators have seen two figures but it is striking that while T'ēodoros the Greek commander – *զայրասպետն Յունաց* – is depicted interceding with Constans II for Varaztiroc' to be released from exile, it is T'ēodoros lord of Řštunik' who embraces Varaztiroc' warmly when they meet in Constantinople after his release.

prince of the Medes to negotiate peace with him on their behalf; there was already a pact of some kind between this figure and the Roman emperor. The prince of the Medes should almost certainly be identified as Rustam's brother and successor as *spāhbed* of Ādurbādagān, Xořoxazat/Farrukhzād. It is less clear whether this title, prince of the Medes, reflects a self-designation, an expression of the territory under his control – the prince of Media – or an eschatological interpretation of his identity devised by the author of the passage, as the inferior successor to Nebuchadnezzar described in Daniel 2.<sup>56</sup> According to the passage, T'umas promised Farrukhzād he would arrest T'ēodoros, lord of Řštunik', then acting as prince of Armenia, and have him conveyed to Constantinople; this duly happened. However on his arrival, T'ēodoros was exonerated.

Two features of this episode stand out: firstly that the hostilities, which are otherwise unreported, pitted the prince of the Medes against Armenian princes – probably under the leadership of T'ēodoros, since he is titled prince of Armenia – but did not involve the Romans, who seem to have been developing relationships with both parties; and secondly, that the authority of the prince of the Medes, at least in Armenia, collapsed very soon after this. This is supported by the decision to appoint Varaztiroc' Bagratuni as *curopalates* and prince of Armenia despite the fact that he had recently fled from Constantinople and taken refuge in Armenia.<sup>57</sup> As we have noted above, Varaztiroc' had gone to Heraclius a decade earlier when warned that Farrukhzād was about to arrest him in Duin. His appointment as principal Roman client while Farrukhzād was still active in Armenia would have been, at the very least, inflammatory. If, however, Farrukhzād had been forced to pull out of Armenia and focus his attention elsewhere, it is possible that Varaztiroc' became an attractive choice to use as a client, someone through whom Roman influence could be extended eastwards into regions that had, until that point, been under Farrukhzād's hegemony. Varaztiroc' had had experience of governing Persian Armenia as *marzpan* a decade before, as well as ties of friendship with other Armenian nobles, some of which went back to his upbringing in Ctesiphon. Constans II and his advisers were looking for someone who was unlikely to go over to Farrukhzād and Varaztiroc' Bagratuni was such a figure. Furthermore, after Varaztiroc' death, Constans II appointed T'ēodoros, lord of Řštunik', as commander of Armenia, someone who had recently opposed Farrukhzād, to the extent that the latter had engineered his removal. Evidently control over Armenia had remained divided down to this time, with some parts still under Iranian control, albeit a regional power based in Ādurbādagān rather than an imperial power based in Ctesiphon. The appointments of Varaztiroc' and then T'ēodoros by Constans II therefore mark the moment when Iranian political hegemony over Armenia waned and the traditional bipartite character of Armenia, divided between Roman and Persian sectors for two centuries, dissolved.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 143: *h2huuū Uuřnuug*. See also *ibid.* 172, describing the land of Media, *u2huuřhū Uuřnuug*, as comprising the deep forested valleys, cliffs, and rocky places of the river Gaz and the mountains of Media, where the people of Geln and Delumn lived, in other words of Gēlān and Dēlamān/Daylam. These are the western Alburz mountains, south and west of the Caspian Sea.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 144.

The testimony of two other sources support this proposition. The *History of Ałuank*<sup>58</sup> reveals that when Juanšēr returned from fighting for the *šahanšah* Yazdgird III, probably in 643 CE, and retired to his own country, the “Persian commander” as he is termed, urged him to marry his sister.<sup>58</sup> It is highly likely that this was none other than Farrukhzād. Juanšēr refused on the grounds that she was an unbeliever, and hostilities ensued, in the course of which he was forced to abandon the city of Partaw to the Persians and retreated to the hills.<sup>59</sup> After a series of campaigns, reported in great detail but all undated, the Persian commander sought to make peace with Juanšēr, employing the great prince of Siwnik<sup>60</sup> as his intermediary. Arguably, it was this warfare in Albania which pulled Farrukhzād away from Armenia and enabled the extension of Roman influence. The use of the reign of Constans II as the chronological marker in the Canons of Duin, noted above, also provides indirect support for this Roman expansion. This is the earliest extant Armenian ecclesiastical document to be dated by reference to the reigning Roman emperor.

Armenia therefore remained contested space throughout the 630s and early 640s, as Roman and Iranian interests interacted and competed for influence among the local elite. The narrative is complex and incomplete, reflecting the changing fortunes of the *šahanšah* and the emerging but short-lived regional power of the *spāhbed* of Ādurbādagān. Accepting the above reconstruction, the first Arab-Islamic raid into Armenia in autumn 640 therefore occurred while Armenia was still partitioned; and the second in summer 643 took place not only in the aftermath of the battle of Nihāvand but also in the context of Farrukhzād’s hostilities with Armenian and Albanian princes.

Let us move on to the second of the case studies, namely the terms of the treaty made in 653 CE between the prince of the Ishmaelites, Mu‘āwiya, and T‘ēodoros, lord of Řštunik<sup>61</sup>, until then the principal Armenian client of the Romans, as preserved in the *History* attributed to Sebēos. These read as follows:

Let this be the pact of my treaty between me and you, for as many years as you may wish. I shall not take tribute from you for one three-year period. Then you shall pay by oath, as much as you wish. You shall keep in your country 15,000 cavalry and provide sustenance from the country and I shall reckon it in the royal tribute. I shall not request the cavalry for Syria but wherever else I shall command, they shall be ready for work. And I shall not send *amirs* to the fortresses nor an Arab army, neither many nor a single cavalryman. An enemy shall not enter Armenia. And if Romans come against you, I shall send you troops in support, as many as you may wish. I swear to the great God that I shall not be false.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Movsēs Dasxuranc‘i/Katankatuac‘i, *Patmut‘iwn* II.18: *գալրասպետն Պարսից*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* II.19.

<sup>60</sup> Sebēos, *Patmut‘iwn* 164: Այս լիցի ուխտ հաշտութեան իմոյ ընդ իս և ընդ ձեզ՝ որչափ ամաց և դուք կամիցիք. և ոչ առնում ի ձեզ սակ զերեւամ մի. սպաս յայնժամ տաջիք երդմամբ, որչափ և դուք կամիցիք: Եւ հեծեալ կալէք յաշխարհիդ ժԵ հազար, և հաց յաշխարհէն տուք, և ես ի սակն արքունի անգարեմ. և զհեծեալսն յԱսորիս ոչ խնդրեմ. Բայց այլ ուր և հրամայեմ՝ պատրաստ լիցին ի գործ. և ոչ արձակեմ ի բերդորայն ամիրայս, և ոչ տանիկ սպայ՝ ի բազմաց մինչև ցմի հեծեալ: Թշնամի մի՛ մտցէ ի Հայս. և եթէ գայ Հռոմոմ ի

This passage has been analysed most fully by Jinbashian and Vacca although several others, including Dadoyan and Garsoïan, have also commented upon it.<sup>61</sup> There has been general consensus that it contains the terms of an agreement established between two military men in a time of conflict. It is primarily concerned with arrangements for the payment of tribute, the provision of military service and mutual defence. It may therefore be distinguished from many other Conquest-era treaties which tend to record the terms negotiated by clerical leaders on behalf of individual urban communities. Armenian clerics are not recorded acting in this way as intermediaries before the end of the seventh century.<sup>62</sup>

Even a cursory glance reveals that the passage contains a wealth of information. It refers repeatedly to tribute, *sak*, rather than taxation, *hark*, and envisages that this is levied or assessed every three years. The same term *sak* is used by the later sixth-century Armenian writer Elišē when referring to the tribute paid to the Persians.<sup>63</sup> Although the above translation retains the reading *erdmamb*, ‘by oath’, it is possible that this conceals a variant instrumental form of *eream*, perhaps *eremamb*, meaning ‘per three year period’.<sup>64</sup> A connection is made between tribute and military service, with the provision of supplies for the 15,000 cavalrymen apparently being set off against the existing liability for royal tribute. The apparently mysterious reference to not requiring military service in Syria should be placed in the context of the foundation inscription on the church at Mren which describes the anonymous *curopalates* – almost certainly Davit‘ Saharuni – uniquely as *sparapet* of Armenia and Syria.<sup>65</sup> Nothing is known about his military service in the 630s but this extension of his command to Syria suggests that he participated in operations there. It is striking that it does not preclude military service elsewhere. The passage contains the earliest occurrence in Armenian transliteration of the Arabic word *amir*. It envisages them being situated in fortresses, just as Iranian commanders had been appointed previously to Duin and, almost certainly, to Naxčawan. The Arab army is represented as comprising cavalrymen. The common enemy is identified as being Roman rather than Persian.

Yet there are also mysterious elements in the treaty. The repeated phrase “as much as you wish” produces uncertainty, both in terms of the amount of tribute to be paid and the number of reinforcements to be sent. This is the opposite of what one would expect in an agreement. Jinbashian proposed an elaborate solution, based on his reconstruction of an Arabic original which included the term ‘*afw* or surplus but Vacca has observed that this seems to be more aligned with ‘Abbāsīd-era

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վերայ ձեր՝ արձակեմ ձեզ զարխ յազնակաւնութիւն՝ որչափ և որք կամիջիք: Եւ երդնում ի մեծն Աստուած՝ եթէ ոչ ստեմ:

<sup>61</sup> Jinbashian, *Arab-Armenian Peace*; Vacca, *Non-Muslim provinces* 186-93; Dadoyan, *Armenians*, i, 56-7; Garsoïan, *Interregnum* 9, 13. Surprisingly it is not discussed by Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims*.

<sup>62</sup> Lewond, *Patmanbanut’iwn*, c.12 (Sahak) but see Vacca, *Non-Muslim provinces* 37 and 183-4 on this story; more securely, see Movsēs Dasxuranc‘i/Kaġankatuac‘i, *Patmut’iwn* III.4-5 (Elia).

<sup>63</sup> Vacca, *Non-Muslim provinces* 189 and n. 35.

<sup>64</sup> For *երդնամք*, read *երեմամք*.

<sup>65</sup> Greenwood, *Corpus* A.7.



Caucasian Albania, a comparable figure.<sup>72</sup> Three of the twenty-four mathematical problems attributed to Anania Širakac‘i and dating from the middle of the seventh century contemplate Armenian military service on and beyond the eastern frontier of Sasanian Iran.<sup>73</sup> The *History* attributed to Sebēos contains numerous passages recording the recruitment of Armenian forces in Persian or Roman campaigns; indeed the size of the forces of the country of Armenia assembled to fight for Khusro II against Vahram Č‘obin is recorded to have numbered around fifteen thousand.<sup>74</sup> Even if the Sasanian-era agreements preserved in Armenian literature do not reproduce the terms verbatim, they nevertheless reflect the understanding and perceptions of contemporary writers. If they were wholly fictitious, bearing no relation to the lived experience of the audience, the willingness of that audience to accept the version of the past being represented would be compromised. The treaty between Mu‘āwiya and T‘ēodoros represented in the *History* attributed to Sebēos therefore belongs to a long tradition of such reconstructed agreements; despite the contemporary reference to *amirs*, it looked back to a Sasanian-era model. The reference to the “great God” does not denote a contemporary expression of the divine from within the nascent community of Believers but reflects the terminology found within Armenian tradition for the supreme Iranian deity, Ohrmazd/Ahuramazda.

A second interpretation views the treaty as being composed in the light of subsequent events, and so with the benefit of hindsight. In response to Constans II visit to Armenia in 653 to reconnect with his supporters and displace or destabilise his erstwhile client T‘ēodoros, the latter is recorded retreating to the island of Aht‘amar with his son-in-law Hamazasp Mamikonean and requesting, and receiving, 7000 troops from the Ishmaelites.<sup>75</sup> In the autumn of the following year (654 CE), Hamazasp split with T‘ēodoros, prompting the latter to appeal once again for troops from the Ishmaelites.<sup>76</sup> It could be the case that these actions were deemed by the author of the passage to have been covered in the original treaty, hence the inclusion of an appropriate clause.

But there is a third solution, namely that Hamazasp was the source of information about the agreement. He had remained loyal to his father-in-law T‘ēodoros for at least a year after the agreement with Mu‘āwiya, negotiating a temporary truce with his nephew Mušel Mamikonean only after an army of Ismael had been billeted in Duin and T‘ēodoros had fallen ill.<sup>77</sup> In one of the final passages to the work, Hamazasp is praised for being “a virtuous man in all respects, one who stayed at home, a lover of reading and study” but untrained and inexperienced in military affairs and combat.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore he is the last named Armenian figure in the original composition. When taken together, these elements lend support to the proposition that Hamazasp was the sponsor of the *History*

<sup>72</sup> Etišē, *Vasn Vardany* 22.3 (2.63-74) for recruitment; 63 (3.81-3) for Albanian cavalry.

<sup>73</sup> Greenwood, *Mathematical* 161-7 (problems 2, 11 and 21)

<sup>74</sup> Sebēos, *Patmut‘iwn* 77.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 169.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 172.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 171-2.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 174: *այր անաբրինի յամենայն դէմս... ընդամենաւնն և ընթերցասէր և մտամնասէր...* The rhythm and rhyme of these terms is lost in translation.

attributed to Sebēos. His recent breach with T'ēodoros could explain the sudden reversal in the latter's portrayal, from "pious Armenian commander" to the one who abandoned the divine covenant when he negotiated the treaty with Mu'āwiya, the servant of the Anti-Christ. It would certainly have been in the interests of Hamazasp to distance himself from T'ēodoros and the highly symbolic language used to define the two protagonists indicates one of the ways in which this was achieved.

This study therefore contends that the *History* attributed to Sebēos does not preserve the actual treaty established between Mu'āwiya and T'ēodoros, lord of R̥štunik'; instead it supplies a credible reconstruction of what a contemporary Armenian writer believed it to have comprised. This was devised on the basis of similar agreements in the past between Armenian princes and Sasanian Iran, as remembered in Armenian historical tradition. It may also have been written with the benefit of hindsight and even, perhaps, have been shaped by the personal knowledge and experience of Hamazasp Mamikonean; the context in which it is situated implies his involvement. It seems unlikely that we shall ever be able to determine the degree to which each of these three dimensions contributed to its form and content. Whatever its exact terms, it seems to have been in effect for no more than eighteen months or so. By the end of 654, an Arab army was stationed in Duin – in breach of the purported treaty – and T'ēodoros, lord of R̥štunik' had fallen ill and withdrawn again to the island of Aĥt'amar.<sup>79</sup> He had also been abandoned by Hamazasp. The contemporary nature of the description of the treaty imbues the passage with great significance but it is not the verbatim record that many have assumed it to be and therein lies its challenge.

In conclusion, this paper offers an overview of the state of scholarship in relation to the study of Armenia in the Conquest era and stresses the methodological value of Vacca's recent monograph. It then defines a body of Armenian-language texts which could be used to study Armenia in this era, starting with the *History* attributed to Sebēos. It then employs these sources in two case studies, one tracing relations between elements within Sasanian Iran and Armenia from 628 CE down to c. 643 CE, and the second reassessing the treaty between Mu'āwiya and T'ēodoros, lord of R̥štunik' as preserved in the *History* attributed to Sebēos. The results of the first indicates that Armenia was a zone of intense political rivalry in the 630s and 640s, as Roman, Iranian, Arab and Armenian interests clashed. The second proposes that the treaty is not what it purports to be and that it should be approached not as an authentic document, somehow embedded in the narrative, but rather a contemporary reconstruction of what such an agreement was presumed to contain. The Armenian sources for the Conquest era still have much to tell us.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 171-2.



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