

## THE LIFE OF MASHTOTS

### The Story of the Life and Death of the Blessed Man St. Mashtots Vardapet Our Translator by His Pupil, Koriun Vardapet

I had been thinking of the God-given alphabet of the Azkanazian nation and of the land of Armenia-when, in what time, and through what kind of man that new divine gift had been bestowed, as well as the luminous learning and angelic, virtuous piety of that person, so as to cause memorials to blossom in an individual volume. And while I was striving to remember [the facts], there came the command of an excellent man named Hovsep, a disciple of that person, as well as the encouragement of others, our fellows of student days. Therefore, I, who had had the fortune of being [his] special pupil, even though the youngest [among his pupils] and the task beyond my capacities, [nevertheless] hastened to write without delay that which was suggested, compelled by the clear roan-date which had been addressed to me. And we ask them all that they assist us in our tasks by their prayers, and to commit us to the divine grace, so that we may sail successfully and unerringly over the boundless waves of the sea of doctrine.

#### II

But let me make an introductory statement whether it is permissible to write concerning the lives of men of perfection. We on our part do not wish to engage in disputatious eloquence, relying on our own thoughts; but through examples we simply wish to prove the contrary.\*

• That is, contrary to the opinion of those who say that it is not permissible.

For God the bountiful has been so gracious to His beloved as not only to deem them worthy of the splendid and high reward in endless eternity for their virtuous lives, but has caused them to be extolled to the heavens here in this world, in the course of this transitory life, so that they may in general shine with spiritual and earthly lustre.

And in the Mosaic story manifest is the nobility of blessed men and the firmness of [their] true faith, the beauty of godly and god-fearing life, and the radiance of a marvelous life. For one of them by virtue of acceptable sacrifice has been called just; another, because of his pleasing work, disdaining all-devouring death, has remained alive; a third, because of his perfect righteousness has been preserved in a ship for a period of one year on the god-sent scourge of a boundless, mountain-high sea, along with every breathing thing; a fourth, has been justified through [his] suddenly-found faith, and drawing nigh unto God, has become an oracle and ally of God and has inherited the promise of the bounties to come. Many others similarly have come to know God, and whose nobility all the divine books have described.

Similar to those I have mentioned, blessed Paul in his [epistle] to the Hebrews praises by name the true faith of such persons, whereby each one has received, according to his attainments, rewarding consolation from God the Bountiful, giver of all things. He even offers as an example the hospitality of Raab the evildoer [which she had shown] to the spies. However, upon noting how numerous such persons are, he actually has revealed the names of but a few of them, omitting others, deeming the time insufficient to recount them all in their proper order. He then records in a general manner the tribulations of such persons and their martyrdom without resistance, which he considers preferable to all the wealth of the world.

Thus, all the inspired books have recorded the brave deeds of men of war; the victory of some, in accordance with the divine religion, the bravery of some in the course of encounters and wars, in the manner of the world, as those of Nimrod, Samson, and David. A few are praised, moreover, for their natural as well as godly intelligence, as that of Joseph, in Egypt, and Daniel, in Babylon. There were among them advisors to mighty kings, who indicated the state of worldly affairs, at the same time imparting knowledge to everyone concerning God, the Lord of all. In praise of the wisdom of such persons, the prophet himself states as follows: "Art thou wiser than Daniel; or were they wise councilors who have advised thee by their

understanding." And this is not all, he extols the power of the saints, by dispatching the angels as emissaries, who declared Daniel to be magnificent and the Holy Mother of the Lord, in Galilee, "blessed among women."

But what to say concerning the praise whereby comrades honored each other, whose nobility the Lord Himself loudly proclaimed before the angels and men, revealing not only their known works, but also the radiance in the recesses of their hearts. How He represented hospitable Abraham as an intimate servant, and after the promise he had received, related to him what was to befall to Sodom. Similarly, He praises the good martyr Job, prior to his encounter with Satan, saying: "A perfect and upright man; one that feareth God and turneth away from evil." Moreover, He has revealed, in every religious book, the close intimacy of great Moses with God. The divine tradition has disclosed even his youthful intelligence, nor has the advice of Jethro, the alien, been omitted.

And thus, through divine tradition there shine the good works of all the devout masters whose blessed names no one can completely record. And He has caused to blossom forth not only the noble deeds of those who had come before, but also of those who came after the Only Begotten Son, the Saviour of all, even crowning them with beatitudes in His luminous gospel, lauding not only His own twelve or the Forerunner, but also praising the rectitude of the faith of the others who had come nigh unto the truth of the faith. Thus concerning Nathanael He states that in him there was no guile, and the greatness of the faith of the patrician, which He says, was not to be found in Israel. Yet Christ who exalts the humble [praises] not only the greater things, but more so he [praises] the lesser ones; who thinks highly of the pouring of a little ointment and [states that] the memory of those who poured it shall be preached under heaven. He, moreover, says concerning the faith of the Canaanite woman that it was great, and the generosity of those who contributed two mites He found more praiseworthy than those of the wealthy.

As, for Paul, who had determined to spread the luminous order that was established by Christ, he was designated as a chosen vessel who could bear His wondrous name in the world. Therefore, the blessed one, upon beholding the loftiness of the grace [which had been bestowed] for his faith and for that of all the saints, begins loudly to glorify [by saying] that "the grace of God which is proclaimed in everything, concerning us in Christ, and the savor of His knowledge is made manifest everywhere through us." Yet he adds even more boldly: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" And the blessed apostles had received from the Lord permission to put into writing the virtues of all their co-workers. A few [of them] can be seen in the Holy Gospel, and a few others are found in the Acts, written by blessed Luke, and there are others who are better presented in the general epistles.

At the same time St. Paul tells in fourteen epistles concerning his fellow apostles and co-workers, making [them] participants in his joy, and at the end of his epistles extends greeting to each one of them, inquiring [concerning them] by name, and quotes the gospel in praise of one of them. But he is thankful not only for the assistance to the blessed one, but gives much praise for the Christian hospitality of his hosts, and pleadingly applies to God, asking recompense for their kindness. And he declares in all the synagogues the nobility of the chosen, not only of the men, but also of the women disciples who preached the truth of the gospel.

And he has declared all this not for the sake of praise or pride, but so that it may serve as an example for those who were to come later. So that they all should be zealous in good deeds, he says: "Follow after charity and desire spiritual gifts." In relating in Macedonia, of the Achaians' readiness to serve the saints, he exhorts by rousing their envy, and even permits them to be unreservedly [jealous] of the virtue of the just, by saying that, "it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing." He moreover, exhorts them to resemble him and the Lord.

Again, he strives to live with them all by Christ's example. "Look unto Jesus," says he, "the author and perfecter of our faith," and again, "remember them which have rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow." And finally, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

Thus states also Luke at the beginning of the book of "The Acts," while beloved James, brother of Jesus, taking as his example the entire phalanx of the saints as well as the Lord, lover of the saints, states in his epistle: "Take my brethren, the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering, affliction and patience. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord."

It is evident from what has been stated that praise of the God-loving chosen is from the Lord Himself, some from the angels, and some from others, not for the sake of pride, but for the purpose of arousing each other's envy, so that encouraged by each other, we may succeed in the accomplishment of good works, the goal set up by blessed Paul, "to come... unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," whose freedom is in heaven, to await The Saviour, the great God.

We have also the gracious canonic writings which came after the apostles indicating how they honored and praised one another for their true faith and evangelical life and have been similarly treated to this very day.

And thus we have from them both permission to commit to writing the life of the just man.

Therefore, that which we have promised shall henceforth be produced, to the best of our ability; the biography of the father shall be duly completed and their\* sweet command shall be elaborately carried out.

\* That is, of Hovsep, the Acting Catholicos, and the other pupils of St. Mesrop.

### III

Mesrop Mashtots was the name of the person to whom we referred at the beginning of our account, whose story we have been eager to write. He was from the province of Taron, the village of Hatsekats, son of a blessed man named Vardan. From childhood he had been tutored in Greek literature, and coming to the court of the Arsacid kings in Armenia Major, served in the royal secretariat, as an executor of the royal commands, during the service of one named Arvan as the *hazarapet* of the land of Armenia. He was well versed in secular laws, and was esteemed by his men for his mastery of the military art. While serving the princes, he, nevertheless, devoted himself eagerly to the reading of the scriptures, whereby he soon was enlightened, gaining insight and profundity in matters related to the divine commands, and adorning himself with every preparation, he served the princes.

### IV

And subsequently, in compliance with the precepts of the gospel, he devoted himself to the service of God the lover of men. Thenceforward he was divested of princely passions, and taking the exalted cross went after the all-sustaining Crucified. And in obedience to the commands of [faith], joined the crusading legion of Christ, and soon entered the monastic order. He experienced many kinds of hardships, in keeping with the precepts of the gospel. He subjected himself to all types of spiritual discipline- solitude, mountain-dwelling, hunger, thirst, and living on herbs, in dark cells, clad in sackcloth, with the floor as his bed. Often, in the twinkling of an eye, he would end in standing vigil, a night's pleasant rest and much needed sleep. And he did all this not a few times. And having found a few persons, he caused them to adhere to him making them pupils in the same evangelical exercise.

And thus, bearing with a courageous will all the temptations that came upon him, and growing in radiance, became known and beloved of God and men.

### V

Taking along with him his faithful pupils, the blessed one went to the disorderly and uncultivated regions of Goghtan. He was met by the ruler of Goghtan, a pious man whose name was Shabit. A gracious and hospitable man, who devoutly served him in a manner worthy of an apostle of Christian faith. And the blessed one at once exercising the art of evangelism, with the faithful cooperation of the ruler, began [to preach] in the province, and capturing them all away from their native traditions and satanic idolatry, turned them to obedience to Christ.

And as he implanted in them the word of life, there appeared many miracles that are known to all the

people of the province. Evil spirits in various aspects took flight and fell in the regions of the Medians. He resolved to have greater concern for the consolation of the people of the entire land; [therefore] he increased his moanful prayers to God with upraised hands and ceaseless tears, remembering the words of the Apostle who said: "I am sorrowful and constant in my heartache for my brethren and my kin."

He was thus surrounded and ensnared with sad worries and engulfed by waves of apprehension as to how he might find a solution to the problem.

## VI

And after being occupied with the same [problem] for many days, he rose and came to the Holy Catholicos of Armenia Major, whose name was Sahak, and whom he found predisposed and sharing in the same concern. Cordially they came together, and with earnest prayers early every morning [besought] God that all men attain the salvation brought by Christ. And they did this many days.

Then as a boon from God the gracious, the council of blessed monks, devoted to the service of the land, gathered to secure letters for the Armenian nation. They conducted much inquiry and exploration, and much toil. Later they disclosed the foremost object of their search to the King of the Armenians whose name was Vramshapouh.

The King told them of a man named Daniel, a Syrian bishop of noble lineage, who unexpectedly had come into the possession of letters of Armenian alphabet. And when the King told them concerning Daniel's discovery, they prevailed upon him to do what was needful. He then dispatched a man named Vahrij along with messages to a priest called Habel, who was an intimate of Bishop Daniel.

As for Habel, upon hearing it, he hastened to Daniel, and first became familiar, through Daniel, with the letters, then taking them from him sent to the King in the land of Armenia. The [letters] reached his hands on the fifth year of his reign. Upon receiving the letters from Habel, the King rejoiced with Sahak and Mashtots.

Then the blessed stewards taking the unexpectedly discovered object of their search, requested of the King young children through whom they might experiment with the alphabet. And when many of them had been taught, the King commanded that everywhere the instruction be effected through the same [letters]. Thus the blessed one attained the noble rank of teacher, and taught for two years with the use of the same letters.

Yet when they became aware of the fact that those letters were insufficient to form all the syllables of the Armenian language, especially since the letters essentially proved to have been buried and then resurrected from other languages, they found themselves once more in the same anxieties and for some time were engaged in search of a solution.

## VII

Therefore, taking with him a group of young men, by authority of the King and the consent of Saint Sahak, the blessed Mashtots took leave with a kiss of holiness, on the fifth year of King Vramshapouh's reign, and came to the region of Aram, to two Assyrian cities, one of which was called Edessa, and the other, Amid. There he presented himself to two bishops, one of whom was called Babilas, and the other, Akakios. And they, clergy and nobles of the city, received the visitors with due honors and solicitude, in keeping with the custom of Christians.

The dedicated teacher then divided his pupils into two groups, assigning one group to the Assyrian school in the city of Edessa, and the other to the Hellenic school in Samosata.

## VIII

He then resumed, with his co-workers, his usual prayerful labors, his tearful pleadings, his life of austerity, and his anxieties, remembering the word of the prophet: "In retiring and rest shalt thou live."

Thus he experienced many tribulations in order to serve his nation. And God the All-Bountiful finally granted him that good fortune; for with his holy hand he became the father of new and wonderful offsprings-

letters of the Armenian language, and then and there quickly designed, named, determined, their order and devised the syllabication.

Then taking leave of the holy Bishop, he went, along with his pupils, to the city of Samosata, where he was accorded great honors by the Bishop and the Church. He found there in the same city, a Hellenic scribe, named Ropanos, by whose hands all the variations of the letters, thin and heavy strokes, long and short, the single letters as well as the diphthongs were devised, after which he proceeded with translations, with the help of two of his pupils, Hovhan, from the province of Ekeghiats, and Hovsep from the House of Baghan. And thus began the translation of the Bible, first, the Proverbs of Solomon, which begins with the exhortation to seek wisdom: "*To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding,*" which was written also by the same scribe. At once they began to teach the youth, [training] scribes for the same task.

## IX

Then taking papers from the Bishop of the city and taking leave of them together with his followers, he came to the Assyrian Bishop. He showed the alphabet to those who had received him earlier. Whereupon from the holy bishops and all the churches there rose many hymns of praise, glorifying God and offering encouragement to the students. And taking with him letters of good tidings and God's gracious gift, he set out with his group, safely, passing many hostelries, and with profound joy, he arrived in Armenia, in the regions of the province of Airarat, near the limits of the New City, on the sixth year of King Vramshapouh's reign.

Even Moses the Great was not as happy when he descended from Mount Sinai. We do not say that he [was happier], but that he was even much less [happy]. For as the man who had seen God descended from the mountain, holding the Commandments inscribed by God, he [was saddened] because of the sinful people, who having [turned away] from Providence, had become abject God-forsakers and were bowing down before their molten idol, to the great distress of the bearer of the Commandments, causing him to lament, as is evident from his breaking the tablets.

But the blessed one concerning whom this essay is being written did not act as had transpired there; on the contrary, filled with spiritual consolation, he was confident of the eagerness of those who were to be the recipients, and in anticipation of the joy of the recipients, the very hostelries on his road appeared as receivers of tidings.

Let no one consider us bold *for* what we have said. We may be subject to censure for our analogy between a very modest man and Moses the magnificent, who had spoken with God. But we feel justified in that, there is no reason to disparage, overtly or covertly that which is from God; for it is from only one omnipotent God that all graces come to earth-born men.

And thus as the unforgettable one approached the royal city, they informed the King and the holy Bishop. And they, followed by the entire assemblage of noble courtiers and a throng, came outside the city and met the blessed one on the bank of River Rah, and after warm greetings amidst sounds of joy and the singing of hymns and doxologies, returned to the city. And the days passed in festive joy.

## X

He then immediately obtained permission from the King to undertake [to teach] in the savage regions of the Medians who were difficult to communicate with, not only because of their devilish, satanic, and fiendish character, but also because of their very crude, corrupt, and harsh language. Undertaking to refine them, they made them, offsprings of many generations, intelligible, eloquent, educated, and informed of godly wisdom. Thus they became immersed in the laws and commandments, to the extent of becoming distinguishable from their fellow natives.

## XI

And from then on continuing with the husbandry of God's work, they began with the evangelical *art-to*

translate, to write, and to teach, especially since they had before their eyes the Lord's lofty commands and God's lofty Commandments which were given to blessed Moses concerning all the things that were-so as to be inscribed in a book to be preserved for the eternity to come, as well as similar commands which had been given to other prophets: "Take thee a great roll," said He, "and write in it with a scribe's pen." And elsewhere: "Now go, write it on a tablet, and inscribe it in a book." But David indicates even more clearly that the divine law shall apply to all nations, by saying, "This shall be written for the generation to come," and that "The Lord shall count when he writeth up the people," which in His coming Christ fulfilled by His gracious commandment: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations," and that "this gospel shall be preached in all the world." Thus our blessed fathers, having obtained permission, rendered their work, through hopeful endeavor, manifest and fruitful as the gospel.

At that time our blessed and wonderful land of Armenia became truly worthy of admiration, where by the hands of two colleagues, suddenly, in an instant, Moses, the law-giver, along with the order of the prophets, energetic Paul with the entire phalanx of the apostles, along with Christ's world-sustaining gospel, became Armenian speaking.

What heart-warming joy existed there thenceforward, and what a pleasant scene for the eyes! For a land which had not known even the name of the regions where all those wonderful divine acts had been performed, soon learned all the things that were, not only those that had transpired in time, but that of the eternity which had preceded, and those that had come later, the beginning and the end and all the divine traditions.

## XII

And as they became certain that things were firmly established, they were emboldened even more in gathering more pupils for the newly discovered learning, so as to instruct, educate, and train for preaching illiterate men.

On their part they arose and came in large numbers from all parts and provinces of Armenia to the [newly] opened fountain of divine knowledge. For in the provinces of Airarat at the seat of kings and patriarchs, there gushed forth for the Armenians a grace of God's commandments. Here it is needful to recall the words of the Prophet: "And there shall spring a fountain in the House of David."

And truly the [two] pillars of the Church boldly assumed the task of preaching Christ by sending to different parts and provinces of Armenia their apostles of truth, [deeming] those of us who had completed their training as qualified to teach others. To them they offered their own labors as examples and guide rules, bidding them to stay within those rules.

And by their God-given wisdom they instructed nearby the royal court together with the entire *azatagound banak* Moreover, blessed Sahak instructed especially the men of the Mamikonians, foremost of whom was named Vardan, who was also called Vardkan. Likewise he strove to instruct everyone and to impart the knowledge of the truth.

## XIII

After this the blessed Mashtots obtained permission so that while the Lord Bishop disseminated the word of life among the royal garrisons, he himself would do likewise in areas of heathendom. And he took leave of them with his assistants, the first one of whom was named Tirayr from the province of Khordsenakan, and that of the second, Moushe, from the province of Taron, who were both saintly, energetic [men], as well as other servants of the gospel whom I am unable to designate by name. Together with them, trusting in God's grace, the blessed one arrived in Rotastak of Goghtan, his first parish. And expounding the doctrine in his usual manner, in company with the pious Shabit, he filled the province with the message of Christ's gospel, and in all the towns of the province he established orders of monks. He was soon joined by Git, son of the Christ-loving Shabit, who followed in his father's footsteps, and rendered much service to the vardapet in the manner of a true son.

## XIV

After this he went to Siunik, across the boundary. Here too he was received with godly amenities by the ruler of Siunik whose name was Vaghinak. From him (Mashtots) obtained much assistance in his assumed task, enabling him to visit and to familiarize himself with all parts of Siunik. And so as to teach he gathered youths from the more brutal, barbarian, and fiendish regions and cared for them and instructed as a teacher, educated and advised them so well as to ordain a bishop overseer from among those barbarians, whose name was Ananias, a saintly, distinguished man, and a father for the seminarians. He then filled the region of Siunik with monastic orders.

At that time God ordained that brave Vasak Siuni, a wise and ingenious, far-seeing man, endowed with the grace of divine knowledge, came to be the ruler of Siunik. He greatly assisted in the work of the evangelization. He showed obedience, as a son to his father, and duly serving the gospel, carried out all his requests.

## XV

Again, after the passage of some time, the beloved of Christ thought of taking care of the barbarian regions, and by the grace of God undertook to create an alphabet for the Georgian language. He wrote, arranged, and put it in order, and taking a few of his pupils, arrived in the regions of Georgia. And he went and presented himself to King Bakour, and the bishop of the land, Moses.

He placed his skill at their disposal, advised and urged them, and they consented to do what he requested. And he found a Georgian translator by the name of Jagha, a literate and devout man. The Georgian king then ordered that youths be gathered from various parts and provinces of his realm and brought to the *vardapet*. Taking them he put them through the forge of education, and with spiritual love and energy he removed [from them] the purulent uncleanness of the worship of spirits and false idols, and he separated and purged them from their native [traditions], and made them lose their recollection to such an extent that they said, "I forgot my people and my father's house."

And thus they who had been gathered from among so many distinct and dissimilar tongues, he bound together with one [set of] divine commandments, transforming them into one nation and glorifiers of one God. There were found among them men worthy of attaining the order of bishop, first among whom was a saintly and devout man by the name of Samuel, who became the Bishop of the royal court.

And when he had organized the work of God's worship in all parts of Georgia, taking leave of them he returned to Armenia, and meeting Sahak, the Catholicos of the Armenians, recounted all that had transpired [and] together they glorified God and the exalted Christ.

## XVI

And then he came back to visit the places he **had** organized and the provinces in Armenia that had been taught, in order to revitalize, renovate, and confirm. And when he had filled every place with the holy gospel of the Lord, admonishing them all to walk in the path of life, he then thought of the other half of the Armenian nation which was under the rule of the king of the Horoms. \*

\* The Byzantine emperor.

And he hastened and went with many pupils to the region of the Greeks, and owing to the renown for his good works which had reached there long before, from the northern regions, he received at the very outset of his journey a very sincere and amicable reception from the bishops and princes and provincials of the land, especially from the commander-in-chief of the area whose name was Anatalis, who transmitted in writing [Mesrop's] design to Caesar, whose name was Theodosius, son of Arcadius, from whom there came an order to accord due honors to the Saint, who was to be called Acoemeti.

And he took the group of his pupils to Militene and left them in the care of the saintly Bishop of the city whose name was Akakios, and [he] named as their supervisor one called Leontius, a loyal and pious man. And then the blessed one taking with him the excellent Bishop of Derjan, whose name was Gint, and a few of his pupils there, and boarding a public transport and receiving much courtesy, arrived at the capital

city of Constantinople. The court was immediately informed of him, and he entered into the presence of the exalted throne, the God ordained monarchs and to the Patriarch and saintly Catholicos of the royal city, whose name was Atticus, and was well received. It was ordered that [Mesrop] be honored in the capital city for a definite period with the same living accommodations accorded to the Church, the court, and the excellent nobles of the city.

And after the passage of Easter, he explained to Caesar the nature of his needs, and obtained unassailable authorization, along with a *sucra rescripta* bearing Caesar's seal, to gather youths from their half of the Armenian nation\* for the purpose of instruction, concerning the Borboritons, evil doing men, and the preservation of the Church, as well as to be honored with valuable gifts. The virtuous one, however, having prevailed upon the court, declining the gifts, left [them]. Thereupon he made obeisance to the empurpled august [personages] and to His Holiness the Catholicos, and having been bid Godspeed by the Church and the foremost princes of the city, they boarded the litters and carriages provided by the court, and with much pomp and circumstance took the royal road. And they were met at every city, and were treated as high dignitaries [in every] city.

\* The part of Armenia under Byzantine rule.

And having received many gifts, they finally arrived at the appointed places. At once they visited the *sparapet* of Armenia, and presented themselves [armed with] Caesar's *sacra rescripta*. And when he received the *sacra rescripta* bearing Caesar's seal, he hastened to carry out the command at once. He therefore dispatched messengers to the provinces in the half of the Armenian nation to have many youths gathered and to have provisions made for their maintenance at suitable places, where the blessed one resumed his teaching, educating those who had been gathered. Then he undertook to examine the uncouth and stubborn sect of the Borboritons. And when he found no other way to rectify them, he began to use the miseryinflicting stick, with very severe chastisements, imprisonments, tortures, fetters. And when even then they remained deprived of salvation, scourged, branded, smeared in soot, and subjected to various indignities, they were driven out of the land.

However, the blessed one devoted himself to his educational task, organized and completed it. And having acquired many a noble book by the church fathers, he further deepened his knowledge of the doctrine and was filled with all goodness.

Then there came and visited them an elderly man, an Albanian named Benjamin. And he [Mesrop] inquired and examined the barbaric diction of the Albanian language, and then through his usual God-given keenness of mind invented an alphabet, which he, through the grace of Christ, successfully organized and put in order.

After this he separated from the bishops, the princes of the land, and all the churches. He appointed two of his pupils, the first one of whom was called, Yenovk, and the second Danan, as overseers for the faithful, clerics, effective men in the evangelical service, whom he commended to God and placed them there. And along with many pupils he came to the regions of Greater Armenia, and arriving at Nor Kaghak presented himself to the saintly bishop, Sahak, and to the Armenian King whose name was Artashes, and to the nobles, and related to them the things wrought by the Grace of God in those regions, and remained there a few days to distribute spiritual consolation.

## XII

And then he bid farewell to them in order to go to the region of the Albanians and arrived in their country, and upon reaching the royal regions, he saw the saintly Bishop of the Albanians whose name was Jeremiah, and their King, whose name was Arsvagh, who along with the nobility received [him] in the name of Christ with utter compliance. And then they inquired and he explained the reason for his coming. And they, the two associates, the King and the Bishop, expressed their readiness to adopt the letters and ordered that a large number of youths be gathered from provinces and places in the realm and to open schools in suitable places to make provisions for their livelihood.



And when this order was actually fulfilled and bore results. Bishop Jeremiah soon began the translation of the divine books, whereby at once in one instant, the barbaric, slothful, and brutal men become well acquainted with the prophets and the apostles, becoming heirs to the gospel, and in no way ignorant of the divine traditions. Moreover, the God-fearing King of the Albanians promptly commanded the satanic and devil worshipping nation to withdraw and to free itself from the old superstitions and to submit to the sweet yoke of Christ.

And when they had accomplished it and had done all that was needed and that which he wanted, he was aided in his sacred task of indoctrination, in the region of Baghas, by the saintly Bishop whose name was Moushegh. He then took leave of the Albanian King, the Bishop, and the Church.

And he named a few of his pupils as overseers over them along with one of the royal priests whose name was Jonathan, who had shown much eagerness for his instruction.

And committing them and himself in God's providential mercy, he resumed his journey from the regions of Albania to the land of Georgia.

### XVIII

He arrived opposite to the Gardmanian valley. He was met by the ruler of the Gardmank whose name was Khours, who with god-loving piety welcomed him and placed himself along with his office at the service of the Vardapet. After enjoying the richness and essence of his doctrine, he helped the blessed one to get on his way while he set out towards his destination.

At that time [one] by the name of Ardzugh became King of Georgia and caused learning to progress and flourish, and he visited all the pupils and exhorted them to remain in righteousness.

At that time the ruler of Dashir, an excellent god-loving man, whose name was Ashusha, placed himself along with his entire province under his disposal, and the dissemination of his doctrine was no less successful than in other provinces.

And leaving them in the care of the saintly Bishop Samuel, mentioned above, he returned to the regions of Armenia Major. Coming to the usual places he warmly greeted Saint Sahak and all those whom he saw, and related to them also of those, new endeavors. Upon hearing him they praised God for [His] bounties.

### XIX

Then the blessed ones turned their attention to the improvement and refinement of the literature of their nation. Sahak the Great, as before, began to write and to translate.

And it so happened that they dispatched two brothers from among their pupils to the city of Edessa in the region of the [Syrians] the first one Hovsep, as mentioned above, and the second, Eznik by name, from the village of Goghb in the province of Airarat, for the purpose of translating and writing down the traditions of the church fathers from Syriac to Armenian.

The translators, therefore, upon arriving at their destination, carried out their orders and sent [the translations] to the excellent fathers. Then they went to the region of the Greeks where they studied and became proficient translators from the Greek language.

After a while a few brethren came to the region of the Greeks, the name of the first one of which was Ghevondes, and the second, was I, Koriun. And as they drew near Constantinople they joined Eznik, and as most intimate companions, together they performed their spiritual tasks.\* Then they came to the land of Armenia, having brought authentic copies of the God-given book and many subsequent traditions of the worthy church fathers, along with the canons of Nicaea and Ephesus, and placed before the fathers the testaments of the Holy Church which they had brought with them.

• That is, the work of translation.

Yet blessed Sahak, who had rendered from the Greek language into Armenian all the ecclesiastical books and the wisdom of the church fathers, once more undertook, with Eznik, the comparison of the former random, hurriedly done translations from then available copies with the authentic copies, and they translated

many commentaries of the Bible.

And thus the fathers passed their time, day and night, with the reading of books, and thus served as good examples to their studious assistants, especially in keeping with the commandments from God's messengers, the first of whom has commended: "On His laws shalt thou meditate day and night," and the second which similarly commands: "And give attendance to reading, exhortation, and to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in them. ... Meditate upon the things, giving thyself wholly to them ... for doing this thou shalt save both thyself and them that hear thee."

## XX

Then the blessed Mashtots with his excellent erudition began to prepare diverse, easily understood and gracious sermons, full of the light and essence of the prophetic books and illustrations of true evangelical faith. He then [created] and organized many examples and allusions from ephemeral things of the world related to after-life, resurrection, and hope, so as to make them intelligible even to fools and to those distracted by secular things, to revive, to awaken, and to convince them of the rewards that have been promised.

## XXI

And thus all over Armenia, Georgia, and Albania, throughout his lifetime, in summer and winter, night and day, fearless and without hesitation, he bore, with his evangelical and upright life, the name of Jesus the Saviour of all, before kings, princes, and all the pagans, and with no contradiction from opponents. And he adorned every man spiritually with the vestments of Christ, and he saved many who had been imprisoned and in chains, by wresting them away from the hands of tyrants by the mighty power of Christ, and he tore up many inequitable contracts and through the doctrine of consolation gave to many who were in mourning and in despair, expectation and hope in the appearance of the glory of Almighty God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, and in general he changed them all by bringing them under God's law.

## XXII

And again he established many and countless groups of monks in inhabited as well as in uninhabited places, countless groups in lowlands, in mountains, in caves, and in cloisters. From time to time he showed himself as an example to them. From all the monasteries he took with him a few pupils to retire into the mountains and to live in caves. They secluded themselves in caverns and ended the day by receiving their daily nourishment from herbs. And thus they subjected themselves to painful weakness, having especially in view the consolation of the apostolic word: "When I am weak for Christ, I am strong," as well as, "It is better that I glory in my infirmities so that the power of Christ may rest in me."

There they did not become drunk with wine, but were filled with the spirit and their hearts were ever ready to praise with hymns the glory of God. There they received training by reading spiritually instructive books. There the master instructed and exhorted the chosen to go forward to attain the crown offered by Christ. There they were fired with God-worshipping service. There they prayed tearfully and pleaded to God, the lover of mankind, for the reconciliation of the life of all [men].

And thus he performed his spiritual art for many days in desolate places until he received word from the priests of the region to come to their assistance for any worthy purpose in the grace of Christ. And he without hesitation hurried with his assistants whatever happened to be the problem, and through the power of God solved it, and with ceaseless speech, he caused the streams of the doctrine to flow abundantly in the hearts of his hearers.

And he did this throughout his lifetime for himself and for the world. For all true teachers earnestly strive to render their virtues as examples for their pupils, especially stressing that of the Lord, the only wise God. "For Jesus began to work and to teach." He often took His disciples aside, and made His all powerful person and example to imperfect men, when on Mount Tabor He pronounced the Beatitudes and offered on the same mountain the canonical prayer, while His disciples sailed on the Sea of Tiberias. And, again, during the feast of the unleavened bread, having secluded himself on the Mount of Olives, He offered His prayer

of the night. Thus it is evident without the need of scrutiny that the Lord of All strove not for Himself, but to teach the world, as an example for all who obey, and for that reason said, "watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation."

And if earthen man is deficient in the knowledge of the minor arts, how much more lacking may he be considered in the art which enables him to speak with God? Thus blessed Paul states that all are ignorant; therefore, the omniscient spirit comes to their aid and intercedes for them "with groanings that cannot be uttered."

Yet when we hear that "Jesus began to work and to teach," it should be understood that He worked and taught and not as though He made a present [of the knowledge]. And the intercession of the saints and the intercession of the Holy Spirit was for the purpose of teaching us, and is to be understood as intercession for one another, for Godhood is not of varying but of equal [rank].

While the blessed apostles, having received the example from the teacher of truth, first applied it to their imperfect selves, and then transmitted it to their disciples. They greatly exalted the glory of Christ, sometimes in private, and sometimes by gathering the people together. For in reality it is far more useful to retreat from all worldly interests, to withdraw one's self and to engage only in the worship of God, as had done the prophets who in the mountains and deserts and in caverns had devoted themselves to the service of the divine faith.

Similarly, all the church fathers who came after the order of the disciples, endowed as they were with piety, served as examples to us who have followed them. Thus the blessed one had assumed this honored tradition, and similarly admonished all who came near him with the same exhortation. And it was thus that they lived a long time, richly filled by the grace of divine gifts, rising early in the morning for the same purpose, daily, with perseverance.

### XXIII

At that time there was brought to the land of Armenia the false books and inane traditions of a man named Theodore. Synodical fathers of the church had informed Sahak and Mesrop, the faithful glorifiers [of God], concerning it in writing; and the latter, in the interest of truth, destroyed and sent them beyond their borders, so that no satanic smoke might contaminate the luminous doctrine.

### XXIV

After that the blessed Sahak, righteous to the end, full in the number of years and gracious with the goodness of God-given bounties, on the first year of Jazdegerd [II], son of Vram, the King of Persia, in the province of Bagrevand and village of Belrotsats, at the end of the month of Navasard, even as they had been commemorating the birthday of the blessed one, at the hour of two, in the course of the administration of extreme unction with prayers pleasing to God, expired in Christ, as spoken by the prophet, "Into thine hand commit I my spirit," and as the blessed Stephan said, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit." He, moreover, committed to God those he left behind.

Hastily making all preparations, his God-loving officers, his own pupils, the chief of whom was called Yeremia, a saintly and devout man, who with the assistance of a noble lady named Douster, the wife of Vardan, whom we have mentioned before, as well as a large group of saintly men, raised him with psalms, doxologies, and hymns, and going day and night for several days, arrived in Taron, the very village of Ashtishat. And there, at the altar of All the Martyrs, placed him with sweet-smelling incense of all kinds in the sarcophagus of the saints, and sealed it with the seal of Christ, and after performing the customary rites, everyone returned to this place. Every year coming together at that month, they observed his memory.

### XXV

But his blessed colleague, by this I mean Mashtots, seared with yearning, was immersed in sad, tearful, and heartfelt lamentations, and deep mourning. For if the holy Apostle upon not finding his co-worker, Timothy, says that his soul was restless, how much more sorrow is experienced over those who are forever

departed, by those who are left behind? Even though the sorrow caused by loneliness would not permit cheerfulness, yet he continued with the grace of God, faultlessly, his evangelism and administration of the Holy Church and strove even more and exhorted everyone to be undaunted in goodness. And day and night, with fasting and praying and with supplications, and in loud voice admonished everyone, reminding them of the God-ordained commandments, and performed some of the most arduous disciplines [of monastic life]. Above all, owing to his advanced age, thinking of his last days, he would not allow his eyes to be overcome with sleep nor his eyelids with somnolence, until **he** attained rest in the Lord.

## XXVI

And while he thus revived the religious fervor of those who were near him, and sent many messages of advice and exhortation to all the provinces, the same year, six months after the death of blessed Sahak, the Armenian Army being located, along with the saintly master, in the Nor Kaghak in Airarat, with the same godly life he reached the saintly end of those who have been summoned by Christ. And after an illness of a few days, on the 13th day of the month of Mehekan, as he was about to become separated from his beloved pupils to join Christ's legion, freed from his pains and regaining consciousness, he arose and sat in the midst of those around him, and with hands upraised to heaven, he surrendered to God's grace those who remained, and asked assistance of them.

And the names of the principal disciples who had gathered [there] are, first, Hovsep, whom we have mentioned at the beginning; second, Tadik, a temperate man, most heedful to the directions of the master. Among the military, the name of the first one, Vahan, of the Amatouni clan, who was the commander in chief of Armenia Major, and that of the second, Hmayak, of the Mamikonian clan, excellent and pious men, heedful to the master's instructions.

And as the hands of the saint were upraised to heaven, there was seen a luminous vision resembling a cross over the mansion where the blessed one was dying. This was seen by everyone with his own eyes, and was not related by acquaintances. And he passed on to the saints love and unity as a legacy, blessed them that were far and near, and went to his rest, offering prayers pleasing to Christ.

Vahan and Hmayak, along with the populace, lifted the deceased, having made all arrangements, with psalms and doxologies and spiritual joy, with burning handles and flaming torches, sweet-smelling incense, and brilliant candlesticks, preceded by luminous crucifixes, went up to Oshakan and laid him there in the place of the Martyrs and performed the funeral rites. Then the vision disappeared, and they all returned to their places.

However, three years later Vahan Amatouni was able to build, with Christ-loving zeal, a marvelous church with finely hewn, sculptured stones, and inside the church built the Saint's tomb. For the altar of the life-giving body and blood of Christ, he prepared graceful vessels of varied colors, decorated with shining gold, silver, and precious stones. And together with the assembled monks, he transferred the body of Mashtots, the witness for Christ's religion of the cross, to the sarcophagus in the church. And for the glory of God they appointed one of his pupils named Tadik, a temperate and pious man, along with brethren, as servants of the Saint who had attained the state of bliss.

## XXVII

The principals, administrators, and vicars had been named by the departed church fathers. The first of these was Hovsep, chief of the council, and the second, another pupil named Hovhan, a truly saintly, truth-loving man. It so happened that, after the passing of the Saint, this man victoriously withstood for Christ many and varied torments and sorrows in chains at Ctesiphone in a single-handed combat against redoubled tyranny, and thereby inherited the designation of confessor, and returned to his administrative task in Armenia.

As for the beneficent Vahan, who rendered unexpected assistance to all, through the grace of Christ our God, becoming a true spiritual son of the world-reforming fathers, was worthy of being a close participant in their life.

## XXVIII

And the fathers went to their reward as we have written. We did not record them by gleaning them from old tales; on the contrary, we witnessed their countenances, as assistants in [their] spiritual endeavors, were hearers of their gracious teaching, and were their co-workers as per the dictum of the Gospel. We have done this for my father, not by resort to false eloquence, but we wrote [this] concise work by leaving out much and by gathering from all best informed people, [facts] which are known not only to us but to those who have read this book. For we could not record in detail all the things that they each of them had done, but sufficed by this easier apostolic *Acts*. We set aside a multitude of the acts of the saints, so as to relate in detail the most important events. And we related this not for the glory of the saints of God who already have been honored for their most luminous faith and life, but as an inspiring example to their spiritual sons and to all who, through them, will be taught from generation to generation.

## XXIX

And thus the blessed one's years of faith\* were forty-five years, and the period from the creation of the Armenian alphabet to his death, thirty-five years, which is computed as follows: The Persian King Kerman reigned six years and Jazdegerd, twenty-one years, (and Vram eighteen years), and the Saint died in the first year of Vram's son, Jazdegerd II.

Thus, the years of [service] in the holy faith began on the fourth year of King Kerman up to the first year of Vram's son Jazdegerd II, and the Armenian alphabet was created on the eighth year of Jazdegerd [I].

And glory to Christ, the lover of mankind.

\* Life as a clergyman.

*Translated by  
Bedros Norehad*