

At the request of the priest David Mamikon:

I have carried out the work that you ordered, noble sir. You ordered [a work] about the Armenian war in which more than a few showed virtue.

Behold, I have composed it in the following seven chapters:

First: the time

Second: the course of events brought about by the Prince of the East

Third: the unity of the covenant of the church

Fourth: the secession of some who abandoned the covenant

Fifth: the attack of the Easterners (the Persians)

Sixth: the resistance of the Armenians in war

Seventh: the continuation of the troubled state of affairs.

In these seven chapters I have recorded and set down in complete detail the beginning and middle and end, so that you may read it without interruption and learn of the valor of the virtuous and baseness of the cowards - not because of any lack in the fullness of your extensive worldly knowledge, but for an examination of the heavenly providence which in its foreknowledge dispenses the compensations of both sides and by visible means presages the invisible.

But why would you, who are so versed in the knowledge of God, command me rather than command those far better qualified? As it seems to me, and to you and to those who have occupied themselves with philosophy, this is a token of heavenly love and not of earthly vainglory; just as some of the eminent historians said: "Harmony is the mother of blessings, discord the parent of evils."

So considering the holy love inspiring your command, we did not hesitate nor were we discouraged on contemplating our own ignorance. For holiness is many things, including support to weakness - as is prayer to knowledge and holy love to the common advantage.

Receiving this [support] with your command, we willingly accepted this task, which is consolation to friends, hope to the trusting, and encouragement to the valiant as they eagerly assault death, seeing before them the victorious general (Christ) who is not malevolent or hostile to anyone but teaches all his own invincible power. Behold, he accepts as a valiant hero (*nahatak*: This is an important expression in Elishē as it has overtones of martyrdom and the defense of the faith) whoever so desires. And because the title of heroism is multifaceted, he distributes manifold grace to everyone; and that superior to all we recognize to be the holy love [inspired] by a guileless mind.

This simplicity bears the image of that heavenly [simplicity]; as we perceive it in you, we forget our own nature. Indeed, we are raised up with you in flight; like high-soaring birds we pass through all the harmful tempestuous atmosphere; and gradually absorbing the pure upper air, we receive knowledge for the salvation of our souls and the glory of the all-victorious church. Hence may the multitude of holy ministers joyously perform the service of their office to the glory of the Father of all; therewith may also the Holy Trinity rejoice and be glad in his own untroubled essence (*ēut' iwn*).

So then, having received this command from your generous person, let us begin where it is right to begin, although not eagerly do we bemoan the misfortune of our nation. Indeed, not willingly but with tearful laments we shall describe the many blows which we suffered and of which we ourselves were an eyewitness.

Chapter 1: *The Time*

On the extinction of the Arsacid line the race of Sasan the Persian ruled over Armenia. They governed their empire by the religion of the magi, and frequently fought against those who would not submit to the same religion; beginning from the years of King Arshak (king of Armenia 350-367), son of Tiran (king of Armenia 339-350), they waged war up to the sixth year of Artashes, king of Armenia (423-428, when he was deposed), the son of Vramshapuh (king of Armenia 392-414). And when they had deprived him of his kingdom, rule passed to the Armenian princes. For although the tribute (treasure) went to the Persian court, yet the Armenian cavalry was completely under the control of the princes in time of war. Therefore piety was freely practiced with head held high in Armenia from the beginning of the rule of Shapuh, king of kings, up to the second year of Yazkert (Yazkert II), king of kings, son of Vram. But him Satan made his accomplice, and spewing out all his accumulated venom filled him like a quiver with poisonous arrows. He began to wax haughty in his impiety; by his roaring he blew winds to the four corners of the earth; he made those who believed in Christ to appear as his enemies and opponents; and he tormented and oppressed them by his turbulent conduct.

Since confusion and the shedding of blood were dear to him, therefore he was agitated within himself: "On whom shall I pour out my poisonous bitterness, and where shall I loose my multitude of arrows?" In his great folly, like a ferocious wild beast he attacked the land of the Greeks. He struck as far as the city of Nisibis and ruined in his assault (marauding raids) many Roman provinces; all the churches he put to the torch, he amassed plunder and captives, and terrified all the troops of the land.

Then the blessed emperor Theodosius (Theodosius II, 408-450), since he was peace-loving in Christ, did not wish to go out to oppose him on the field, but sent to him a man called Anatolius, who was the commander of the East, with many treasures. And the Persians who had fled [from Persia] because of their Christianity and who were in the imperial city he arrested and handed over to him. Whatever he [Yazkert] said at that time, he [Theodosius] carried out according to the former's desires; thus he restrained him from much anger, and he returned to his own city of Ctesiphon.

When the impious ruler saw that his wickedness had succeeded, he began to increase his plotting, as one throws more wood onto a blazing fire. From being a little suspicious he became thoroughly fearless; therefore he caused many to fall away from the holy covenant of the Christians - some by threats, some by imprisonment and tortures, and some he put to a terrible death. He confiscated goods and possessions and tormented everyone with great dishonor. And when he saw that they had been scattered to many regions he summoned a council his perverse ministers, who were bound to idolatry by indissoluble links, burning and heated like a furnace to consume the community of the holy church.

For such people were living in their lifetimes as it were in gloomy darkness; their souls were captive in their bodies like a living man in a tomb; on them the ray of Christ's

pure light shone not at all. Just as bears in their dying pangs fight more powerfully at their last gasp and wise men retreat and flee from them, such is the end which befell their rule. If they are struck they do not feel it; if they strike they are unaware of doing so; and when no outer enemy is found they wage war against themselves. Appropriate is the prophet's saying concerning them: "A man in his hunger will go about and eat half of himself" (Isa. 9:20: but Elishē does not follow the biblical text closely). In like fashion the Lord himself says: "Every house and kingdom which is divided against itself is unable to stand firm" (this is based on Matt. 12:25; Mark 3:24-25; Luke 11:17, without following any text exactly).

So why do you beat around, why do you struggle, why do you burn, why do you flame up, why are you not extinguished? Why do you summon to council those who have drawn your spirit out of you, brought your soul to corruption, and dragged your corruptible body to the dust like a foul, discarded corpse? Do you in fact wish that the desire of your impiety be hidden? But when it is revealed, look, and you will know its final outcome.

The magi said: "Valiant king, the gods have given you your empire and success. They have no need of human honor; but if you convert to one religion all the nations and races in your empire, then the land of the Greeks will also obediently submit to your rule. But do you, king, immediately fulfill one counsel of ours. Raise an army and gather a force; march to the land of the Kushans; assemble all nations and bring them through the Pass (the Chor Pass at Derbent), and there make your dwelling. When you detain and enclose them all in a distant foreign land the plans of your desire will be fulfilled; and as it seems to us in our religion, you will rule over the land of the Kushans, and the Greeks will not venture forth against your power - on condition you exterminate the sect of the Christians."

This counsel seemed pleasing to the king and to the magnates, who were of the same mind. He wrote edicts (official letters) and sent many messengers to every region of his empire. And this is a copy of the edict:

"To all the nations of my empire, to Aryans and non-Aryans, may the greeting of our benevolence be multiplied for you. Be well, and we ourselves are well by the help of the gods.

Without causing you any trouble we marched into the land of the Greeks, and without warfare by our loving benevolence we subjected the whole land to us in servitude. Do you celebrate and be unstinting in rejoicing. But immediately accomplish this command which we impose:

"We have decided in our infallible judgment to march to the land of the East, to subject the empire of the Kushans to us with the help of the gods. When you see this edict, straightway without impediment gather cavalry before us and meet me in the land of Apar."

In this form the edict reached the lands of the Armenians, Georgians, Albanians, Lp'ink', Tsawdēik', Korduik', Aldznik', and many other distant parts which were previously not accustomed to travel that road. A force of nobility and lesser nobility was assembled from Greater Armenia and retainers from the royal house; likewise from Georgia, and Albania, and the land of the Lp'ink', and still others from all the districts of the south hear the borders of Tachkastan, the Roman Empire, Korduk', Dasn, Tsawdē,

and Arznarzn, people who were all believers and baptized into one catholic and apostolic church.

Innocently unaware of the king's duplicity, they marched from each one's land obediently and with loyal intentions in order to fulfill their military service with sincere faith. They brought with them the divine holy testaments, with many ministers (*pashtawnēayk*: this is a term of general meaning, but here means "deacon" as opposed to "priest.") and priests. But they bade farewell to their lands, not as in expectation of life, but as if [they were to] pay the debt of death, commending their souls and bodies to each other. For although the king's plan had not been revealed to them, yet suspicions were it everyone's mind. Especially when they saw the power of the Greeks broken before him, they were greatly stricken in their thoughts.

But because they were obedient to the holy testaments of God, they continually recalled the commands of Paul: "Servants, be obedient to your bodily masters; be not false servants and deceitful, but serve [them] faithfully as if [serving] God and not men. For the recompense of your just labors comes from the Lord" (this is a conflate of Eph. 6:5, 7, and Col. 3:24, with allusions to the book of Proverbs).

Setting out from their lands with all this goodwill and commended to the Holy Spirit, they presented themselves [to the king], hastily fulfilling his orders and doing everything according to his wishes. The king greatly rejoiced as if the desires of his thoughts had been accomplished. And behold he acted with them just as the ministers of his impiety had advised.

So when the king saw all the armed soldiers and the multitude of the force of the barbarians who had loyally come to the royal service, he was even more happy in front of the magnates and all the host of his army. Outwardly he hid the desires of his mind, and unwillingly bestowed lavish presents on them. He marched immediately against the kingdom of the Huns, who the call Kushans; but after fighting for two years he was unable to make any impression on them. Then he dispatched the warriors to each one's place, and summoned to his presence others in their stead with the same equipage. And thus he established the habit from year to year and built there for himself a city to dwell in, beginning from the fourth year of his reign to the eleventh.

And when he saw that the Romans remained firm in their pact which they had with him, and that the Khaylndurk had ceased to cross the Pass of the Chor (the pass near Derbent), and that in every region his empire lived in peace, and that he had put the king of the Huns into even greater straits since he had ruined most of his provinces and had prevailed over his rule, then he sent messengers throughout all the fire-temples of his land, he increased the sacrifices of fire with white bulls and hairy goats, and he assiduously multiplied him impure cult. He honored many of the magi and the greatest of the chief-magi with crowns and distinctions. He gave a further command that all the goods and possessions of the Christians in Persia should be seized.

Thus he waxed haughty and overweening; in his arrogance he exceeded the nature of man, not merely in the matter of physical warfare, but he began to think of himself as one superior to the nature of his ancestral rank. Therefore he deceitfully hid his intention; but, as it appeared to the wise, he placed himself in the rank of the immortals. He grew furious at the name of Christ, when he heard that he had been tortured and crucified, had died and been buried.

As in this fashion he madly raved from day to day in the same designs, one of the youngest of the Armenian princes debated with him and said: "Valiant king, whence did you learn to speak such things about the Lord?" The king answered: "They have read your erring Scriptures before me." Then the young man replied, saying: "Why, O king, did you have them read only to that place? But have the reading prolonged and you will hear of his resurrection, his appearance to many, his ascension to heaven, his sitting at the right hand of the Father, the promise of his Second Coming when he will effect the miraculous resurrection of all, and the summary compensation of his judgment." When the king heard this he was deeply smitten, but outwardly he laughed and said: "All that is fraud." The soldier of Christ replied and said: "If his bodily sufferings are credible to you, even more credible to you should be his awesome Second Coming."

When the king heard this he blazed up like fire of the furnace in Babylon, until his own people around him were consumed like the Chaldaeans.

Then he poured out all the fury of his ire on that blessed man, whose name was Garegin. Bound hand and foot he was given over to torture for two years, and deprived of his princely rank, he received the sentence of death.

Chapter 2:

The Course of Events Brought About by the Prince of the East

Those whose souls are sluggish in heavenly virtue are great cowards in their physical nature. Such a man is shaken by every wind, troubled by every word, and trembles at every contingency; he is a dreamer in his lifetime, and at his death is dispatched to irretrievable destruction. As someone said of old: "Death not understood is death, death understood is immortality." Who does not know death, fears death; but he who knows death does not fear it.

All these evils enter man's mind from lack of knowledge. A blind man is deprived of the rays of the sun, and an ignorant man is deprived of a perfect life. It is better to be blind in the eyes than blind in the mind. As the soul is greater than the body, so is sight of the mind greater than that of the body.

If someone is very affluent in worldly wealth but is very poor in his mind, such a man is more pitiable than most others - as indeed we see not only in ordinary men but even among the very greatest. If a king does not have wisdom that is equal to his throne, he is unable to shine in his rank. And if this is so with bodily matters, how much the more so in a spiritual sense!

The soul is the life of the whole body, but the mind steers both body and soul. Just as it is for a man, so it is for the whole world. A king has to give account not only for himself, but also for all those for whom he was the cause of destruction.

Although we are not permitted to censure princes, yet we cannot praise the man who will fight with God. However, I shall not delay in describing the course of events which was brought about by him against the holy church - not with the intention of denouncing, but neither being silent in giving a truthful account of events. Not spurred to conjecture or sparked to rumor; but I myself was there in person and I saw and heard the sound of the arrogant voice. Like the strong wind which agitates the great sea, so he shook and convulsed the whole host of his army. He made a review of all doctrines, and compared magism and divination and all the doctrines of the empire. He also deceitfully

introduced Christianity and said with raging mind: "Question, examine, see. Let us choose and hold which is best." And he hastened quickly to fulfill what was in his mind.

But on every side the Christians in the army recognized the fire which was secretly burning and intending to consume the mountains and the plains together. They too were warmed by the inextinguishable fire and valiantly prepared themselves for the trial of his hidden stratagems.

The, with voices raised, with psalms, and spiritual songs, and glorious preaching, they began to worship openly and publicly in the great camp. Fearlessly and without hesitation, they willingly instructed whoever came to them. And the Lord prospered them with signs and miracles, for many of the heathen army who were ill received healing.

But when the impious ruler realized that his perverse plan had been revealed and that the flames of the fire which he had prepared had become known to the fearers of God before anyone had blown on it, then he began to wound his own evil mind with hidden arrows and he saw incurable wounds inflicted on his soul and body.

Now he flashed and writhed like a poisonous snake, now he stretched himself and roared like a furious lion. He rolled, twisted, and sprawled in his double-faced intention, striving to fulfill his desired plans. Since he was unable to seize and arrest them - because they were not gathered together in one spot near him - he therefore began to give precedence to the junior over the senior, to the unworthy over the honorable, to the ignorant over the knowledgeable, to the cowards over the brave. Why should I enumerate the details? All the unworthy he promoted and all the worthy he demoted, until he had split father and son from each other.

Although he worked this confusion among all nations, he especially strove against the land of Armenia. For he saw that they were very ardent in their piety, especially those of the Armenian nobility, and they sincerely observed the holy preaching of the apostles and prophets. He deceived some of them with gold and silver, and many with other liberal gifts - some with estates and large villages, some with honors and great principalities. And still further vain hopes he offered to their souls. In this way he was continuously enticing and exhorting: "If only, he said, you accept the religion of magism and sincerely convert your error to the splendid truth of the religion of our gods, I shall make you the equal of my beloved nobles in grandeur and in dignity, and shall even make you surpass them." In such fashion he deceitfully humbled himself before all, speaking with them on the pretext of love, but hypocritically so that he might be able to seduce them according to the former advice of his counselors. Thus he acted, beginning from the fourth year of his reign up to the eleventh.

However, when he saw that his secret cunning had been in no way effective but that his opponents waxed the greater - for he saw Christianity daily increasing and spreading throughout all the regions of the distant road through which he was passing - he began to languish, to waste away, and to lose his spirits from sighing. He unwittingly revealed his secret plans. He gave a public command: "Let every nation and language under my authority abandon each one's erring religion and only cleave to the worship of the sun, offering sacrifices and calling it god, and serving the fire. In addition to all this, let them fulfill the religion of magism and be negligent in nothing."

These words a herald proclaimed in the great camp and he imposed strict injunctions on everyone. He also hastily dispatched messengers to all the distant nations, and imposed the same orders on them all.

Then at the beginning of the twelfth year of his reign (449/450), he gathered a force infinite in multitude and attacked the land of the T'etals. When the king of the Kushans saw this, unable to oppose him in battle he retreated to the regions of the impregnable desert and lived in hiding with all his troops. But [the Persian king] assailed his provinces, regions and lands, captured many fortresses and cities, amassed captives, booty, and plunder, and brought them to his own empire. Then, still engaged in the same vain plans, he was strengthened in his erring intention and said to his impious ministers: "With what shall we repay the gods for this great victory, in which no one was able to oppose us in battle?"

Then in unison the magi and astrologers raised their voices and together said: "The gods who gave you empire and victory over your enemies have no need to seek visible honors from you, but [they wish] that you remove all the erroneous teachings of men and bring them to the single honorable Zoroastrian religion."

This statement seemed pleasing to the king and all the magnates, especially to those foremost in their religion. When council had been held, this opinion prevailed.

Then he held within the Pass the host of cavalry of the Armenians, Georgians, Albanians, and of all who believed in the holy Gospel of Christ. The garrison of the Pass was given strict instructions to allow through those who were coming eastward to us (*us*: i.e., the Persian king who gave the order), but to block the way for those going from the East to the West.

When he had restrained and confined them in this secure and inescapable prison - and in truth I said secure and inescapable, for there was no place to flee or hide because the enemy dwelt all around - then he laid hands on them and by means of severe tortures and various torments maltreated many of them and pressed them to deny the true God and confess the visible elements. But the soldiers in unison, with noble minds, bravely and forcefully cried out together saying: "Heaven and earth are witnesses to us that we were never tardy in the king's service, nor did we ever mingle cowardice with our noble valor. These inflictions on us are without reason and merciless."

And the noise of their complaint increased until the king himself with his own eyes saw their denunciation of their treatment, but he immediately affirmed with an oath: "I shall not let you go until you have accomplished all the intent of my orders."

So his malicious (*ch'arasēr*: "loving evil") servants received authority to put four soldiers from the aristocracy to torture. First they condemned them to many torments, then imprisoned them in the same bonds. But the others he deceitfully left alone for a while, throwing the blame for all the harm on those imprisoned. This he did by the advice of Satan.

Twelve days later he commanded a banquet be given, more liberally than the daily custom, and he summoned many of the Christian soldiers. When they were ready to take their seats, he granted a place at the table to each one of them; he conversed with them in a friendly and gentle way in accordance with his former manner so that perhaps they might be persuaded to eat sacrificial meat (*mis zoheal*), which had never been lawful for the Christians to eat. Although they all refused, he did not force them but ordered that they be offered their usual food, and he increased the merrymaking in the palace with ever more wine.

As they were leaving the royal chamber, some of them were arrested, their hands bound behind them, and the cords [of their trousers] sealed and carefully tied - some for

two days, some for three. They also suffered many other ignominious torments, which we did not consider suitable to put in writing. Some of them were exiled, deprived of their noble rank, and humiliated.

Again many detachments from among these [peoples] were sent to a distant land to wage war against the king's enemies in the inaccessible desert. There many died by the sword. [The Persians] reduced everyone's set pay (*t'oshak*) and afflicted them with hunger and thirst. They ordered their winter quarters to be in the harshest places and rendered them dishonorable and base in the eyes of all.

But they, for the love of Christ, bore all these fortunes very joyfully for the sake of the great hope which is prepared in advance for those who keep the commandments and endure. The more evil increased their dishonor, the more they were strengthened in the love of Christ. Especially because many of them had studied the Holy Scriptures from their youth, they consoled themselves and encouraged their companions; and like a tower (*ashtarak*. The tower is a common symbol of the church and of hope and piety) of light they practiced their worship and increased it.

Therefore many of the heathen (*het'anos*), to whom their voices seemed sweet and pleasant, encouraged them and spoke words of consolation to the effect that it was better for a man to suffer (*chgnel*: a term with overtones of struggle and endurance) even death than to deny such a religion.

However, although in their love of Christ they were very happy and joyful in the inner man, their outward appearance was very miserable in their exile. Such noble soldiery had attained miserable ignominy, and their ancestral (*hayreni*) freedom was in cruel subjection to a murderous (*mardakhoshosh*) tyrant who exceeded the traditions of heathens in the shedding of blood and did not at all suppose that there might be revenge for all this in heaven.

Likewise he did not remember anyone's earthy services; and what is worse than all else in the human condition, since there were some of the princes who had nourished his brothers with their mother's milk (This refers to the common practice whereby young nobles were brought up in the houses of other noble families, a custom both within Armenia and also practiced between Armenia and Iran), these he condemned even more than all the others.

In addition to all this he contrived even further wickedness. He sent one of his trusted servants, called Denshapuh (*hawatarim tsaray*), on a mission to Armenia. He came at the royal command, bringing the great king's greetings, and made a census (*ashkarhagir*) of the whole land of Armenia with soothing hypocrisy [as if] for the alleviation (*t'olut'awn*, possibly "relief" or "remission," although it can also mean "amnesty") of taxes (*harkk'*) and the lightening of the burden of the cavalry. Although outwardly he dissimulated, yet within his plans were revealed as evil.

First: he cast the freedom of the church into slavery (the term "freedom"

[*azatut'awn*] here has the connotation of untaxed patrimony).

Second: he included in the same census the Christian monks living in monasteries.

Third: he increased the tax burden on the country.

Fourth: by slander he pitted the nobility against each other, and caused dissention (*khrovut'awn*) in every family.

He did all this in the hope of breaking their unity, scattering the clergy (*ukht*: it is not always clear from the context whether the meaning "covenant" or the narrower meaning "clergy" is intended) of the church, driving away the monks, and wearing out the peasants (*shinakank*'), so that in their great poverty they might unwillingly turn to the religion of the magi.

And even more pernicious was the fifth. The governor (*hazarapet*: here the governor of Armenia is intended) of the country had been regarded as a father and overseer (*verakats 'u*) by the Christians of the land, but he incited accusations against him, deprived him of office, and in his place brought a Persian to the country. In addition he also brought a chief-magus (*mogpet*) as judge of the land, so that they might corrupt the glory of the church.

However, although all these actions were so cruel, no one yet openly laid hand on the church. Therefore nobody opposed him despite the severity of the taxes. For where it was suitable to take up to a hundred *dehekan*, they took twice as much. Likewise they taxed both bishops and priests, not merely of inhabited lands but also of desolate areas. So who indeed could describe the severity of dues and taxes, excises and levies on the mountains and plains and forests? They did not act in accordance with royal dignity but raided like brigands, until they themselves were greatly amazed as to whence all this treasure came and how the country remained prosperous.

When they saw that despite all this they were unable to cow [the Armenians], then they openly ordered the magi and chief-magi to write a letter in keeping with their perverse religion. And this is a copy of the letter:

"Mihnerseh, Great Vizir of Iran and non-Iran, many greetings to Greater Armenia.

"You must know that every man who dwells under heaven and does not accept the Mazdaean religion (*awrēnk 'deni mazdezn*) is deaf and blind and deceived by the demons of Haraman.

"For before heaven and earth existed the great god Zrvan sacrificed for a thousand years and said: 'Perhaps I shall have a son, Ormizd by name, who will create heaven and earth.' And he conceived two in his belly, one from making sacrifice and one from saying 'perhaps.' When he knew that there were two in his belly, he said: 'To the one who emerges first I shall give my rule.'

"But the one who had been conceived from his doubt tore open the belly and came out. Zrvan said to him: 'Who are you?' He said: 'I am your son Ormizd.' Zrvan said to him: 'My son is luminous and sweet-smelling, you are gloomy and evil-loving.' And when he had wept bitterly, he gave him his rule for a thousand years.

"When he begat the other son he called him Ormizd. He took the rule from Arhmn and gave it to Ormizd, saying to him: 'Up to now I sacrificed to you, now do you sacrifice to me.' And Ormizd created heaven and earth, but Arhmn worked evil in opposition.

"And creation is thus divided: the angels are Ormizd's, but the demons Arhmn's. And everything good, both in heaven and here, is Ormizd's and everything harmful done there and here Arhmn worked. Likewise, whatever is good on earth Ormizd did, and whatever is not good Arhmn did. Just as Ormizd made man, Arhmn made diseases, illnesses, and death. All misfortunes and disasters that occur, and bitter wars, are the creations of the evil side; but success and empires and glory and honors and health of

body, beauty of face, eloquence and longevity - these receive their existence from the good one. And everything which is not like that has been mixed with a creation of the evil one's.

"All men are in error who say: 'God made death, and evil and good derive from him.' Especially as the Christians say: 'God is jealous. Because of the eating of a single fig from the tree God made death, and subjected man to that punishment.' Such jealousy not even man has for man, let alone God for men. For who says this is deaf and blind and deceived by the demons of Haraman.

"Again there is another error: 'God who created heaven and earth came,' they say, 'and was born of some woman called Mary, whose husband was Joseph.' But in truth he was a son to a certain Banturak by an illicit intercourse. And many have gone astray after such as man.

"If the Romans have ignorantly gone astray in their great folly and have been deprived of our perfect religion, they have brought their own ruin upon themselves. But why are you infatuated with their error? Do you hold the same religion that your lord has, especially because we have to give account for you before God.

"Do not believe your leaders who you call Nazarenes (*Natsrats 'ik'*), for they are very deceitful. What they teach in words they do not practice in deeds. 'To eat meat,' they say, 'is not a sin,' yet they themselves do not like to eat meat. 'It is right to marry,' but they themselves do not wish even to look at a woman. 'It is a great sin,' they say, 'to accumulate riches,' but they praise poverty excessively. They honor misfortune and despise success; they mock the name of fortune and greatly scorn glory. They love simplicity of clothing, and honor the dishonorable more than the honorable. They praise death and condemn life. They dishonor the births of men and praise childlessness. And if people were to listen to them and not approach their wives, the end of the world would soon arrive.

"But I did not wish to put all the details in writing for you, because there are many other things that they say. But what is even worse than what we have just written, they preach that God was crucified by men, that he died and was buried, then rose and ascended to heaven. Should you yourselves then not have made a judgment concerning such unworthy doctrines? Demons, who are evil, are not seized and tortured by men, let alone God, the Creator of all creatures. This is shameful for you to say, and these words are incredible to us.

"So there are two possibilities before you: either answer this letter word for word, or come to court and appear before the great assembly."

Joseph, bishop of Ayrarat
Sahak, bishop of Tarawn
Melet, bishop of Manazkert
Eznik, bishop of Bagrevand
Surmak, bishop of Bzunik'
Tachat, bishop of Tayk'
T'at'ik, bishop of Basean
K'asu, bishop of Turuberan
Eremlia, bishop of Mardastan
Eulal, bishop of Mardoyali

Anania, bishop of Siunik‘
Mushē, bishop of Artsrunik‘
Sahak, bishop of Rēshtunik‘
Basil, bishop of Mokka‘
Gad, bishop of Vanand
Elisha, bishop of Amatunik‘
Elbayr, bishop of Andzavatisk‘
Eremia, bishop of Apahunik‘

All these bishops and many chorepiscopi (*k'orepiskoposk'*) and honorable priests from many places, and the holy clergy of the church, with one accord and in unison, gathered in the capital city of Artashat, in concert with the greatest princes and all the people of the land, and wrote an answer to the letter.

"Bishop Joseph and his united colleagues from the greatest to the smallest, to Mihrnerseh, the great *hazarapet* of the Aryans and non-Aryans, with very peace-loving intentions - may greetings be multiplied to you and all the great army of the Aryans.

"From our ancestors we have retained the divinely-instituted custom of praying for the life of the king and ceaselessly requesting God for long life for him, so that he may rule in peace his universal empire, which has been entrusted to him by God, and so that in its extended peace we too may complete our lives in well-being and piety.

"Concerning the letter which you addressed to our land - in an earlier time one of the chief-magi, who was greatly versed in your religion and whom you regarded as superior to ordinary mortals, believed in the loving God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and he explained and expounded your religion to you word for word. And since they were unable to refute him, he was stoned and put to death by King Ormizd. If you consider it reliable to hear our words, in many places of your own country his book (this means the account of his martyrdom, as the story of Gregory was known as "the book of Saint Gregory") is to be found: read and you will be informed.

"But as for our religion - it is not obscure nor is it preached in some corner of the land, but it is spread throughout the whole world, across the sea, the dry land, and the islands; not only in the West, but also in the East, the North, the South and in between [the world] is densely filled with it. It does not have its surety in a man, to be spread through the world by a protector, but has its confirmation in itself. It does not appear sublime from comparison with the depravity of others, but from heaven above it derives its infallible charter and not through a mediator - for God is one and there is none other beside him, neither older nor younger.

"God did not receive the beginning of his existence from anyone, but he is eternal in himself; he is not in any place but is his own place; he is not in any time but time derives from him; and he is prior not only to heaven but also to the thoughts of men and angels. He is not shaped into a material appearance nor is he subject to the vision of the eye; he is not merely impalpable to the hand, he is not even graspable by anyone's mind - not merely among mortals, but also among the incorporeal angels. But if he himself wishes he is comprehensible to minds worthy of him, though he is not visible to the eyes or understanding, not to earthly [minded] creatures but to those who believe truly in God.

"His name is Creator of heaven and earth. But as he is self-existent, prior to heaven and earth, so is he self-named. He himself is timeless, but when he wished he

made a beginning of existence for his creatures, not from something but from nothing. For he alone is "something" and everything else received its being from him. Not that after he had taken thought then he created [creatures], but before he created, in his foreknowledge he saw the creatures. Just as now, before a man has done anything good or evil, men's deeds are clear to God, likewise then also, before he had created, he was aware of the uncreated beings, not as a confused jumble, but the forms of each of their parts were arranged and ordered before him, both of men and of angels, and the forms of whatever was going to be in a form.

"And because he is a creative power, his benevolence was unable to prevent our wickedness, as indeed happened; but we have as judge the creative right hand. The hands which established heaven and earth, inscribed also the stone tablets and gave us a book containing the laws of peace and salvation, so that we might know the one God, Creator of things visible and invisible - not different as if one were good and the other evil, but one and the same wholly good.

"But if it appears to you that anything evil exists among God's creatures, speak out boldly so that perchance you may learn the true good. You said the demons are evil; there exist also good spirits, who you and we call angels. If they wish, the spirits are good, and if they wish, the angels become evil. This also can be seen among men, and especially in the sons of a single father: there is one who is obedient and submissive to his father, and there is one who is more evil than Satan. Likewise a single man can be seen to be divided into two: sometimes evil and sometimes good; and the one who was good, the same became evil; it has occurred that he again returned to the good, yet his nature is one.

"But as for your saying that because of a single fig God created death, a piece of parchment is even less significant than a fig: if the king's order is marked on it, whoever tears it receives death as punishment. But is it then right to call the king evil? Far from it; I say no. But by using an example I am instructing others. God would have been jealous at that time if he had not commanded not to eat from the tree. But if he had previously cautioned, he therein revealed the mercy of his natural love. Then man by despising [the command] received the punishment of death.

"Now as for your having said that God was born from a woman, it was not right for you to turn away or flee from that; for behold Arhmn and Ormizd were born from a father and not from a mother - to which if you rally turned your mind even you would not accept. And there is something else still more laughable than this: the god Mihr is born from a woman, as if anyone would have intercourse with his own parent.

"But if you set aside for a while the arrogance of your authority and enter into a debate in a friendly way, I know that despite everything else you are a very wise man and did not consider as superfluity [what was said] about the birth of our Lord from the Holy Virgin, that you understood heavenly salvation to be much more important than the creation of the world from nothing, and that you attributed the transgression to man's freedom and the liberation from servitude to God's benevolence.

"For when you hear that God created this whole world from nothing, understand that creatures were born at his word. So God, who begat this great body without pain, thenceforth is compassionate to it like a father. He who is himself incorruptible begat creatures without corruption; but the latter fell of his own will and was rendered corruptible, and by himself was no longer able to stand on his feet. Because he was from

earth and had acted for and by himself, he returned to the same nature. And since it was not from the foreign power of some evil being that he received punishment, but from his own laziness in not obeying the benevolent command, his subject part was chastised by the death which he suffered in his own person.

"Now if the evil god created death, what reality does death appear to have? None at all. But it destroyed the creatures of the good God. If this is so, it is not possible to call the latter good, but imperfect and corruptible. And the god whose creatures are corruptible and destructible cannot be called an indestructible God. So cast away these foolish babblings.

"One world does not have two lords, nor one creature two gods. If two kings were presumptuous enough to arise for one country, that country would be destroyed and the kingdoms would collapse.

"This world is material, and the elements are different and opposed to each other. The Creator of these opposites is one, and he brings them into harmony by persuasion. Just as he crushes and softens the heat of fire by the chill of air, and the cold solidity of the air by the warmth of fire - so too he grinds up the fine earth and kneads it with the moisture of water, while the natural tendency of water to flow downwards he solidifies and hardens by the binding effect of earth.

"For if the elements were joined together, perhaps one of the less intelligent might suppose that these were God incorruptible, and abandoning the Creator might offer worship to his creatures. Therefore, he who created this [world] took care in advance that men, noticing the mutual hostility of the corruptible elements, might understand that its leader alone is incorruptible and that he is one, not two - the same Creator of the former elements, by whom all things were fashioned at his creative command.

"The four seasons in their cycle fulfill their material tasks; the four of them look to the will of their attentive Creator. They are unconsciously yoked to their obligatory work, not encroaching on each others' established order. Here is a clear explanation, easily comprehensible in the ears of all. That which is fire, in its being and essence is mixed with the three other parts. The warmth is found more in stones and iron, and less in air and water, while it itself appears alone. The nature of water is separate, yet it also exists in mixtures of the other three parts, more so in plants and less in air and fire. But air penetrates fire and water, and through water [penetrates] food that causes growth.

"So are these elements mingled, and they exist as one body and do not destroy each other's nature. They never cease in their opposition, looking to the one unmingled Lord who arranges and orders their mixtures with a view to the nature of all living things and the prolongation of the stability of the whole world.

"Now if God cares thus for the irrational world, how much more [does he care] for the rational world - men.

"As for what one of your very learned men said, that the god Mihr was born from a mortal mother and is king as divine offspring and is a partner of the seven noble gods, if it is right to believe in that fable - which in your religion you claim to be actually real - we no longer believe in fables but are pupils of the great prophet Moses. With him God spoke in the bramble on Sinai, and face to face he set down the law and gave it to him. He made known to him this material world as created and his own immaterial essence as Creator of these elements from nothing. And he revealed to him that this earth with its earthly beings and heaven with the heavenly beings were the works of his hands. The

inhabitants of heaven are angels, and the inhabitants of earth men. Man and angel alone are rational, while God is above heaven and earth.

"All creatures carry out the commands he orders without reasoning, and never do they cross the limit imposed on them. Only man and angel have been left free in their own will, for they are rational. If they abide by his command they are immortal and sons of God. He gave all creation into subjection - earth to men and heaven to the angels. But if they disobey and transgress the commandment, they will be opposing God and will receive disgrace and be deprived of each one's honor, so that his dominion may appear blameless and the transgressors be put to shame at their transgressions.

"But if you err in ignorance, I who have secure knowledge am unable to follow your error. If I become a pupil of your lack of learning, the two of us would go to irretrievable destruction - and perhaps I worse than you because I have as witness to me the very voice of God: "A servant, he says, who does not know the will of his lord and does something worthy of the bastinado is beaten, but less," whereas he who is informed of the king's will and transgresses in his presence, is greatly punished without propitiation.

"So I beg you and all those under your authority: do not be greatly tormented with me, nor I less so with you. But let me and you and all your host with your valiant king so study divine Scripture that we may escape those torments, scorn hell, avoid the inextinguishable fire, inherit the kingdom, and in this transitory life possess unending glory that passes not away.

"But accept what you dread and you will straightway learn the truth.

"One of the host of immortal angels left heaven in revolt. Coming to our world, with treacherous words and a false promise, he proffered an unrealizable hope to the untested, inexperienced, and newly created man, as to a child, turning his mind upwards so that by eating the fruit of the tree - which he had been commanded not to approach - he might become god. So he forgot God's command, was tricked into following that erring deceit, and lost the glory of immortality that he possessed; nor did he gain the dream of his hope. Therefore, expelled from the place of life, he was cast into this corruptible world, in which you too now dwell and senselessly err following the new counselor - no longer by eating of the forbidden tree but by calling creatures god, worshipping the dumb elements, offering food to demons who have no stomachs, and neglecting the Creator of all.

"The evil counselor is not satisfied but wishes to outdo himself in committing evil. For the demons do not lead anyone to destruction by force, but they sweeten sins for man's desires and by blandishments seduce the unlearned into error - just as many men [urge] their friends to theft and brigandage, not doing anything by force but by false deceit causing them to commit many evil deeds, [leading] some to sorcery, some to fornication, and others to innumerable other impure acts. Through just judges they pay the penalty of death - not that the judges of a good God are beneficent and those of an evil one malevolent; for it is often the case that evil deeds are done by good men, and then wholly good deeds by the most wicked men.

"The righteous judges who judge evildoers are not called evil and tormentors but very good and benevolent. Their nature is one, and not two' but from one of them acts of two kinds derive - disastrous for some and munificent for others. And if it is the case among men that [judges] protect the kingdom by means of punishment through royal

authority, how much more does God [protect] the whole of this world, he who wishes life for everyone and not death. So where transgression increased, he inflicted all with death; but where there was attentive obedience, he bestowed gifts of immortality.

"He is the true God, Creator of us all, whom you blaspheme with your impudent and unbridled mouth in fearless and unquivering arrogance. Abandoning the saving name Jesus Christ, you call him the son of P'andurak and suppose him to be a deceiver; you corrupt and dishonor the heavenly salvation to the destruction of yourself and of the whole world. For this you will pay the eternal penalty of torments, condemned to the unquenchable fire of hell with all you companions - the first, middle, and last.

"But we acknowledge God in this fashion, and in the same we believe without doubting:

"God who made this world, the same came and was born from the Holy Virgin Mary, as the prophets previously indicated, without any bodily intervention. Just as he made this massive body, the world, from nothing, likewise without any bodily mediator he took flesh from the unsullied Virgin - truly and not in a shadowy appearance. He was truly God and became truly man. In becoming man he did not lose his divinity, nor in remaining God did he spoil his humanity, but [he remained] the same and one.

"But because we were unable to see the invisible or approach the unapproachable, he came and submitted to our humanity so that we might attain his divinity. He did not think it any disgrace to put on this body created by himself, but he honored as divinely fashioned his won creation. Not gradually did he bestow on it the honor of immortality, as with the incorporeal angels, but all at once he put on the entire [human] nature, with body, soul, and spirit, and united it to his divinity - a unity and not a duality. Consequently we acknowledge the divinity as one, who existed before this world and is the same today.

"This Jesus Christ, who in his own body redeemed the whole world, came willingly to death. And, as the Godhead knows, he was formed from the immaculate Virgin, was born and wrapped in swaddling clothes, was placed in a manger, brought the magi from the East to worship him, was nourished as an infant with milk, grew up and reached thirty years of age, was baptized in the Jordan River by John, son of the barren women. He performed great signs and miracles among the Jews, was betrayed by the priests, was condemned by Pontius Pilate. He was crucified, died, was buried, rose on the third day, appeared to the twelve disciples and to many others - more than five hundred. He moved among them for forty days, ascended from the Mount of Olives to heaven before his own disciples, and came and sat on the Father's throne. He promised to come a second time with fearsome power to raise the dead, to renew the whole world, to make a just judgment between the just and the sinners, to give rewards to the worthy, to punish evildoers who do not believe in all these benevolent acts.

"From this faith no one can shake us, neither angels nor men, neither sword nor fire nor water, nor any kind of cruel torture.

"All our possessions and properties are in your hands and our bodies stand before you; do [with them] whatever you will. If you leave us with this same faith we shall not exchange you for another lord on earth, nor in heaven shall we exchange for another god Jesus Christ - than whom there is not other God.

"Now if after this extensive testimony you ask further questions, behold we have given our entire bodies into your hands. Do immediately whatever you wish; tortures

from you, submission from us; the sword is yours, the necks are ours. We are not better than our ancestors, who on behalf of this witness laid down their possessions, properties, and bodies.

"For if we were immortal and it was possible for us to die for the love of Christ, it would be right [to do so], because he was immortal and so loved us that he accepted death in order that by his death we might be saved from eternal death. And if he did not spare his own immortality, we - since we become mortal by our own will - shall willingly die for his love so that he may willingly endow us with his own immortality; we shall die as mortals so that he may accept our death as that of immortals.

"But do you ask us no further questions after this, for the covenant of our faith is not with a man that we may be deceived like children, but is indissolubly with God - from whom it is impossible to be divided or separated, not now, not in the future, not forever, not forever and ever."

To this great pact (*hawanut'awn*: although this may mean "declaration of faith") all the multitude assented, from the greatest to the smallest. With a solemn oath (*ansut erdumn*) they bore witness that they would remain true to it in life and death.

When the letter reached the court and was read in the great hall in the presence of the whole host of the army, many were they who on hearing it praised the answer. Although they were frightened for awe of the government, yet secretly they bore witness of their praise to one another, astonished more at its bold fearlessness than at its eloquence. Many of the cowed began to recover strength; and the same whispering was heard from all lips.

But the malicious chief magus with the great *hazarapet* breathed calumny, and inflamed the king like an inextinguishable fire. He began to gnash his teeth like one fatally wounded. In public he raised his voice in the great assembly and said: "I know the wickedness of the many men who do not believe in our religion and have gone irrevocably astray after sorcery. I have decided that I shall not exempt anyone from the worst tortures until they, through unwillingly, abandon such an erroneous religion. Even if someone is among those very close to me I shall inflict the same on him."

Then the embittered old man interposed and said to the king: "What is the reason for this great dejection of yours? For if the emperor does not transgress your command and the Huns remain subject to you, what man is there on earth who could oppose your order? Give an imperial command within (i.e. to the palace officials) and whatever you say will be carried out immediately.

Then the king summoned the chief-scribe (*dprapet*) and commanded him to write an edict (*hrovartak*) - not in the usual fashion but in angry terms as if to hateful and vile people, not at all recalling the great services of these loyal men but merely summoning by name the men he knew personally. Their names were:

Vasak, from the house of Siunik'
Nershapuh, from the house of Artsrunik'
Artak, from the house of the Rēshtunik'
Gadeshoy, from the house of the Khorkhorunik'
Vardan, from the house of the Mamikonean
Artak, from the house of Mokk'
Manēch, from the house of the Apahunik'

Vahan, from the house of the Amatunik‘
Shmavon, from the house of the Andzevatsik‘

These princes were summoned by name to the royal court. Some of them were already by him in the army, others were in the garrison of the Huns in the north, and some of the princes he had left in Armenia.

So although they did not happen to be all united in one place, nonetheless they realized in advance the plot of the wicked tyrant, and they thought of themselves, including the most distant, as close to one another in one spot.

Strengthened by the holy bishop Joseph in the same faith, they journeyed from each one's place to the royal court. They made great haste for the sake of their brothers, and sons, and dear foster friends, who were in sore affliction. Therefore they committed themselves to death, not hesitating like ignoble cowards; but they bravely strengthened themselves, that perchance they might be able to save them from severe torments.

When they arrived at the royal court they appeared before the king on the holy Easter Saturday (In 450 Easter Sunday fell on 16 April). But although they saw their own brothers in great trouble and affliction - who had steadfastly endured for the sake of Christ's name - they did not show sad or solemn faces in public. And the more they appeared joyful to everyone, the more the lovers of evil (a common term in Elishē for the Persians) were astonished.

It was the rule in former times, when the cavalry from Armenia went to the court under some distinguished general, for him (the shah) to send a man to meet them, to greet them, and inquire about the welfare of Armenia; he would do the same twice and three times in person review the force. Before they went out to war he would greatly thank them for coming to him, and in front of his companions and all the magnates he would praise them all and recall the services of their ancestors and rehearse the brave deed of each man.

But on that day he remembered nothing at all of these customs, but like an evil demon he did not cease provoking and stirring up a winter snowstorm. Her resembled the tumult of the surging wave-tossed sea; not insignificantly and superficially, but from the bottommost depths he rose in a mass of foam, thundering like a dragon and roaring like a wild beast, shaking his whole worldwide empire as if it would crash and scatter in its entirety over the hills, hollows, and valleys to destroy completely the beauty of the extensive plains.

He raised his voice in a bellow and said: "I have sworn by the sun, the great god who with his rays illuminates the whole universe and with his warmth gives life to all existing things, unless tomorrow morning, at the rising of the splendid one, each of you bends his knee to him with me, confessing him as god, I shall not cease to bring upon you every form of affliction and torture until you fulfill the desires of my commands, though unwillingly."

But the Christians, firm in Christ, were not chilled by the icy blasts of winter or burned by the scorching heat, nor did they tremble at the fearsome voice or hesitate at the threats of tortures. But looking up they saw the power of Christ coming to their aid, and approaching with joyful faces and modest words they replied to the king.

"We beg you, noble sovereign, give ear to our words and listen kindly to what we have to say.

"We remind you of the time of Shapuh, king of kings, who was the father of your grandfather Yazkert and to whom God gave Armenia in subjection under the same religion as that by which we still love today (reference is here made to the division of Armenia in 386/7 into an Iranian sphere and a smaller Byzantine one). Our fathers and great-grandfathers rendered him service and loyally fulfilled all his commands, often receiving generous presents from him. From those times until [your accession] to your ancestral throne we have performed the same service, but perhaps more so for you than for you predecessors."

By saying this they indicated that their valiant deeds in military service had been superior to those of their ancestors. Indeed the amount of revenue and dues and all the other taxes of the country going to the court was greater than in the time of his father.

"Likewise on the holy church, which was free in Christ from the beginning according to the custom of our ancestors, you also imposed taxes. And we, in our loyalty to your rule, did not oppose you. Now why has this anger been stirred up against us? Tell us the reasons for the maltreatment. Is our religion the cause of our being without merit in your sight?"

But the wicked demon, full of all deceit, turned his face to one side and said: "I consider it harm to receive into the royal treasure the tribute of your land, and your valiant deeds useless. For you have ignorantly gone astray from our true religion and have dishonored the gods; you have killed fire and defiled water, you have buried the dead in the ground and corrupted the earth; and by not performing pious duties, you strengthen Haraman. And what is worst, you do not regularly approach your wives. The demons have great joy when you disregard and do not observe all the institutions of the magi. I see you as sheep scattered and lost in the wilderness. And I have great scruples that perhaps the gods, in their anger at you, will take vengeance from us. But if you wish to live and save yourselves and be sent back in honor, do what I have said immediately."

Then the blessed princes in unison raised their voices and said before everyone: "Do not, O king, do not say that again to us. For the church is not the creation of man or the gift of the sun; not only is the latter not god, but it is not even alive as you in your confusion suppose. Churches are not the gifts of kings, or the invention of skill, or the discovery of the wise, or the booty of valiant soldiers, or the false deceits of demons. Similarly, whatever you say of earthly beings, whether grand or ignoble, nowhere is a church [created] by them to be found. But it is a gift of grace from the great God, not given to some individual man, but to all rational peoples whose lot it is to dwell under the sun. Its foundations have been placed on a firm rock; powers below cannot shake it or power above move it. What heaven and earth cannot topple, let no man boast of conquering. So, in whatever manner you wish to treat us, do so. We are all ready for every contrivance of torments and tortures that you have threatened ready not only to be tortured but even to die. And if you were to ask the same questions again, you will hear from each one of us more than the present reply."

Then the king became more bitter than gall. He spewed forth the sea of the willful bile in his stomach; from his nose and mouth issued hot vapor like thick smoke from a heated furnace. Unable to tame his heart he destroyed the strength of his body, pierced the overflowing vessel of his plans, and scattered and wasted all his deceitful thoughts. And what he had never intended to reveal to his friends, unwillingly he revealed before the servants of Christ in its details.

Three and four times he repeated his false oath to the sun, saying as follows: "You are unable to destroy my sure fortifications, not shall I allow you to obtain immediately what you desire. But all of you and those in my army I shall exile in cruel bonds to Sagastan (modern Sistan) through roadless parts, where many of you will perish on the journey from the heat, and the survivors will be thrown into secure fortresses and inescapable prisons. To your country I shall send an infinite army with elephants; you wives and children I shall have dispatched to Khuzhastan; your churches and what you call martyria I shall destroy, raze, and obliterate. And if anyone is found to resist he will be trampled by wild beasts and die a merciless death. All that I have said I shall perform and carry out on the survivors in your country."

Straightway he ordered the honorable princes to be expelled from his presence in great dishonor. He strictly commanded the chief-executioner to guard them unbound in each one's lodging, and the perverse one took up his residence in unconsolable sadness.

But the true believers in Christ were not at all irresolute or doubtful of the earlier counsel of their holy teachers, but they sought further ways how they might extricate themselves and their loved ones from this great tribulation. After frequent attempts, they offered great promises with the prospect of money to the magnates who had helped them at the royal court, and they expended on them no little treasure at that time.

When their inescapable prison was closed on all sides, them recalling the example of Abraham, they cried and said in their hearts: "We have all offered our brothers and sons and all our dear ones and placed them bound like Isaac on the holy altar; receive, O Lord, our willing sacrifice and do not give your church to the ridicule and mockery of this lawless prince."

One of the king's privy counselors secretly had an indissoluble love for Christ, for he had been baptized in the living font, and he was greatly concerned with saving the lives of these unfortunate ones. When he became fully aware that the king was intending to inflict on Armenia all the evils he had threatened, he advised a few of them, though not all, of a means whereby they might save themselves from tribulation for a while.

While they were gathering a force which would banish them to a foreign exile of no return, as they had banished many princes from Georgia (the first exile of Georgian princes attested to in other sources occurred in 484), at that very time arrived a bearer of bad news from the regions of the Kushans, to the effect that a detachment had separated from the enemy and had ruined many royal provinces. This proved a great help to them from heaven. The impious one quickly and urgently sent off the cavalry, and he himself in haste followed closely behind. Deeply wounded in his intentions, he shattered his earlier firm oath.

When the fearers of the Lord saw this, with great hope they prayed and said in unison: "O Lord of all, who knows the secrets of men's hearts and before whom all invisible thoughts are revealed, who does not require witness from the visible as your eyes see what we have not yet done - now before you we pour out our requests. Receive, O Lord, our secret prayers and make us delight in your commands, so that the evil one, who has dared to fight against you through the power of the impious one, may be put to shame. Shake, O Lord, the crooked plans of the deceitful one and obstruct the desires of his impiety; lead us back with peaceful minds to the holy church, that it may not be suddenly attacked and cruelly ruined by the enemy."

Having in their souls made this indissoluble covenant with God that they would remain firm in their former resolution, they sent in as messenger the same adviser of theirs, as if the desire of his impiety would be fulfilled.

When the king heard this he very greatly rejoiced, thinking the gods had come to his help and had toppled and destroyed the firm resolve of God's servants. And behold they offered adoration to the sun, honoring him with sacrifices and with all the rites of the magi.

The madman was unable to understand that the unshadowed light of the sun of righteousness was absorbing and consuming his dark plots, and that they were destroying and ruining all his perverse desires. Blinded by the revelation of the truth he in no way comprehended the deceitful ruses by which he was tricked. He showered them with earthly gifts and restored to them all their honors and ranks, promoting them and making them distinguished throughout his entire world-wide empire. With unbounded liberality he bestowed on each one of them estates and towns from the royal treasury. He called them dear friends, and in the arrogant presumption of his perverse mind he thought that the truth could be changed for falsehood.

Having done this he gathered a large force of cavalry to escort them, and not a few magi; more than seven hundred teachers he sent with them, and over them he appointed a certain great price as chief-magus. Humbly and beggingly he ordered them: "By the time I return in peace from this war, you will have performed and accomplished everything according to my will." And thus with *éclat* and honor he sent them off on the long journey to Armenia. He himself sent joyful tidings to many fire-temples, and indicated in writing to the magi, chief-magic, and all the magnates of every region of his dominions how "by the help of the gods I have carried forward my noble work."

But then those impure ones, rising up from each one's gloomy lair, were impatient to fulfill the command at once. He [the king] sent word to distant lands that they should immediately march to the West. And before they had arrived in the great land of Armenia, they threw sticks and drew lots as to which group [of magi] would undertake the instruction of which people. For they had received a general command from the court [to instruct] not only Armenia but also Georgia, Albania, and the land of the *Lp'ink'*, *Aldznik'*, *Korduk'*, *Tsaudëik'* and *Dasn*, and wherever else in the Persian empire they secretly observed Christianity.

In a mad onslaught they hastened to plunder the treasures of the holy churches, and then like demons they began to fall on one another. A large force was gathered, and the malicious Satan appeared among them like a general, ceaselessly exhorting them all and urging them to make haste. He fixed a time, six months, and they spared no efforts [in fulfilling] the royal command.

"From Navasard to Navasard (the first month of the Armenian year, in 450 it was 6 August)," he said, "in every place that is under the authority of the great king, church services shall be suppressed, the doors of the holy temples shall be shut and sealed, the sacred vessels shall be numbered and taken to court, the singing of psalms shall be silenced, the readings of the true prophets shall cease, Priests shall not be allowed to instruct the people in their own homes, and the believers in Christ, men and women who swell each in their own monasteries, shall change their garments for secular attire.

"Furthermore the wives of the princes shall receive the magi's instruction. Sons and daughters of the nobility and peasantry shall study the precepts of these same magi. The

laws of holy matrimony which they received from their forefathers according to Christian ritual shall be abrogated and abolished; instead of one wife they shall take many, so that the Armenian nation may increase and multiply. Daughters shall be wives [for] fathers, and sisters for brothers. Mothers shall not withdraw from sons, and grandchildren shall ascend the couch of grandparents.

"Sacrificial animals shall not be killed without being offered [to the gods]. Be they sheep, goats, cattle, fowl, or pigs. Dough shall not be kneaded without a veil. Excrement and dung shall not be thrown into fire. Hands shall not be washed without urine. Otters, foxes, and hares shall not be killed. Snakes and lizards, frogs and ants, and all other various kinds of insects shall not be left, but promptly shall be brought forth in appropriate numbers according to the royal measure. And whatever other duties there are, either of offerings or sacrifices, shall be performed according to the yearly festival rites and the due amount of ashes.

"Everyone shall fulfill all that we have said for a period of time up to the completion of a year; and to everything else they shall address themselves in the future."

When the magi and chief-magi received all these instructions, day and night they hastened to Armenia. And in their great joy they were never wearied by the length of the journey.

Text taken from:

Elishē. *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*. Trans. Robert W. Thomson.
Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

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