

## Religion and Armenians

Religion emerged in primitive communities about 3,000 years ago. Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam Under are adopted as world religions (listed in the order of emergence). To be considered global, a religion should have a significant number of followers around the world and herewith, it should not be associated with any national or state community. When adopting any religion as a world one, its impact on the course of history and the distribution scale is also considered.

Hinduism is often referred to as a national rather than a world religion. Herewith, some scholars classify Hinduism as the global one. In principle, in science, this is no longer a controversial issue since the division of religions into the world and non-world ones is now considered obsolete.

Approximately 500 mln people profess Buddhism.

Approximately 900 mln people profess Hinduism.

Approximately 2.4 bln people profess Christianity.

Approximately 1.8 bln people profess Islam.

Judaism has been forming since at least the 19th century BC in the territory of Canaan (now divided between Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel) and northern Egypt. Judaism proclaimed monotheism strengthened by the doctrine of creating a human by God in his own image and likeness. This religion involves all aspects of human life. A Jew is both a religious and a national identity, and a commitment to follow the set of rules and prescriptions defining entire daily life.

Zoroastrianism, i.e., religious doctrine founded by Zoroaster (Zarathushtra), arose in the 7th-6th centuries BC in Central Asia or Eastern Iran. This is a virtually monotheistic religion. Its followers are also called fire worshipers. According to this doctrine, Ahura Mazda (Ormazd) was the god of goodness, the personification of light and life, who continuously struggled with Angra Manyu (Ahriman) personifying evil, darkness, and death. The human was created by Ahura Mazda but was free in his thoughts and deeds and therefore, was subject to evil's influence. However, a human must resist Angra Manyu and his companions - the spirits of evil in his thoughts, words, and deeds. Eventually, good would defeat evil.

Zoroastrianism has a common origin and similarities in texts and creeds with Hinduism, as well as Indo-European paganism. It significantly affected the formation of Christianity, as well as Manichaeism and Yezidism; Judaism and Islam also experienced some influence of Zoroastrianism.

Currently, Zoroastrianism as a religion does not exist. Small communities have survived in Iran and India, there are followers in Western countries and the post-Soviet space (mainly in Tajikistan).

Ateshgah has also been preserved – a temple of fire in Azerbaijan, 30 km to the center of Baku, on the outskirts of the Surakhani village, which has been a place of worship for Zoroastrians and Hindus at various times.

**Before proceeding to the essence of the issue, let us make a short digression into the history of Christianity in general. It is known to have emerged in the 1st century AD in Palestine, then ruled by the Roman Empire. Jews were the first Christians. Over a short period, Christianity spread to other provinces of the Empire among other ethnic groups. Unlike Judaism, which was then a national religion, Christianity gradually turned into a world one.**

In 313, Christianity became the officially recognized religion, and in 324, the state religion of the Roman Empire. During that period from 298 to 363, the province of Armenia was part of the Roman Empire, and just at that time, Christianity finally gained a foothold in that region. In 387, the province was divided between the Romans and the Sassanids. As known, Zoroastrianism was the official religion of the Second Persian (Sasanian) Empire, and heretofore, the Parthian Kingdom and the First Persian (Achaemenid) Empire. This has caused clashes between Christians and Zoroastrians in the Sasanian part of the province for almost 250 years. As a result, some Zoroastrian tribes and clans were killed off and some, fleeing, were forced to move to other provinces or countries. The church and large Armenian nakharars (feudal lords) took over property and lands of the exterminated and fled tribes.

This indirect involvement gave rise to some Armenian chroniclers asserting that in 301, Christianity was officially adopted in Greater Armenia by allegedly ‘king’ Trdat III. They were saying that it was the first country in the world that made Christianity the official religion.

However, two history rewritings are seen here. Firstly, the Armenians have never had an independent or semi-independent state. And secondly, how could they declare Christianity the state religion while not being a state?

Armenian falsifiers should be reminded that back in 71 AD, the Roman Emperor Vespasian abolished the geographical province of Lesser Armenia and included it in the province of Cappadocia. Now it is only a tourist name for the territory in the central part of Turkey (part of the lands of the Nevsehir, Kayseri, Aksaray, and Nigde regions). As for the Greater Armenia satrapy (province), it was part of the Parthian Empire (250 BC - 227 AD), then from 227, part of the Sasanian Empire, and in 591, it became part of the Al-Arminiyya Emirate (province) of the Arab Caliphate. Since 889, its name has completely disappeared.

Note that Christianity penetrated the province of Armenia soon after its emergence. According to the church tradition, Christianity was preached there by the holy apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew, who thus became the founders of the church in Armenia.

According to tradition, the apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew preached Christianity in Asia Minor. Armenian historians assert that “Thaddeus and Bartholomew met in Artashat (30 km to Yerevan) and began preaching Christianity in Armenia” but were killed by pagans. Thaddeus was killed and buried in the historical province of Vaspurakan, now the Chaldiran region in the province of Urmia in Iran. Bartholomew was killed and buried in the city of Alban. The Orthodox tradition identifies this area with the city of Baku. According to another version, his body was buried in the southeast of today’s Turkey.

According to some Armenian historiographers, Armenian Christianity originates from St. Gregory (Grigorios Fostir or Fotis, 252 - 326), who allegedly was the enlightener of Armenia and the first Catholicos of all Armenians.

The first Armenian historians note that Gregory was a member of the Parthian noble Suren-Pakhlav clan, which was a branch of the royal house of Arsacids. The Arsacid clan comprised a dynasty of Parthian kings. In his book, the Armenian historian Agathangelos (5th century - early 6th century) tells that Gregory’s father, the Parthian Apak or Anak, killed the ruler of Armenia Khosrov in the year 238, for which he was subsequently killed, and his entire family was exterminated. His youngest son was saved by a Christian wetnurse who took him to her homeland Caesarea Cappadocia (now Kayseri, Turkey). There the boy was baptized in the name of Gregory and received a Christian

upbringing. He was sent to Rome and entered the service of Khosrov's son Tiridates (Trdat III), wishing to make amends for his father.

But this version of Armenian history has a lot of inconsistencies. How could Anak have killed Khosrow in both 238 and 252?

Trdat III was the son of Khosrov II. Some historians write that in 252, the Persian agent Anak killed the entire family of the governor of Armenia, including Trdat's father Khosrov, by the order of the king of Parthia Shapur I. Anak was captured and executed along with some family members while his two sons, one of whom was the future Gregory the Illuminator, went into hiding in Caesarea. Trdat III fled to the Roman Empire. They write that Anak was from the Arsacid clan, i.e., Khosrov's relative, even his brother. However, Trdat was born not in 287 but approximately in the 250s while Khosrov II was assassinated in 252.

In the second half of the 3rd century, the Roman and Sasanian Empires were at war. The governor of Greater Armenia supported the Romans. Therefore, he was killed by the Sassanids. In 296, the Persians captured Armenia; Trdat III fled and only three years later, in 299, he became the Roman governor of Greater Armenia again.

### ***Reference:***

*Trdat I or Tiridates I – the governor of Greater Armenia in 62-88, the founder of the Arshakuni dynasty (ruled in 62-428), which is a branch of the Parthian dynasty of Arsacids.*

*Arshakuni (Arsacids) – a dynasty (51-428 AD) gained a foothold in the province of Armenia, the cadency of the Parthian Arsacids.*

*Khosrov II the Great (?-287) – the governor of Armenia from the Arshakuni dynasty. Some sources specify the date of his death as 287, other ones as 252 or 268. He was a child of the governor of Armenia Trdat II and an unknown woman. Khosrov II was the namesake of his paternal grandfather Khosrov I. According to American historian Nina Garsoyan (specializing in the history of Byzantium, the Middle East, and Armenia), Armenian sources often confuse Khosrov II with his grandfather Khosrov I.*

However, not only names but also terms are confused. The leaders of feudal clans are called 'knyazes', the governors of the provinces – 'tsars', the province of Greater Armenia – the 'State of Greater Armenia', etc.

Khosrov II, who became a governor in 287, started severely persecuting the followers of Christianity, which had been spreading in the province by Gregory the Illuminator since 279.

However, according to Armenian sources, he was then in Rome and served Trdat.

According to Armenian historians of the 5th century, Trdat arrived in Armenia in 287 as a ruler, accompanied by Gregory and the Roman legions. During the ceremony of offering sacrifices in the (pagan) temple of the goddess Anahit, Gregory refused to make a sacrifice. At that point, it became clear that he was the son of Anak, and Gregory was imprisoned.

How did the Christian Gregory serve Trdat if the latter was a pagan? Most likely, the truth is that having arrived in the province of 'Armenia' as a governor, Trdat imprisoned the son of his father's murderer and the spreader of Christianity, rolled into one? Why didn't he kill him? Gregory was probably his relative and a representative of the same Arsacid clan. Or was Trdat too humane?

Were Trdat in exile and Gregory in prison in 296-299? Didn't the Persians notice him?

### ***Reference:***

*Anahit in Armenian mythology – the mother goddess, the goddess of fertility and love, the daughter (or wife) of Aramazd. The cult of the Persian goddess Aredvi Sura Anahita (the goddess of water and fertility in Iranian mythology) spread to the province of Armenia in the 1st century BC - 3rd century AD when Zoroastrianism and Hellenistic culture were disseminated there.*

*Aramazd – the supreme god in Armenian mythology, the creator of heaven and earth, the god of fertility, and the father of gods. The name comes from the Iranian form of the name of the Zoroastrian god-creator*

*Ahura Mazda (Ormazd). Movses Khorenatsi (Armenian historian, 410-490) reports the existence of four Aramazds in the Armenian pantheon.*

The adoption of Christianity by Armenia is tightly related to the Martyrdom of the Holy Hripsimian Virgins.

According to tradition, Gayane, Hripsime, and another 35 virgins were novices of the St. Paul Convent located near Rome. Goiana was the abbess of the St. Paul Convent, where the virgins lived. Among the virgins living in the Convent, Hripsimia was distinguished by her special beauty.

According to Agathangelos, in the past, Gayane was a nurse in a noble Roman house and raised Hripsime, instilling Christian values in her.

In his book ‘The History of the Conversion of Armenians to Christianity,’ the 5th-century Armenian historian Agathangelos described the conversion of Armenians from paganism to Christianity at the beginning of the 4th century and its establishment as the ‘state religion’ of Armenia.

Wikipedia reports no biographical data on Agathangelos (Agatangeghos) preserved. According to legend, he was the secretary of Tsar Trdat III the Great and the cousin of Gregory the Illuminator.

However, Agathangelos could not be “the king's secretary and the cousin of St. Gregory” since he lived and worked 100 or more years after their death!

Another source reports that in 301, forty Christian virgins (their number varies, some write 36 or 37 ones), who lived in the St. Paul Convent located in the highlands of Rome during the reign of Diocletian (Emperor of Rome in 284-305), arrived in Armenia, led by the abbess Gayane. Hripsime seduced the Emperor with her beauty but did not wish to become his wife and took refuge with her companions in Alexandria (a port on the Mediterranean coast, Egypt). The tradition says that the Holy Mother of God appeared to the virgins, showing them the way to Armenia.

The nun's life was devoted to worship, reading, and daily work in the Convent. They virtually were gated there. How and where could the Emperor fall in love with her?

According to Georgian tradition, the virgins first fled to Jerusalem, where they met Saint Nina. From there, they went to Armenia and settled in Vagharshapat (a city in the Armavir region of today's Republic of Armenia, the second name is Etchmiadzin), in a monastery near a vineyard.

Some sources write that the virgins came from Assyria, from the city of Nisibin (now Nusaybin in southeastern Turkey, on the border with Syria) while Nino was from Cappadocia (a territory in central Turkey).

Nino's uncle, who was the patriarch of Jerusalem, raised her in the spirit of Christianity and sent her away to Rome. Most likely, Nino joined the virgins in Rome.

A small basilica was built at the place of St. Paul's disposition in 324. The Great Temple of St. Paul was built in 386-389. No St. Paul Convent then existed.

There were not many Christians in Jerusalem. The only region where Christianity had real power was Caesarea (Kayseri, Turkey). It would be logical to assume that the virgins settled in Caesarea.

***Reference:***

*The name Gaiania has a Greek origin. The name's meaning is 'earth' or 'glorious.'*

*The name Hripsimia has a Greek origin. The meaning of the name is 'leaving' or 'rejecting.'*

According to tradition, Gayane was an adult woman who converted a Roman family she served for many years to Christianity. Her duties included taking care of Hripsime. Gayane was her wetnurse. Armenians assert that the place of St. Gayane's disposition is located in Etchmiadzin, in the temple bearing her name. This is an absolute lie and fiction.

Hripsime was the daughter of the noble citizens of Rome. She was converted to Christianity by her wetnurse. She left her parental home for

the community founded by Gayane. According to chronicler Agathangelos, Emperor Diocletian fell in love with Hripsime. But since she took a vow of celibacy, Hripsime was forced to leave Rome, fearing the wrath of the ruler, and reached the borders of present-day Vagharshapat, where she died. She was buried in the Etchmiadzin Cathedral bearing her name. This is also lie and fiction.

The Baptist of Georgia Nino, according to her biography, descended from a noble and respected family like Hripsime. She was born in the city of Kolastra in Cappadocia (now the Gokyurt village in the province of Konya, Turkey). Her father Zabulon was a relative of the Great Martyr George, and her mother Sosana was the sister of the Patriarch of Jerusalem. Nina's parents were also Christians.

Even before joining Hripsime, Saint Nino foresaw that she would have to baptize Iberia (Georgia). She managed to escape death when Hripsime was executed, and fulfill her mission of bringing Christianity to Georgia.

In those years, the patriarchs of Jerusalem were Hymeneus (260-298), Zambdas (298-300), and Hermon (300-314). If Nino's father's name was Zabulon, most likely, the patriarch Zambdas was her uncle.

Armenian tradition calls the name of another virgin Mane, a saint of the Armenian Apostolic Church who, like St. Nina, managed to escape death. Mane reached the Armenian city of Erzank in the province of Ekegeats and decided to become a hermit. She found a cave on Mount Sepuh (a peak in the Syunik region of Armenia), where she lived for more than twenty years.

Diocletian sent letters with an order to find the fled Christians to all the Empire provinces. Trdat also received such a letter. Moreover, Diocletian wrote to him that he could keep all the community virgins but Hripsime, who had to be sent to Rome. However, Trdat was so fascinated with Hripsime's beauty that decided to marry her.

But how could the Convent virgins flee from the Emperor of Rome? How could they visit Jerusalem, Alexandria, Cappadocia, and Armenia? It boggles the mind! Did the governor of the Roman province of Armenia disobey the Emperor and crave for marrying Hripsime? Trdat took her as his wife, met resistance, and then ordered all the virgins to be martyred? But why everyone, if only Hripsime resisted?

And, if all, how did Nino and Mane flee? Did swaggerer Agathangelos ask himself these questions when holding a quill pen in his hand?

Then the tale continues. The execution of the virgins caused a strong mental shock and further a serious illness in Trdat. In the 5th century people called this 'pig's illness', which is why sculptors portray the Trdat with a pig's head. The governor's sister Khosrovidukht allegedly repeatedly had a dream where she was told that only the prisoner Gregory could heal Trdat, who was released after spending 13 (according to other sources, 15 and 17) years in a stone pit. Trdat obeyed his sister and after 66 days of prayer and preaching, Gregory healed Trdat, whereupon the latter declared Christianity 'the state religion in Armenia.'

Then Gregory went to Caesarea, where he was ordained by the bishops of Cappadocia headed by Leontius of Caesarea. The ceremony took place in not Vagharshapat but distant Ashtishat (now the Yucetepe village in the province of Mush, Turkey), where the main episcopal cathedra was historically located, founded by the apostles.

***Reference:***

*Leontius of Caesarea (died in 337) was Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia. He was friends with Gregory the Illuminator in childhood.*

*The city of Ashtishat was sometimes part of the province of Greater Armenia and an ancient pagan temple city.*

In another tradition, Hripsime and her companions were martyred in Armenia around 290. Some Lives report that the martyrs died around the year 304, which contradicts the data on the adoption of Christianity by Trdat in 301 or 302, followed by the declaration of Christianity as the 'state religion of Armenia.'

Obviously, the persecution ceased no later than 312.

The Convent virgins had to hide. Therefore, before arriving in today's Armenia, they visited Israel, northern Egypt, and central Turkey. If persecution started in 303, then such a journey would take several years.

According to another Armenian version, "Trdat ordered to kill all the virgins, and Hripsime was put to cruelest tortures. During terrible torment, Ripsimia had her tongue out, and her womb was ripped open.

She was blinded and killed by cutting her body into pieces. Nine days later, St. Gregory the Illuminator found the remains of the Holy Martyrs and buried them. Then St. Gregory the Illuminator built chapels in the name of the martyrs.” But Gregory was in prison all this time! In 299, Trdat became governor again and imprisoned Gregory, where the latter spent at least 13 years. It turns out that he was released no earlier than 312.

The next version says that “near Mount Varag, Saint Hripsime removed the holy wooden cross – a piece of the Cross of the Lord she inherited from her neck and left it in the Armenian land. This relic was miraculously found in the 7th century, whereupon the Armenian Apostolic Church, along with other feasts of the cross, started also celebrating the Feast of the Holy Cross of Varag.” It is now called Mount Erek and is located in the city of Van, Turkey. Did the virgins go to the mountains intentionally to leave a ‘holy wooden cross’ there? And how was this ‘needle in the hay’ then found?

According to tradition, Nino managed to escape, and she went north. It was the year 319 or 320, when 40 Martyrs of Sebaste lost their lives near the city of Sebaste (now Sivas, Turkey).

***Reference:***

*The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste were Christian soldiers who were martyred under Emperor Licinius in 320 for the faith of Christ in Sebaste. The Orthodox Church commemorates them on March 9 (22).*

*Gregory was the founder of the Grigorid clan existed until the middle of the 5th century, who transferred the position of the Head of the Armenian Church by succession. Archbishop Leontius consecrated Gregory to the rank of Patriarch of the province. He belonged to the Parthian clan of the Surens, a branch of the Arsacid dynasty, who then ruled the province of Armenia. The head of the Suren clan had the honor of crowning the first Parthian Shah in the 3rd century BC. After the defeat of the Arsacids and the subsequent rise of the Sassanids, the Surens defected to the side of the Sassanids and began to serve them.*

*The self-name of the Parthians is Pahlavan, which means "hero" in Persian.*

**The reality was as follows.**

Diocletian was Emperor from 284 to 305. Then he fell ill, voluntarily renounced power, and lived in seclusion in his estate in Salona (now the city of Split, Croatia) until he died in 311. In 303, Diocletian started the persecution of Christians and ordered the closure of churches and the destruction of books. In turn, Trdat also tried to convince Gregory to renounce Christianity, and then throws him into a stone pit. Around the year 303, Gayane, Hripsime, and other virgins from the Roman Convent run away from Rome and hid in Greater Armenia, where they could not arrive until 306. The virgins were raped and killed since they were Christians and Trdat was a pagan.

After some time, Trdat went hunting, fell off his chariot or horse, probably hit his head, and went insane.

In 312, Constantine I the Great came to power and made Christianity the official religion. After him, Christianity became the main and then the only legitimate religion in the Roman Empire, and later in Byzantium. Emperor Constantine placed a premium on Christians, believing that faith in a single God would calm the country.

Accordingly, in 318, Trdat convened all the nakharars and influential persons in Vagharshapat, where it was decided to convert to Christianity. A delegation of the province knyazes was sent along with Gregory to Caesarea in Cappadocia to Archbishop Leontius for consecrating Gregory a bishop. Why to Caesarea? Gregory belonged to the Caesarea-Cappadocia Church.

Upon returning, Gregory destroys two Zoroastrian temples, and Christianity starts spreading in the province of Greater Armenia.

The American historian Nina Garsoyan notes that since the second half of the 20th century, opinions on the time of this event have changed from 284 to 314, but more thorough studies now clearly indicate a later date.

In 325, Aristakes I went to the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea (now the city of Iznik in Turkey) as a representative of the Armenian Church, and his name was recorded in the Council's deeds along with the names of other Great Fathers of the Church. As a representative of the province of Greater Armenia, he brought the Nicene Creed approved by Gregory upon arrival.

## ***Reference:***

*Aristakes I - the 2nd Armenian Catholicos (325-333), the youngest son of Gregory the Illuminator, born in Cappadocia.*

*Vrtanes I - Armenian Catholicos (333-341). Gregory's eldest son, born in the capital of Cappadocia - Caesarea/Mazaka (now Kayseri, Turkey), who became a Catholicos after his brother. He had two sons - Grigoris and Housik I.*

*Housik I – the 4th Catholicos (341-347) of the province of Armenia. Honored as a martyr.*

Housik continued the struggle against paganism. The growing influence of Christianity led to a conflict with the province ruler Tiran (Tigranes VII). The confrontation reached the point where in 347, during one of the holidays, Housik forbade Tiran to enter the church. In revenge, the Governor's servants killed Housik.

After Housik's death, Paren together with the influential nakharars of the province, including Vasak Mamikonian, Meendak Rshtuni, Andovk Syuni, and Arshavir Kamsarakan, went to Caesarea where the ceremony of appointing Paren the Catalikos of the province of Armenia took place.

For 28 years from 325 to 353, 4 Catholicoi led the Christian Church of the province of Armenia. Nerses I has been Catholicos for 20 years.

Nerses spent his youth in Caesarea, where he married the Mamicon Princess Sandukht. They had a son Isaac who later became the next Catholicos.

Nerses understood that the unity of the church in the Christian world neither was from the very beginning nor would be in the foreseeable future. Everybody was at odds with each other, and everyone proclaimed only himself the expert and keeper of the truth.

## ***Reference:***

*Nerses I the Great - Catholicos of the Armenian Apostolic Church in 353-373. Descends from the clan of Gregory the Illuminator; one of the Fathers of the Armenian Church. After the death of his wife, Nerses was appointed squire of governor Arshak II due to the support of the Mamikonian clan. In 353, he was elected catholicos.*

The Catholicos and the nakharars did not like the new governor of the Roman province of Armenia Pap, and due to this confrontation, Nerses forbade him to enter the Church. Under the pretext of reconciliation, Pap invited the Catholicos to his table and presumedly poisoned him in 373. A year later, the Romans killed Pap.

For the next 13 years, three Catholicoi led the Church in the province of Armenia. One of them was Isaac I, the son of Nerses I from the clan of Gregory the Illuminator.

Isaac I was the 10th Catholicos, whose activity was associated with creating the Armenian language, forming the Armenian people, and translating the Bible into Armenian. He was the author of sermons and festive evangelical spiritual hymns. According to some reports, Isaac Partev was the son of Nerses born in Constantinople, and his clan belonged to the descendants of Gregory the Illuminator.

He received the cognomen Partev (Parthian) because the clan of Gregory the Illuminator belonged to the Arsacid dynasty, which was of Parthian origin.

Here's what Wikipedia reports on the subject:

“In ancient times, the nomadic tribes of Massagets (Saki in ancient Iranian sources) inhabited the steppes of Central Asia and were part of the Scythian cultures. Approximately in the 3rd century BC, some of these tribes united in a tribal confederation under the common name Dahae. Among these tribes, the Parna tribe became playing the leading role, from which the further leaders and founders of Parthia - the brothers Arshak and Tiridates originated.”

In ancient times, the Parna people inhabited the steppes of the Aral Sea region and Mangyshlak and the northern slopes of the Kopet Dag. Now these are the territories of the Aral Sea in Karakalpakstan (Uzbekistan), the right bank of the Caspian Sea in the Mangistau region (Kazakhstan), and the northern part of the Kopet Dag mountain range (Turkmenistan).

In 250 BC, Arshak captured Parthia. Parthia was then a satrapy (province) of the Seleucid Empire, and earlier the Achaemenid Empire. Today these are territories located between the cities of Nishapur (Iran), Merv and Sanjan (Turkmenistan), and Herat (Afghanistan).

The term Parthia is a Greek dialectal variant of the ancient Persian toponym Aphartik.

### **Reference:**

*Isaac Partev was born in 338. His father was Catholicos Nerses I and his mother - Sandukht Mamikonian. Isaac's daughter Saakanush married Vardan Mamikonian.*

*The name-forming term 'nush' has different meanings in Persian. It means 'sweet, cute, and attractive.' It also means 'piece of something.'*

*The name-forming term 'dukht' in Persian means 'daughter.'*

*Khosrova dukht was the sister of the governor of the province of Armenia Trdat III.*

*Sandukht was the wife of Catholicos Nerses, the mother of Isaac Partev.*

*Saakanush was the daughter of Catholicos Partev.*

*All female names are also Parthian-Persian ones as are the male names of governors and nakharars.*

*The Arshakuni Parthian royal dynasty was the strongest one in the province of Armenia, and the Mamikonian dynasty was the second strongest one. Catholicos, intermarried with the Mamikonian clan, became a powerful force against the governor. The Mamikonian clan was also of Parthian origin.*

Isaac Partev and his companion Mesrop Mashtots created the Armenian language and writing system in 407. The Armenian language combines dialects of close feudal clans, the Parthian dialect of the Persian language, and Greek and Syriac ones.

Before creating the Armenian writing system, Christian worship in the province of Armenia was officiated in two languages: Greek and Syriac-Aramaic, which made it difficult for ordinary people to understand the fundamentals of faith since different clans and tribes,

large and small, living in the province. The spoken language was diverse, many did not understand each other, therefore, the territorial division was tribal.

From this period, the distortion of history begins: everything “that happened in previous centuries was associated with the Armenians:” Jesus created Christianity, the Armenians developed this religion and helped the pagans of the Near and Middle East and Transcaucasia to adopt Christianity. Then in his book ‘History of the Conversion of Armenians to Christianity,’ Agathangelos described the conversion of Armenians from paganism to Christianity at the beginning of the 4th century and its establishment as an official religion in the province of Armenia.

After the Parthian kingdom ceased to exist, Christianity started spreading in the territories called Armenia. The Roman and Sasanian empires were engaged in continuous wars. The province of Armenia passed from hand to hand. In 293-303, the son of Shapur I Narse became the Shahinshah of the Sasanian Empire. Since 276, Narse had been the governor of Armenia and came to power through a coup. In 298, the Sassanids lost the war to the Romans, and Narse concluded the so-called Peace of Nisibis, according to which the Sassanid Empire handed the provinces of Armenia and Iberia over to Rome and returned all the lands conquered by the Persians in the middle of the 3rd century. During that period, Christianity took a strong foothold in the region.

Members of the Parthian clan of the Arsacids were the governors of the province of Armenia, then they also headed the Church. Under Catholicos Nerses in 361, the Church became independent. He began to build monasteries and schools. The Arsacids are related to the Mamikonian clan.

Nerses’ son Catholicos Isaac Partev and the nakharars close to him, whose spoken language was similar, created a new language. Since the province and the church were called Armenian, the language was also called Armenian. The Bible was translated into the new language. The Church was opening new schools with the support of the feudal lords, where all Christians began to intensively learn a new alphabet and a new language; Aramaic and the Parthian dialect of Persian were adopted,

respectively, the writing and language bases. The Artsruni (initially fought for a return to paganism), Bagratuni, and other clans gradually adjoined the Arsacids and Mamikonian.

Spreading Christianity and struggling against paganism continued for several centuries. The governors sometimes quarreled with the Church and sometimes even killed Catholicoses but never claimed its property. Pap (governor of Greater Armenia in 371-374) was the first to do this. He stopped paying taxes to churchmen, took away most of the land that belonged to churches, and even poisoned and killed Catholicos Nerses I. Pap understood that the Romans would support them as long as the province respected their rules. He re-established contacts with the Persians, which the Romans did not like. The Romans strived to tear the province of Armenia away from the Sassanids through Christianization. The Emperor invites Pap to his place, where the latter and his retinue were killed. This was the last attempt to turn the province back to its roots - Zoroastrianism and Persians.

Later, bloody clashes still took place between various clans and tribes. The confrontation was also between the governors, on the one hand, and Catholicoi and large clans, on the other hand. E.g., the Marzpan (governor) of Persian Armenia (564-572) Chihor-Vishnasp Suren supported Zoroastrianism, accused Christian Armenians of colluding with the Byzantines, and persecuted them. He was killed by Christians led by Vardan III Mamikonian, whereupon Vardan and the Catholicos fled to Byzantium.

Sometimes with the help of the governor, and sometimes with the support of large Christian nakharars, the Church destroyed the pagan tribes and confiscated their property in favor of the governor, the nakharars, or its own. Even those who adopted Christianity but refused to obey the Church were killed. The Church, however, struggled for centralization aimed at absolute supremacy over the governor of the province of Armenia and all clans. Thus, an ecclesiastical monarchy emerged in the form of autonomy. This succeeded under the Roman and Byzantine empires, although they ruled a negligible western part of the province of Greater Armenia. This also succeeded under both the Sasanian Empire and during the time of the Caliphate, where the main

eastern part of the province located. The Christianization and Armenization of clans in the western part went faster than in the eastern one, where the majority did not wish to abandon Zoroastrianism.

When the Arabs conquered (640-1055) eastern Anatolia, Iran, and Transcaucasia, including the province of Greater Armenia, paganism gradually disappeared. Christianity spread among the tribes and clans that inhabited the territory of the province of Al-Arminiyya.

***Reference:***

*The Apostolic Church of Armenia - the Orthodox Church, which has some specifics in dogma and ritual, differing from Byzantine Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. In worship, Armenian rites and the Grabar (ancient Armenian) language are used, the Armenian cross has a specific shape, there is a ritual of offering (animal) sacrifices - 'matah', the sign of the cross is made from left to right.*

*The Armenian Church broke away from other Christianity branches in 451, not accepting the decision of the Council of Chalcedon on the dual nature of Christ. The city of Chalcedon is now in Istanbul.*

*'Apostolic' means that "Christianity was brought to Armenia by the disciples of Christ, the apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew."*

*The Armenian Church is also called 'Gregorian' after Gregory the Illuminator.*

*Armenia is a secular state, the constitution of Armenia (Article 18.1) enshrines "the exclusive mission of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, as a national church, in the spiritual life of the Armenian people, the development of their national culture, and preservation of their national identity."*