

THE LONGEST CENTURY OF ARMENIA: A QUEST FOR BALANCING BETWEEN THE ROMAN–SASANIAN IN THE FOURTH CENTURY*

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Abstract

This study explores the intricate political and religious dynamics that shaped Armenia during the fourth century, focusing on the impact of Roman and Sasanian imperial interventions and the internal divisions within Armenia. The division of Armenia into Roman and Sasanian spheres following the agreements of 387 resulted in a bifurcated political structure, with significant implications for the region's stability. The rivalry among local aristocratic families, known as *naxarars*, played a crucial role in this fragmentation, as their shifting loyalties and internal conflicts facilitated external manipulation by both empires. Additionally, the religious conflict between Christianity and Zoroastrianism further complicated the political landscape, contributing to the erosion of centralized control and exacerbating internal strife. The study examines how these factors combined to influence the political trajectory of Armenia, from the internal struggles during the reign of King Tiridates to the eventual consolidation of Sasanian's control under Vramšapuh. By analyzing these dynamics, this research highlights the complex interplay of internal and external forces that defined Armenia's historical trajectory in this period, offering insights into the broader implications of imperial rivalry and religious conflict in shaping regional politics.

Key Words: Armenia Between Roman and Sasanian, Armenia in the Fourth Century, Armenian Feudalism, *Naxarars*, Ancient Armenia.

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** This article is the development of a part of the doctoral dissertation entitled "Armenia between the Romans and the Sasanids in the Late Antiquity (224-451)", which was prepared as a result of research carried out at Oxford University with the support of TÜBİTAK 2214A Scholarship Programme.

Öz

Armenia'nın En Uzun Yüzyılı: Dördüncü Yüzyılda Roma-Sâsânî Arasında Bir Denge Arayışı

Bu çalışma, 4. yüzyılda Armenia'yı şekillendiren karmaşık siyasi ve dini dinamikleri, Roma ve Sâsânî imparatorluk müdahalelerinin etkisine ve Armenia'daki iç bölünmelere odaklanarak incelemektedir. Armenia'nın 387 anlaşmasını takiben Roma ve Sâsânî arasında bölünmesi, bölgenin istikrarı üzerinde önemli etkileri olan çalkantılı bir siyasi yapıyla sonuçlanmıştır. *Naxararlar* olarak bilinen yerel aristokrat aileler arasındaki rekabet, değişen sadakatleri ve iç çatışmaları her iki imparatorluğun da dış manipülasyonunu kolaylaştırdığı için bu parçalanmada çok önemli bir rol oynadı. Buna ek olarak, Hıristiyanlık ve Zerdüştlük arasındaki dini çatışma, merkezi kontrolün zayıflamasına katkıda bulunarak ve iç çekişmeleri şiddetlendirerek siyasi manzarayı daha da karmaşık hale getirmiştir. Bu çalışma, Tiridates dönemindeki iç mücadelelerden Vramşapuh döneminde Sâsânî kontrolünün nihai olarak pekiştirilmesine kadar, bu faktörlerin Armenia'nın siyasi gidişatını nasıl etkilediğini incelemektedir. Bu dinamikleri analiz eden bu çalışma, Armenia'nın bu dönemdeki tarihsel yörüngesini belirleyen iç ve dış güçlerin karmaşık etkileşimini vurgulayarak bölgesel siyaseti şekillendirmede emperyal rekabet ve dini çatışmanın daha geniş etkilerine ışık tutmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Roma ve Sâsânîler, Arasında Armenia, Dördüncü Yüzyılda Armenia, Armenia Feodalizmi, *Naxararlar*, Antik Armenia.

Introduction

The fourth century is regarded as one of the most critical and transformative periods in the history of Ancient Armenia, characterized by intense political, religious, and cultural changes. During this century, Armenia was at the centre of power struggles between the Roman and Persian Empires while also undergoing internal transformations such as adopting of Christianity as the official religion and internal power struggles within local governance. Particularly, with the enforcement of the Treaty of Nisibis in 299, the Sasanian hegemony that had persisted over Armenia since 252 came to an end. Following the assassination of his father (or grandfather?) Khosrov II and Tiridates IV, who had been taken to Roman territories and raised in the court of Licinius, returned to Armenia. According to Łazar P'arpec 'i's epic narrative, Tiridates returned to Armenia like *a giant*.¹ Movsēs Xorenac 'i places Tiridates' return in the third year of Diocletianus's reign (287); however, various Armenian authors present differing dates. For instance, Agat' angelos' account includes chronological errors extending to the period of Emperor Probus.² Conversely, Uxtanēs dates Tiridates' ascension to the throne to the third year of Diocletianus (287), while Samuel Anec 'i indicates either the first year (285) or the ninth year (293) of Diocletianus's reign.³

The issue of Tiridates's accession to the throne is rooted in the relative chronology and informational errors found in Armenian sources. Particularly, the complexity or absence of distinction between Tiridates III and IV in these sources complicates the

¹ Aa, 37, 46; ŁP', 1.2; MX, 2.67, 2.79; T'A, 1.10. The fate of Tiridates III, who sought refuge in Rome following Narseh's invasion of Armenia in 296, remains unclear.

² Aa, 37-40.

³ MX, 2.82; Ux. 1.78-79; SA, 365.

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accurate interpretation of Tiridates's actions. Although inconsistent in details, Agat'angelos' account that Tiridates participated in a battle alongside Licinius might help explain why it was Tiridates, rather than Tiridates III, who ascended to the Armenian throne in 299.⁴ However, Armenian historical tradition exhibits conflicting statements on this matter. While Agat'angelos asserts that Tiridates IV fought with Licinius, Movsēs Xorenac'i narrates the same story without naming the emperor, aligning it with the Gothic attack during the time of Tacitus or Probus. Consequently, it remains uncertain whether the story pertains to Tiridates III or IV.⁵ If Agat'angelos' narrative indeed refers to Tiridates IV, the battle involving Licinius would likely be the one against Narseh in 298. Eutropius mentions that Licinius fought under his old friend Galerius against the Sasanians.⁶ Therefore, it is plausible that Tiridates IV, under Licinius' protection, also participated in these battles, and according to Toumanoff's calculations, Tiridates IV would have been approximately 17 years old at the time.⁷ Another possibility is that Agat'angelos confused Licinius with Gallienus, who reigned as emperor from 253 to 268 since Gallienus' full name was Publius Licinius Egnatius Gallienus Augustus.

Although Armenian sources do not provide sufficient details, they do attribute a positive image to Tiridates IV (assuming it is indeed Tiridates IV) through his skills demonstrated in a battle. Agat'angelos, in particular, vividly depicts Tiridates IV's extraordinary heroism during a siege alongside Licinius and Licinius' admiration for him in an epic manner.⁸ This portrayal suggests that Tiridates IV was honoured by the Emperor and allowed to become the new king of Armenia. Upon his return to Armenia, Tiridates faced a large Sasanian army.⁹ Having been raised in Roman territories, the new king was well-versed in both language and military matters. Upon his arrival, he was welcomed by the *naxarars*, who were weary of Sasanian rule. Soon after, he announced the appointment of Awtay, who had raised his sister Xosroviduxt, as *hazarapet*.¹⁰ Subsequently, Tiridates went to the town of Erēz in Acilisene, where he offered sacrifices to Anahita before setting up camp beside the Gayl River.¹¹ According to Movsēs Xorenac'i's notes, after a period of engaging in battles, the Armenian king married Ašxēn, who was likely the daughter of the Alan king Ašxadar.¹²

While Tiridates was implementing reforms in governance and internal politics, the border changes stipulated by the Treaty of Nisibis began to be enforced. The regions that had become independent satrapies were organized as Roman vassals.¹³ Shortly thereafter,

⁴ Aa, 39-41.

⁵ Aa, 41-45; MX, 2.79.

⁶ Eutr. 10.4.

⁷ Toumanoff 1963, p. 270.

⁸ Aa, 42-44.

⁹ Aa, 47. Moreover, from a chronological point of view, Agat'angelos' narrative is erroneous. Because by the time Tiridates IV reached Armenia (probably 299), the Sasanians had already been repulsed by Galerius.

¹⁰ MX, 2:82.

¹¹ Thomson 1976, p. 459. See also, Aa, 48; Hübschmann 1969, p. 415-416.

¹² Aa, 763, 791; MX, 2.82-83.

¹³ [*civitates foederatae liberae et immunes*]. See, Garsoïan 1997, p. 75.

the political situation between Rome and Persia shifted, and in 302, Narseh died, succeeded by his eldest son, Ohrmezd II.¹⁴ According to the *Chronicles of Seert* and *Arbela*, Ohrmezd ascended the throne at the end of 302 or the beginning of 303, and to avenge his father, Narseh, launched attacks on Roman territories, plundering numerous Roman cities.¹⁵

Ohrmezd likely did not attack Roman territories, but significant developments were occurring in the Roman Empire during his reign in Persia. The most notable of these changes was the death of Constantius Chlorus in 306 and the ascent of his son, Constantine, to the position of *caesar/augustus* in the western part of the Empire.¹⁶ Following Diocletianus's abdication in 305 and Constantine's rise, the tetrarchic system experienced fractures and subsequent internal strife, leading to a temporary reduction in focus on Iran and Armenia. This situation persisted until 310, when a series of campaigns led by Maximinus II (Maximinus Daia, 311-313), who was *caesar* in the East, against the Sasanians began to address these issues.¹⁷ Eusebius, albeit ambiguously, interprets Maximinus's campaign against Armenia in the context of Christianity.¹⁸ However, it remains unclear whether Maximinus's persecution of Christianity, which began after 311 and was designated as *religio licita*, was carried out in the region of Armenia or Armenia Minor.¹⁹

At the beginning of 313, Constantine and Licinius met in Milan and approved the Edict of Milan (Edictum Mediolanense), which granted Christianity legal status—though its authenticity is debated.²⁰ The Edict's implementation in the West and its subsequent proclamation in Nicomedia following the death of Maximinus II, who had been ousted by Licinius in the same year, had a profound impact on Roman society. Similarly, the political and religious atmosphere created by the Edict of Milan led to a rapid shift in Armenia's internal and external political balance, distinct from traditional narratives, with Tiridates IV converting to Christianity around 313/4. From the early fourth century, Armenian history became inextricably linked with Christianity, marking the beginning of a new relationship between the Roman Empire and the region of Armenia through the lens of Christianity. Additionally, the situation of Šābuhr II, who ascended the Sasanian throne in 309 while still an infant, further accelerated Roman influence over Armenia.²¹ Thus, while the 310s may appear as a period in which the Romans focused on internal matters and suspended foreign policy, it was a time of intensified interaction between Armenia and Rome through Christianity.

¹⁴ Taberī, 1.836.

¹⁵ *Chron. Seert*. 12; *Chron. Arbela*. 11; Shahbazi 2004, p. 464-465.

¹⁶ Aa, 867; MX, 2.83.

¹⁷ Barnes 1982, p. 66. For discussions on the Armenian campaign of Maximinus II, see, Mosig-Walburg 2006, p. 253-255.

¹⁸ Euseb. *HE*, 9.8.

¹⁹ The Edict of Serdica (Nicomedia), issued by Galerius on April 30, 311, brought the last major prosecution of Christianity to an end. See, Lac. *DMP*, 34-35; Euseb. *HE*, 8.17.

²⁰ Lac. *DMP*, 48.4.

²¹ *Forty days passed, and then a child was born to the fair woman like the shining sun*. See, Firdevsî, 1431.

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Tracing the course of relations between Rome and Armenia until 323 AD, excluding the influence of Christianity, is quite challenging. This is because contemporary sources from that period largely focused on Christianity, taking advantage of the intermittent wars between Rome and Persia. Consequently, there is little detailed information about the period until the Sasanian king Šābuhr's (step) brother Ohrmezd sought refuge under the protection of Constantinus I via Armenia.²² According to the pagan historian Zosimus, who provides the most straightforward account of Ohrmezd's escape to the Romans in 323/4 AD, Ohrmezd, with the help of his wife, fled to his *friend*, King Tiridates of Armenia, and eventually reached Constantinus's court with Tiridates' assurance. This incident indicates that Tiridates sided with Constantinus in his rivalry with Licinius.²³ It is even possible that Constantinus and Tiridates made a secret pact against Licinius in 314 AD.²⁴ This alliance continued harmoniously at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, which addressed Christian matters. Just before 325 AD, Tiridates travelled to Rome to meet Constantinus personally, and Armenia was represented at the Council by *kat'olikos* Grigor's son, Rstakēs.²⁵

The new order that Tiridates sought to establish within the Roman Empire's sphere, alongside the adoption of Christianity, led to a power struggle with the *naxarars*, an aristocratic class in Armenia that rejected Christianity. The Sasanians, who aimed to keep Armenia from drifting away from Zoroastrianism, exploited this situation. According to Taberī, while Tiridates was in Rome, Šābuhr, at the age of 16, had grown strong enough to seize control of the Sasanian administration.²⁶ Movsēs Xorenac'i's chronologically inaccurate account suggests that during Tiridates's absence, Šābuhr incited northern tribes to attack Armenia and stirred conflicts among the *naxarars*.²⁷ Upon returning from Rome, Tiridates found that the Slkuni family had fortified and settled in Olakan Castle, rebelling against Armenia's central authority. In response, Tiridates gathered all the *naxarar* families and offered *permanent power, villages, properties, and the lands of the Slkuni family to anyone who could bring him the prince of the Slkuni family*. According to Movsēs Xorenac'i's account, it was the Mamikonean family that fulfilled Tiridates's request, a family that would hold significant influence over the Armenian region for centuries.²⁸

In addition to the internal political arrangements in Armenia, Tiridates, according to Movsēs Xorenac'i, launched a campaign towards the northern Gargar region,²⁹ asserting dominance over the local populations. Following this success, he gathered

²² Zos. 2.27. On the other hand, Constantinus I appointed Ohrmezd as the commander of a cavalry unit to benefit him in the wars against the Sasanians. See also, Amm. Marc. 16.10.16; Ioan. Antioc. F. 178; Zon. 13.5.

²³ MX, 2.88.

²⁴ Honigmann 1953, p. 18-25; Lightfoot 2008, p. 495.

²⁵ Aa, 873.

²⁶ Taberī, 1.838-839.

²⁷ Movsēs Xorenac'i confused the reigns of Šābuhr I and Šābuhr II. See, MX, 2.84.

²⁸ Skold 1925, p. 134-135.

²⁹ Hübschmann 1969, p. 273-274; Thomson 1978, p. 236.

troops from the northern tribes and marched against Šābuhr.³⁰ The *K'art'lis C'xovreba* records that Tiridates also fought against the Georgian king Mirian III (284-361) in the north, gaining considerable fame from these battles.³¹ Besides his northern achievements, Tiridates's campaign extended into northern Iran, where he captured Ecbatana (Hamadan) and appointed a governor there. Movsēs Xorenac'i, with a chronological error of 5-6 years, suggests that Šābuhr proposed peace to Constantinus following these events.³² However, according to Eusebius, the peace agreement occurred in 336 AD, by which time Tiridates had already passed away.³³ In a chronologically inconsistent account, the *K'art'lis C'xovreba* states that Šābuhr proposed to Mirian to jointly attack Roman territories, leading Mirian to invade the Roman Empire through Armenia with an army *as numerous as the grasses and trees*. However, this campaign did not yield significant success, and both Šābuhr and Mirian eventually made peace with Constantinus, ending the expedition. This peace also reconciled Mirian with Tiridates, and to solidify their alliance, Mirian's son Rev II (345-361) married Tiridates's daughter, Salome.³⁴

Naxarar Opposition and the Internal Reckoning

Tiridates, who implemented radical changes in Armenia's political and religious life, was likely poisoned by *naxarars* who opposed Christianity in 330 AD.³⁵ His assassination was a direct challenge by the *naxarars* to the Armenian monarchy and church. This event quickly led to conflicts among the *naxarars*, and shortly thereafter, around 333 AD, the leader of the Armenian Church, *kat'olikos* Rstakēs, met the same fate as Tiridates.³⁶ Seizing the opportunity created by the deaths of these two leaders, some *naxarars* initiated uprisings in their regions to exploit the resulting power vacuum.³⁷

Following Tiridates's assassination, his son, Khosrov III (330-c. 338), ascended to the Armenian throne. However, Khosrov's reign was not recognized by the Sasanian-aligned and anti-Christian *naxarars*. The local rulers Bakur of Aġjnik' (Arzanena) and Sanatruk of Caspiana (P'aytakaran), who were not of the Aršakid lineage and thus lacked claims to the Armenian throne, rebelled against the Armenian monarchy, seeking independence and allying with Šābuhr. In response, the pro-monarchy *naxarars* in

³⁰ MX, 2.85; MD, 1.12; Asolik, 2.1. Tiridates also appointed Georgian Prince Mihran, *aspet* Bagarat, Rštunik' Prince Manachihhr and Amatunik' Prince Vahan as commanders. See, MX, 2.85.

³¹ Asolik, 2.1; *K'C'*, 43.

³² MX, 2.87; Thomson 1978, p. 242.

³³ Euseb. *Vit. Const.* 4.57. The peace between Rome and Persia was instrumental in Helena's discovery of the holy cross, which is often mentioned in the Christian literary tradition. Helena, the mother of Constantinus I, who went to Jerusalem after the peace, found 5 nails along with the holy cross. See, Soc. *HE*, 1.17; Soz. *HE*, 2.1; Theod. *HE*, 1.17; Malal., *Chron.* 13.5; MX, 2.87; Barnes 2014, p. 30-33.

³⁴ *K'C'*, 44.

³⁵ MX, 2.92.

³⁶ P'B, 3.2; MX, 2.91.

³⁷ Kulikowski 2016, p. 279.

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Armenia, led by *kat'olikos* Vrt'anēs, mobilized support.³⁸ They sent letters and gifts to Constantinus, along with Mar, the lord of Sophene (Tsop'k'), and Gag, the lord of Haštēank', urging him to recognize Khosrov as king.³⁹

There is no information in Roman sources or other Armenian accounts regarding the letter that Movsēs Xorenac'i claims was sent to Constantius II [*sic*], promising to hand over Armenia to the *impious Iranians*. Only *Buzandaran* recalls that Tiridates had sought help from the Romans, noting Constantinus I's visit, but most likely refers to the period after the Sasanian capture of Tiran (*ca.* 338-350), who succeeded Khosrov III as king.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the confusion among Armenian sources regarding the distinctions between Constantinus I, Constantius II, and Constantius I led to Constantius II being erroneously considered the Roman Emperor from 324 AD. Constantius II became emperor only after 337 AD, while Khosrov had been ruling Armenia since 330 AD. Similarly, Movsēs Xorenac'i incorrectly asserts that Constantius II [*sic*] responded to the letter by sending troops to Armenia, resulting in the proclamation of Khosrov as king.⁴¹

Khosrov's rule was accepted within the monarchy due to his Aršakid lineage. However, discord and conflicts among the *naxarars* increased significantly. To maintain control over Armenia, Khosrov reorganized his armies, appointing *aspet* Bagarat to the western forces, the Georgian prince and *bdeašx* of Gogarena, Mihran to the northern forces, the Amatunik' prince Vahan to the eastern forces, and the Rštunik' prince Manachihhr to the southern forces.⁴² It is likely that the military distribution provided by Movsēs Xorenac'i, which might not be unique to Khosrov's reign, actually reflects a military reorganization following a campaign by Tiridates in the Gargar region.⁴³

The extent of Khosrov's control over Armenia remained unclear until 333 AD. However, following the death of *kat'olikos* Rīstakēs in 333, Vrt'anēs succeeded him, necessitating cooperation between the monarchy and the church to protect their mutual interests. Khosrov and *kat'olikos* Vrt'anēs worked together to end the *naxarar* conflicts and establish the authority of both the monarchy and the church. To address the ongoing violent disputes between the Manawazean and Orduni families, Bishop Aḅbianos was dispatched to the region, but his efforts were unsuccessful. Consequently, Vač'ē, son of Artawazd from the Mamikonean family, who was the *sparapēt* (commander-in-chief) of Armenia, took decisive action against the two families. He eliminated them and allocated their lands to the *dioceses* of Manazkert and Basean.⁴⁴

Khosrov's actions had a significant impact on the central regions of Armenia, but rebellions in the border areas and pro-Sasanian policies persisted. In 335 AD, Sanēsan,

³⁸ MX, 3.4; MD, 1.12; Asoḷik, 2.1. On the other hand, Movsēs Xorenac'i, using faulty chronology, states that Armenia allied with Ohrmezd II. However, Ohrmezd II reigned from 302-309, and Khosrov's accession was approximately 330. Therefore, it should be Šābuhr II, not Ohrmezd II.

³⁹ MX, 3.4-5.

⁴⁰ P'B, 3.21; Thomson 1978, p. 258.

⁴¹ MX, 3.5.

⁴² MX, 3.VI; MD, 1.1.2.

⁴³ MX, 2.85.

⁴⁴ P'B, 3.4. Asoḷik, 2.1.

the king of Mazk'ut'k' (Gogarena/Iberia), rebelled against Khosrov. Leading a large army, including nomads, Sanēsan crossed the Kura River into Armenian territory.⁴⁵ His forces looted Armenia, killed Mihran, the *bdeašx* of Gogarena, and besieged Vaḥaršapat. According to *Buzandaran*, Khosrov fled from the battle. However, upon learning of the situation, *sparapēt* Vač'ē and the eastern and western armies of Armenia arrived and succeeded in driving the rebels back.⁴⁶

After subduing northern Armenia, Khosrov turned his attention to the south, where the Bžnuni family, allied with Šābuhr, posed a challenge. During this period, Khosrov constructed a new capital called Dwin and built a grand palace and garden known as X(Kh)osrovakert.⁴⁷ However, he received alarming news from the regions of Hēr and Zarawand, reporting that the Sasanians had advanced west of Lake Van to Xlat', plundering the cities there. Khosrov requested that Prince Databē of the Bžnuni family lead Armenian forces against the Sasanians. However, Databē, aspiring to become the king of Armenia, defied Khosrov's orders and sought an alliance with the Sasanians. Additionally, a large portion of the Armenian army was annihilated in a surprise attack orchestrated by Databē. Upon learning of Databē's betrayal, Khosrov sent *sparapēt* Vač'ē on a campaign to the south against Databē and his Sasanian allies. Under Vač'ē's leadership, the Armenian forces eventually captured Databē, who, according to *Buzandaran*, was stoned to death.⁴⁸ In the same region, another rebel against Khosrov was Bakur, the *bdeašx* of Ałjnik' (Arzanena). Bakur's claim to the Armenian throne, supported by Šābuhr, was quickly ended by a defeat against the Armenian monarchy or the forces of Constantius II, who was *caesar* in the east at the time.⁴⁹

While the Armenian monarchy dealt with its regional issues, relations between Rome and Iran began to deteriorate after a long period of calm. In 336 AD, the turmoil among the *naxarars* in Armenia and the intensification of conflicts between pagans and Christians provided various pretexts for both the Romans and the Sasanians to become actively involved in resolving the problems in Armenia. Following his role as *caesar* of the East since 324 AD, Constantius II was succeeded in 336 AD by Hannibalianus, the nephew of Constantinus I, as king of Pontus, Armenia Minor, and Cappadocia.⁵⁰ Hannibalianus's appointment was linked to the political and religious chaos in Armenia as well as the Sasanian's invasions of Roman and Armenian territories.⁵¹ In the same year,

⁴⁵ P'B, 3.7. The regions where Sanēsan gathered armies were Honk' (Huns), P'oxk', Hečmatakk', Ižmaxk', Gat'k', Głuark', Gugark', Šičbk', Čilbk', Bałasčik' and Egersuank'.

⁴⁶ MX, 3.9; Garsoian 1989, p. 523.

⁴⁷ P'B, 3.8; MX, 3.8; Asolik, 2.1.

⁴⁸ P'B, 3.8.

⁴⁹ Iulian, *Or.* 1.18D; P'B, 3.9; MX, 3.4; Marciak 2017, p. 250.

⁵⁰ [*Rex Regum et Ponticarum Gentium*]. See, Amm. Marc. 14.1.2; Iulian, *Or.* 1.13B; Zos. 2.39; *Chron. Pasch.* 532; *Exc. Val.* 6.35; Jones 1986, p. 85; Frakes 2012, p. 95.

⁵¹ Although the proclamation of Hannibalianus as king of Armenia may be seen as a temporary action, this development may be a symbolic indicator of the rapprochement of relations between Armenia and the Roman Empire. See, Barnes 1985, p. 132; Potter 2004, p. 461; Lenski 2012, p. 81.

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Šābuhr's brother, Narseh, besieged Amida, confronting Roman forces. According to Rufius Festus, Narseh was defeated in the Battle of Narasara and killed by the Romans.⁵²

Šābuhr's involvement in the disputes among the Armenian *naxarars* and his aggressive policy towards Roman territories were interpreted by Constantinus I as clear acts of war.⁵³ Consequently, Constantinus planned a campaign against the Sasanians at the beginning of 337 AD. However, before the preparations could be completed, he fell ill and died on May 22, 337, in Nicomedia.⁵⁴ Following Constantinus's death, the rivalry among the five *caesars* culminated in the assassination of his nephews, Dalmatius and Hannibalianus, who was referred to as the king of Armenia, by the imperial guards.⁵⁵ This eliminated the possibility of re-establishing the tetrarchy, and the governance of the Roman Empire was divided into three parts, shared among Constantinus's legitimate sons.⁵⁶ As a result, the eastern part of the empire, which included the Armenian region, came under the authority of Constantius II, who had already been active in the area.

Upon ascending to the role of *augustus* and taking control of the eastern regions of Anatolia, Constantius II wasted no time in moving to Antioch to counter Šābuhr's aggression.⁵⁷ By late 337 AD, the Sasanian armies had advanced as far as Nisibis, a key administrative centre since Diocletianus's reforms. Despite their progress, the Sasanians ultimately failed in their siege and were forced to retreat.⁵⁸ While Šābuhr's forces faced setbacks in southern Armenia, King Khosrov of Armenia died unexpectedly. According to *Buzandaran*, he was buried in Camacha (Ani-Kamax), where his ancestors were interred.⁵⁹ Khosrov's death added another dimension to the Roman-Sasanian rivalry.⁶⁰ Following his death, *kat'olikos* Vrt'anēs convened all Armenian *naxarars* and decided to request Constantius II to appoint Khosrov's son, Tiran, as the new king of Armenia. Learning of these developments, Šābuhr, according to Movsēs Xorenac'i, assembled a large army intending to install his brother, Narseh, as the king of Armenia. However, the ensuing battle at Mfūl resulted in heavy losses for the Roman-backed Armenian forces, but they managed to repel the Sasanian army. Thus, likely in 338 AD, Tiran became the new king of Armenia under the aegis of Constantius II.⁶¹ This strategic move by Constantius II ensured Armenia's allegiance to the Roman Empire throughout the 340s, marking a significant success for Roman influence in the region.

After Tiran ascended to the throne of Armenia, he gathered many *naxarars*, *hazarapets*, and *nahapets* following monarchical traditions and appointed Yusik, the son

⁵² Fest. *Brev.* 27. See also, Theoph. AM5815; Barnes 2014, p. 166; Crawford 2016, p. 50-51.

⁵³ Daryaee 2009, p. 17; Lenski 2016, p. 77.

⁵⁴ Euseb. *Vit. Const.* 4.64; Soc. *HE*, 1.39; Eutr. 10.8; Aur. *Vic.* 41.16-17; Oros. 7.31; Fest. *Brev.* 24; *Chron. Pasch.* 532; Theoph. AM5828; *Exc. Val.* 6.35; Phil. *HE*, 2.16; Barnes 1985, p. 132.

⁵⁵ Van Dam 2007, p. 118. Also see, Iulian, *Ep. ad Ath.* 270C; Soz. 2.40.

⁵⁶ Zos. 2.39; Jones 1986, p. 112; Humphries 2008, p. 99.

⁵⁷ Soc. *HE*, 2.7; Theod. *HE*, 2.26; Dignas and Winter 2007, p. 89.

⁵⁸ Amm. Marc. 19.9.6. Also see, Barhebraeus, *Chron.* 8; Iac. Ede. *Chron.* 13; *Chron. Pasch.* 533; Mich. Syr. *Chron.* 7.3.

⁵⁹ P'B, 3.11; MX, 3.10.

⁶⁰ MX, 3.10.

⁶¹ P'B, 3.12; MX, 3.10-11; Asohik, 2.1; T'A, 1.10; Redgate 2000, p. 133.

of Vrt'anēs, as the *kat'olikos*. Subsequently, Tiran swiftly made peace with the Sasanians and adopted a pragmatic policy of balance by paying tribute to both the Romans and the Sasanians.⁶² This alliance with the Sasanians proved so effective that Šābuhr II took measures to prevent northern tribes from attacking Armenia, thereby protecting the region from such invasions for nearly four years.⁶³ This significant development in foreign policy allowed Armenia some political respite. However, the local political situation remained tumultuous. According to Movsēs Xorenac'i, although Tiran shared his father Khosrov's religious sensibilities, he secretly abandoned Christianity.⁶⁴ Tiran's drift from Christianity and his tendency to relax church laws not only strained the relationship between the monarchy and the church but also intensified conflicts among key *naxarar* families. Consequently, Tiran soon found himself embroiled in power struggles with both the clergy and the *naxarars*.

As Tiran struggled to consolidate his rule over Armenia amidst conflicts between the monarchy and the church, the war between Rome and Persia entered a new phase. Constantius II's crossing of the Tigris and capture of Sasanian cities intensified the conflict.⁶⁵ In 344, Sasanian forces besieged Singara (Sincar), but their attempt failed, forcing them to retreat. The failure of the Singara siege adversely affected Šābuhr, who sought to rectify the situation by launching a second siege of Nisibis in 345/6.⁶⁶ However, this second attempt also failed after 73 days, further diminishing Šābuhr's position.⁶⁷

In the context of Constantius II's significant successes against the Sasanians, sources on Armenia's position during this period remain notably silent. Armenian historical records from this time focus on criticizing King Tiran's policies and his stance against Christianity. A notable event was the death of *kat'olikos* Yusik I in 346/7.⁶⁸ According to *Buzandaran*, Yusik had prevented Tiran from participating in church celebrations in Sophene (Tsop'k'), leading to Tiran's rage. He had Yusik beaten and killed.⁶⁹ The death of Yusik severed the already fragile ties between the church and the monarchy. In a further act of brutality, Tiran also had the former priest Daniel, who had *criticized* and *cursed* him, executed by strangulation.⁷⁰ These tragic events profoundly disturbed Armenia's clergy and left lasting damage to the relationship between the church

⁶² MX, 3.11.

⁶³ MX, 3.12.

⁶⁴ MX, 3.11.

⁶⁵ Iulian, *Or.* 1.22 A-D; Athan. *Hist. Ar.* 3.16.

⁶⁶ Iulian, *Or.* 1.22D-25B; Fest. *Brev.* 27; Eutr. 10.10; Ier. *Chron.* 281h; Amm. Marc. 18.5.7; Soc. *HE*, 2.25. Also see, Maróth 1979, p. 239-243; Dodgeon and Lieu 2005, p. 159-167; Harrel 2016, p. 80-81.

⁶⁷ Ier. *Chron.* 281h; Theoph. AM5838. See also, *Not. Dig. Or.* 36.29.

⁶⁸ P'B, 3.12-13.

⁶⁹ P'B, 3.12-13; MX, 3.14. Although Movsēs Xorenac'i says that the *kat'olikos* Husik was killed because he refused to allow the portrait of the Roman Emperor Iulianus [*sic*] into the church, this information is not chronologically possible.

⁷⁰ P'B, 3.14; MX, 3.14.

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and the monarchy. By 348, *kat'olikos* P'arēn had to overlook Tiran's actions due to the severity of the ongoing conflicts.⁷¹

Although *kat'olikos* P'arēn chose to overlook King Tiran's negative attitude towards Christianity, the situation was different for Christian *naxarars*. While Movsēs Xorenac'i's chronology may be misleading, sources indicate that Prince Zawray of the Rštunik' family, commander of the southern armies of Armenia, *opposed the king following the assassination of the kat'olikos*.⁷² Zawray instructed his troops to disregard the statements of the *kat'olikos*'s assassin. Noticing this, King Tiran besieged Alt'amar Island and eliminated Zawray along with his family when he saw that Zawray was left isolated by other princes. Tiran's aggressive stance towards the prominent *naxarars* of Armenia was not limited to these events.⁷³ The Rštunik' and Artsruni families were annihilated in their entirety by the royal armies without any charges. These actions reflect Tiran's harsh and ruthless policy against both Christian communities and the powerful families within his monarchy.⁷⁴

The disruption of delicate social and political balances by the King of Armenia led to the acquisition of numerous enemies rather than allies. According to Movsēs Xorenac'i's account, despite its flawed chronology, and the narrative of *Buzandaran*, this situation culminated in the blinding of Tiran by Šābuhr. It is noted that the *naxarars* did not intervene in this event.⁷⁵ Essentially, the capture and blinding of Tiran by the Sasanians represent an additional dimension of Šābuhr's policies against Constantius II. During the same period, Šābuhr's forces also besieged Nisibis for the third time, targeting the city.⁷⁶ Emperor Iulianus's *Panegyric* on Constantius II provides intriguing details about Šābuhr's strategic manoeuvres and the siege process, while Libanius likened the battle of Nisibis to *a naval battle fought on dry land*.⁷⁷ In the conflict of 350, Šābuhr was again unsuccessful, and the contemporary engagements of the Sasanians Empire with the eastern Huns and the Romans with internal strife compelled both Šābuhr and Constantius II into a brief period of peace.⁷⁸

The peace between Rome and Iran, following prolonged conflicts, afforded both states a respite. During this period, the idea of exchanging prisoners and restructuring Armenia culminated in the ascension of Tiran's son, Aršak II (circa 350-367), to the Armenian throne, despite Tiran having been blinded by Šābuhr.⁷⁹ The coronation of Aršak as the King of Armenia was perceived as a positive development more for the Sasanians than for the Romans. According to *Buzandaran*, Aršak fought against the

⁷¹ P'B, 3.14-16; MX, 3.16.

⁷² MX, 3.15.

⁷³ MX, 3.15.

⁷⁴ P'B, 3.18; T'A, 1.10.

⁷⁵ P'B, 3.20; MX, 3.17; MD, 1.13; Baynes 1910, p. 627; Garsoïan 1997, p. 85.

⁷⁶ Smith 2016, p. 66.

⁷⁷ Iulian, *Or.* 1.27B-D, 2.62D; *Lib. Or.* 18.208; *Chron. Pasch.* 539; Theoph. AM5841; Zon. 13.7.

⁷⁸ Phil. *HE*, 2.22; Iulian, *Or.* 1.26D-27A; Iac. Ede. *Chron.* 19, 27; Lightfoot 1988, p. 112; Daryaeae 2009, p. 17.

⁷⁹ P'B, 4.1; MX, 3.18; MD, 1.13; T'A, 1.10.

Romans on the Sasanian's side during the siege of Nisibis and pledged his loyalty to Šābuhr after becoming king. By strengthening his influence over the Armenian throne in this manner, Šābuhr replaced Vahan Amatuni, the commander of Armenia's eastern armies, with Vañinak, the Siwnik' prince who had suppressed Bakur's rebellion in the 330s and was closer to Šābuhr.⁸⁰ Following his ascension, Aršak, like his predecessors, sought to resolve Armenia's internal issues and took various measures to alleviate the friction and unrest among the *naxarars*. In this context, he restored the status of the Artsruni, Rštunik', and Mamikonean families, whose properties had been confiscated during his father Tiran's reign, and appointed Vasak of the Mamikonean family as *sparapēt* of the army.⁸¹

During the same period, the reforms initiated by Aršak also precipitated internal conflicts within the royal family. The most notable of these disputes involved Prince Gnel, the son of Tiran and cousin of Aršak, who was unjustly subjected to persecution. According to Movsēs Xorenac'i's account, before his death, Tiran bequeathed his entire estate to his grandson Gnel. This decision not only created tension between Aršak and his cousin Gnel but also unsettled Aršak due to Gnel's residence in Ayrarat. Aršak, asserting that *only kings could reside in Ayrarat*, sent a letter to Gnel demanding that he vacate the region.⁸² Consequently, Gnel complied with the king's order, leaving Kuaš and moving south to settle in Añovit and Arberan.⁸³

In addition to his reforms among the *naxarars* and the royal family, Aršak temporarily improved the relationship between the monarchy and the church by restoring the office of the *kat'olikos* to the clergy descended from Saint Grigor. In 353, Nerses I, who was related to the Mamikonean family that held Armenia's military power, was appointed as *kat'olikos*.⁸⁴ The appointment of Nerses I became a pivotal factor in reshaping the relations between Armenia and Rome through his influence. According to a misinterpreted retrospective account by Movsēs Xorenac'i, fearing an attack on Armenia by Theodosius, a general of Roman Emperor Valentinian (364-375), Aršak sent *kat'olikos* Nerses I to Constantinople with a substantial sum of money and several *naxarars*.⁸⁵ Valentinian, favourably disposed towards Nerses I's mission, not only released the hostages but also sent Olympias, a member of the imperial family, to Aršak II as his bride, thereby creating a dynastic bond between the Romans and Armenians against the Sasanians. A more reliable source, Ammianus Marcellinus, writes that in 358, Constantius II pardoned Aršak and, to secure the Armenian king's allegiance against the Sasanians, sent Olympias, the daughter of Ablabius, to Aršak.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ MX, 3.18.

⁸¹ P'B, 4.2, 4.16; *Nersēs, St. Vita*, 2; T'A, 1.10.

⁸² The traditional narrative is that Gnel's cousin Tirit tricked Vardan of the Mamikonean family into encouraging the king to do so. See, MX, 3.22.

⁸³ MX, 3.22.

⁸⁴ On the other hand, St. Sahak, who was to be *kat'olikos* from 387-428, would be born from this kinship. See, *Nersēs, St. Vita*, 2.

⁸⁵ MX, 3.21.

⁸⁶ Amm. Marc. 20.11.1-3. See also, P'B, 4.15; *Nersēs, St. Vita*, 8; MX, 3.21.

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Constantius II's strategic alignment with Aršak was a crucial step in countering the impending Sasanian threat. In 358, Šābuhr, the Sasanian king, sent a letter to Constantius II that began with the words, *I, Šābuhr, king of kings, brother of the sun and the moon, and companion of the stars*. In his letter, Šābuhr asserted that Armenia and Mesopotamia, which were deceitfully taken from the Sasanians, were their rightful inheritance and should be returned.⁸⁷ The reference to the *deceitful* acquisition of Armenia in Šābuhr's letter likely alludes to the peace treaty of 299. A story recounted by *Buzandaran* from the same period sheds light on why Šābuhr used the term *deceit*. According to the narrative, Andovk, the *nahapet* of Siwnik', and Aršawir, the *nahapet* of Aršarunik', disguised themselves as peasants and infiltrated Sasanian territories to learn the empire's weaknesses. They then conveyed this intelligence to Galerius, enabling the Romans to secure victory.⁸⁸ Thus, Šābuhr's claim underscores his belief that the Romans had unfairly won the war and forcibly seized his ancestral lands.

Constantius II, undeterred by the Sasanian threat, replied to Šābuhr in a similar tone, stating that it was impossible to cede Roman territories to the Sasanians.⁸⁹ Consequently, in 359, the Sasanians besieged Amida, a city that Constantius II had fortified with strong walls and towers.⁹⁰ The Roman legions, unable to withstand Šābuhr's forces, lost Amida after a 73-day siege.⁹¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, who recounted his escape from the intense siege of Amida, listed the allies who supported Šābuhr but did not mention the presence of Armenian forces during the siege.⁹² In contrast, *Buzandaran* claimed that Aršak participated in the battle alongside Šābuhr with a substantial army. Movsēs Xorenac'i, despite some inconsistencies, stated that Aršak remained loyal to Constantius II but sent a small contingent to the battle to deceive Šābuhr. Therefore, it remains unclear whether Armenia supported Šābuhr during the siege of Amida. After capturing Amida, the advancing Sasanian forces also seized other significant centres such as Singara and Bezabde. To retain Aršak's allegiance, Constantius II offered a special proposal exempting Armenia from taxation.⁹³ Although it is difficult to ascertain the success of Constantius II's efforts, Šābuhr's siege of Tigranocerta may have nullified any potential Armenia-Sasanian alliance.⁹⁴ However, determining the exact timing of Šābuhr's siege of Tigranocerta is challenging due to the relative chronology presented by Movsēs Xorenac'i. A similar account is attributed to 367 by *Buzandaran*.⁹⁵

⁸⁷ [*Ideoque Armeniam recuperare cum Mesopotamia debeo, avo meo composita fraude praereptam*]. See, Amm. Marc. 17.5.3-7; Kaçar 2008, p. 9.

⁸⁸ P'B, 3.21.

⁸⁹ Amm. Marc. 17.5.10-15; Isaac 2000, p. 23.

⁹⁰ Amm. Marc. 18.9.1; Lightfoot 1989, p. 285-294; Lenski 2007, p. 222. Also see, Iac. Ede. *Chron.* 21-22; Chaumont 1985, p. 808; Blockley 1988, p. 244-260; Dodgeon and Lieu 2005, p. 168, 182.

⁹¹ Amm. Marc. 19.9.9; Zon. 13.9.

⁹² Amm. Marc. 18.6.22, 19.1.4-12, 19.8.5; Minorsky 1958, p. 12.

⁹³ Amm. Marc. 20.6.1, 30.7.1, 20.11.1. Constantius II, on the other hand, made similar attempts to keep Iberia alongside Armenia. See, Amm. Marc. 21.6.8.

⁹⁴ MX, 3.26.

⁹⁵ P'B, 4.58.

During the siege of Tigranocerta, the city was defended by Antiochus, the prince of Siwnik', and the Sasanian forces, unable to capture the city, were compelled to return to Nisibis. Following this failure, Šābuhr's letter to Aršak reflects the Sasanian king's intense anger: *I will annihilate you with my fury.*⁹⁶ Ignoring Šābuhr's letter, Commander Antiochus soon found the Sasanian forces once again besieging the city. The city, supported by the Romans, was destroyed and set ablaze at the end of the siege. Šābuhr's rage towards the resistance at Tigranocerta was so severe that, after capturing the city, he sent a messenger to Aršak demanding the annihilation of the Siwnik' family for their defence of Tigranocerta.⁹⁷

The political rivalry and shifting balance between Rome and Iran significantly impacted Armenia's position, while Aršak faced his internal uncertainties. Indeed, following 359, the harmony between the monarchy and the church began to give way to disputes and bloody conflicts. Having previously experienced discord with Prince Gnel, Aršak ordered Vardan Mamikonean to have Gnel killed, making it appear as though the death was accidental.⁹⁸ According to Movsēs Xorenac'i's account, Aršak feigned sorrow by requesting that his cousin Gnel be buried in the royal city of Zarišat.⁹⁹

The killing of Gnel exacerbated tensions between the monarchy and the church. Aršak had taken Gnel's wife, P'arānjem, as his own and integrated her into the monarchy as his queen.¹⁰⁰ In response, *kat'olikos* Nerses I expressed condemnation towards King Aršak and his lineage.¹⁰¹ Although the exact impact of Nerses I's hostility towards the monarchy on Aršak is uncertain, it is evident that the repercussions of Gnel's death persisted for some time. According to a romanticized account by *Buzandaran*, Tirit, motivated by his love for Gnel's wife P'arānjem, orchestrated Gnel's death as part of a game and confessed his crime to P'arānjem. Upon learning of this, Aršak felt compelled to exact revenge by having his other cousin, Tirit, killed.¹⁰²

After ending the internal conflict within the royal family in a bloody manner, Aršak established a city named Aršakawan after himself and resettled many individuals who had been ostracized from society as criminals, murderers, and thieves. According to *kat'olikos* Nerses I, the king's actions were contrary to the principles of Christianity, and he was openly challenging the church. Additionally, the *naxarars*, disturbed by the resulting disorder and anarchy, urged Aršak to reconsider his decision. Nevertheless, Aršak persisted in fortifying Aršakawan and relocating people there, prompting the *naxarars* to send envoys to Šābuhr to complain about him. Seizing the opportunity to intervene, Šābuhr dispatched one of his commanders to pursue Aršak. Realizing he could not withstand the Sasanians, Aršak, according to Movsēs Xorenac'i, fled north and sought

⁹⁶ MX, 3.26.

⁹⁷ MX, 3.28.

⁹⁸ P'B, 4.15; ĞP', 1.15; MX, 3.22-23; Asoġik, 2.1.

⁹⁹ MX, 3.23.

¹⁰⁰ P'B, 4.15; MX, 3.22, 3.24; Asoġik, 2.1.

¹⁰¹ *Nersēs, St. Vita*, 7; MX, 3.24.

¹⁰² P'B, 4.15; MX, 3.25.

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refuge among the Georgians.¹⁰³ Taking advantage of Aršak's absence, Šābuhr's commander captured Ani Fortress along with its treasures, and with the assistance of the *naxarars*, the city of Aršakawan, along with its inhabitants, was burned and destroyed.¹⁰⁴ The destruction of Aršakawan led Aršak to gather an army from the Georgians to seek revenge and attack the *naxarars*.¹⁰⁵ In response to Aršak's movement against the feudal structure, the *naxarars*, led by the Kamsarakan family, united against him, and the church predominantly sided with the *naxarars* in the conflict between the monarchy and the *naxarars*. Even Xad, Bagrewand Bishop, reproached Aršak for attacking the *naxarars* but paid with his life for his stance.¹⁰⁶

The conflict between the *naxarars* and the monarchy also contributed to Armenia's vulnerability against the Sasanians. Observing this, *kat'olikos* Nerses I travelled to Roman territories to request support for Armenia and offered Pap, the son of Aršak, as a hostage to the Romans.¹⁰⁷ Armenian sources give the impression that *kat'olikos* Nerses made two trips to Roman lands. This is because Pap, who would later become king, was born to Aršak's other wife, P' aranjem, and this event likely occurred around 359 or 360.¹⁰⁸ However, it is also noted that Nerses had previously travelled to Roman territories following Gnel's death.¹⁰⁹ Thus, the chronology and frequency of Nerses's trips to Rome are inconsistent. Furthermore, according to Movsēs Xorenac'i, Nerses sent a letter to Emperor Valens [*sic*], but the letter was ignored. This process eventually led to *kat'olikos* Nerses and the *naxarars* accompanying him being exiled to a desolate desert island.¹¹⁰

The conflict between the Aršakid dynasty, which held the kingdom, and the clergy was also related to the excessive empowerment of the Armenian Church, which had gained the strength to challenge the monarchy. Consequently, Aršak removed *kat'olikos* Nerses I from office and appointed Č'unak, a loyalist, as the new *kat'olikos*.¹¹¹ Encouraged by this move, Aršak II once again sought revenge for the destruction of Aršakawan by attacking the *naxarars*. Specifically, the Kamsarakan family, which controlled Artagerk' and Eruandašat, became the target of the monarchy's forces, resulting in the deaths of all family members except Spandarar, the son of Aršavir, who managed to escape.¹¹² The properties of the *naxarars* affected by the monarchy's aggressive policies were directly annexed to the Armenian royal family, leading to a significant loss of power for the opposing princes. Suspicious of the Mamikonean family,

¹⁰³ MX, 3.27.

¹⁰⁴ P'B, 4.12-13; *Nersēs, St. Vita*, 7; MX, 3.27.

¹⁰⁵ MX, 3.29.

¹⁰⁶ MX, 3.29, 3.32.

¹⁰⁷ MX, 3.29.

¹⁰⁸ MX, 3.24.

¹⁰⁹ *Asolik*, 2.1.

¹¹⁰ MX, 3.29-30. *Buzandaran*, contrary to Movsēs Xorenac'i, states that the *kat'olikos* Nerses I was killed and the *naxarars* were sent back to Armenia. See, P'B, 4.5, 4.11.

¹¹¹ P'B, 4.15.

¹¹² P'B, 4.19; MX, 3.31.

which supported the monarchy, Aršak fortified Artagers Fortress as a precaution against *naxarars* seeking revenge.¹¹³

While Aršak was implementing stringent domestic policies, Constantius II had completed preparations for a campaign against *caesar* Iulianus, who had declared himself *augustus* in the western part of the empire and had set out westward. However, before the imperial forces could engage Iulianus's troops, Constantius II fell ill and died on November 3, 361, in Mopsuestia (Misis).¹¹⁴ Thus, Iulianus, whom the fourth century writer Gregory Nazianzen denounced as a *cousin killer* with religious fervour, arrived in the east with the legitimate title of Roman Emperor to wage war against the Sasanians.¹¹⁵ Seizing the opportunity presented by the political changes within the Roman Empire, Šābuhr sought to draw Armenia to his side and maintain a balance of power. He sent valuable gifts and envoys to Aršak. However, according to Ammianus Marcellinus, the Armenian king chose to remain allied with the Romans. Indeed, Iulianus, confident in Aršak's loyalty, ordered him to prepare a large army and join the Roman forces for the campaign against Ctesiphon.¹¹⁶ Although Movsēs Xorenac'i inaccurately refers to the Armenian king as Tiran [*sic*], it is confirmed that the Armenian forces did indeed join Iulianus in the attack against the Sasanians.¹¹⁷

Iulianus's journey from Antioch extended several months, culminating in various engagements up to Ctesiphon.¹¹⁸ The Armenian forces, joining Roman commander Sebastianus, advanced with a total of approximately 30,000 troops into Sasanian territory.¹¹⁹ Amidst ongoing conflicts between the Roman and Sasanian armies and the subsequent Roman withdrawal, Emperor Iulianus was struck by a spear on June 26, 363, *from an unknown source* and died.¹²⁰ Iulianus's unexpected death weakened the Roman Empire's position against the Sasanians, and his successor, Emperor Iovianus (363-364), completely lost the political and military advantage of the Romans against the Sasanians. Consequently, Emperor Iovianus either proposed a peace treaty to Šābuhr or accepted Šābuhr's offer of peace.¹²¹

Peace of Shame and Anarchy in Armenia: 363 Nisibis

Holding military superiority and inflicting serious losses on the Roman army in a short period, Šābuhr promised Emperor Iovianus that the remaining Roman forces would

¹¹³ P'B, 4.19.

¹¹⁴ Eutr. 10.15; Amm. Marc. 21.15.2-3; Theoph. AM5852; Iac. Ede. *Chron.* 30.

¹¹⁵ Lib. *Or.* 18.215; Eutr. 10.16; Greg. Naz. *Ep.* 3.1; Soz. *HE*, 6.1; MX, 3.13.

¹¹⁶ Amm. Marc. 23.3.5; Garsoïan 1997, p. 90.

¹¹⁷ MX, 3.13. See also, Shahbazi 2004, . 461-462.

¹¹⁸ *Epit. de Caes.* 43.1.

¹¹⁹ Bowersock 1978, p. 110.

¹²⁰ Amm. 25.3.1-15; Zos. 3.28-29; Fest. *Brev.* 28. Also see, Lib. *Or.* 18.274; Dodgeon and Lieu 2005, p. 205-206.

¹²¹ Zos. III.31. On the other hand, according to Malalas, when Šābuhr II learned of Iulianus' death, he sent a nobleman named Surenas to Persarmenia [*sic*] to ask for peace. See, Malal. *Chron.* 13.27.

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safely return if he accepted the peace terms. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, *prefects* Salutius and Arintheus, who conducted the peace negotiations on behalf of Iovianus, were left in difficult conditions and were forced to approve the treaty. The result was a peace treaty generally favourable to the Sasanians (*ignobile decretum*).¹²² According to the treaty, which was intended to last for 30 years, the five provinces beyond the Tigris – Arzanena, Moxoena, Zabdicena, Rehimena, and Corduena – along with several fortresses including Nisibis and Singara, were ceded back to the Sasanians.¹²³ While high-ranking prisoners of war were exchanged, the Roman Empire relinquished all rights in Armenia and Iberia.¹²⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, who was involved in the regional wars, describes the treaty, which he terms the *peace of shame*, and particularly the abandonment of Nisibis, with a tone of reproach, lamenting that *since the founding of Rome, no part of the empire had ever been surrendered to an enemy by an emperor or consul*.¹²⁵

During this process, Armenia's role as a loyal and faithful ally of the Roman Empire led to the inclusion of Armenia's position in the terms of the Peace of Nisibis.¹²⁶ This situation was, in a sense, based on the idea of punishing Armenia and rendered the region extremely vulnerable against the Sasanians. Indeed, *Buzandaran* states that the Romans explicitly approved remaining neutral and not assisting Aršak in the event of an attack on Armenia.¹²⁷ Furthermore, if the letter sent to Armenia by Emperor Valentinianus and his co-emperor Valens (364-378) in 364, as reported by Movsēs Xorenac'i, is not chronologically erroneous, it indicates that Aršak was also indifferent towards the Romans.¹²⁸

One year after the Peace of Nisibis, Šābuhr finally seized the opportunity to attack Armenia, which he had been waiting for some time. Armenian sources, particularly regarding the year 364, contain extensive information about the Sasanian advance and how Armenia responded to this advance. Initially attacking Atropatena (Atrpatakan), Šābuhr was repelled by the commander Vasak and, according to *Buzandaran*, the Sasanian king was forced to flee alone on horseback.¹²⁹ After a while, Šābuhr gathered his army again and attempted to attack Armenia using a new tactic by dividing his forces into three parts, but once again, he failed to achieve the desired result.¹³⁰

After several unsuccessful preliminary attacks by the Sasanians, Armenian sources, which portray the Armenian forces as *victorious*, claim that in the later months of 364, the treachery of an Armenian noble named Meružan Artsruni brought anarchy to

¹²² Amm. Marc. 25.7.1-13; Eutr. 10.18; Zos. 3.31; Soc. *HE*, 3.22; Firdevsî, 1451-1452; Mardirossian 2004, p. 6.

¹²³ Taberî, 1.843.

¹²⁴ Amm. Marc. 25.7.9-14; Zos. 3.31; Soc. *HE*, 3.22; Theoph. AM5856; Malal. *Chron.* 13.27.

¹²⁵ Amm. Marc. 25.9.9.

¹²⁶ Amm. Marc. 25.7.10-13.

¹²⁷ P'B, 4.21.

¹²⁸ MX, 3.19.

¹²⁹ P'B, 4.21.

¹³⁰ P'B, 4.22.

Armenia. According to the story, Meružan Artsruni, pretending to be a Christian, went to the Sasanian court to serve Šābuhr and guided the Sasanian armies in their attack on Armenia. Consequently, Šābuhr's forces quickly captured the regions of Arzanena (Ałjnik'), Sophene (Tsop'k'), Angeł-tun, Mzur, Daranalis (Daranalı), and Acilisene (Ekefeac'), causing significant destruction. Within the same year, major Armenian centres such as Tigranocerta, Zarišat, Artaxata, and Vałaršapat were destroyed by the Sasanian armies.¹³¹ The Sasanian assault on Armenia reached extremely destructive proportions, including the desecration of royal graves at Camacha (Ani-Kamax), where the remains were desecrated.¹³² According to *Buzandaran's* epic account, all the royal tombs, except for that of King Sanatruces, were opened and their treasures plundered.¹³³

It is clear that the Sasanians disrupted Armenia's internal peace and largely plunged the region into anarchy during this period. Although Armenian sources try to overshadow the destruction caused by Šābuhr with the various successes of *sparapēt* Vasak, Ammianus Marcellinus confirms that the Sasanian armies conducted intense attacks on Armenia, seemingly seeking revenge.¹³⁴ Moreover, the power vacuum caused by the Sasanians in Armenia does not align with the heroic narratives insistently highlighted by *Buzandaran* and casts doubt on the *authenticity* of Armenia's epic successes against commanders like Vin, Andikan, Hazarawuxt, and Dmawund Vsemakan.¹³⁵

Seeing Armenia's failure and the weakening of its central power, many *naxarars*, like Meružan Artsruni, converted to Zoroastrianism and thus aligned themselves with the Sasanians. Dozens of regions led by *bdeašx* of Ałjnik' (Arzanena), Nor Širakan, and Gugark' (Gogarena) rebelled against Aršak and pledged their allegiance to Šābuhr. Among those who joined the Sasanian side was Vahan, the brother of *sparapēt* Vasak, who had been deceived by Meružan Artsruni and had personally gone to the Sasanian court. To strengthen this strategic alliance, Šābuhr married his sister Ormizduxt (Ohrmozd-dokt) to Vahan, establishing a new blood connection with Armenia.¹³⁶ As a result, seeing that King Aršak had completely lost his administrative power, *kat'olikos* Nerses I made a final attempt to gather *naxarars* and other regional leaders, urging them to remain loyal to Armenia, but his efforts bore no fruit. Abandoned by both the Roman Emperor and the *bdeašx* and *naxarars*, King Aršak was forced to seek peace from Šābuhr around 364 or 367.¹³⁷ Consequently, Šābuhr ordered Aršak to come to his court personally. *Buzandaran*, who preserved the text of the dialogue between the two kings, recounts the joint exile and humiliation of Aršak and *sparapēt* Vasak Mamikonean.¹³⁸

¹³¹ P'B, 4.23-24; MX, 3.28; Baynes 1910, p. 636-637.

¹³² P'B, 4.24; MX, 3.27.

¹³³ Garsoian 2003, p. 66.

¹³⁴ Amm. Marc. 27.12.1-3.

¹³⁵ P'B, 4.26-50.

¹³⁶ P'B, 4.50.

¹³⁷ P'B, 4.51.

¹³⁸ Amm. Marc. 27.12.2-3; P'B, 4.54; MX, 3.35; T'A, 1.10; Curran 2008, p. 91.

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After Aršak was exiled to the fortress known as Andmāš (also known as Anuš), his wife P'aranjem, who took over the Armenian monarchy, tried to resist Šābuhr's armies but was unable to prevent the Sasanians from plundering Armenia. During her time in the fortified Artagers (Artagerk') Fortress with her supporters, cities such as Artaxata, Vałaršapat, Eruandašat, Zarišat, and Van were ravaged and destroyed down to their foundations.¹³⁹ Šābuhr, who established absolute dominance over Armenia, then turned his attention to Iberia in the 370s, deposing the Roman ally King Mirian III's son Saurmag II and installing his cousin Aspacures under his protection.¹⁴⁰

While P'aranjem was defending Armenia, Aršak, according to Movsēs Xorenac'i, committed suicide due to the calamities that befell Armenia while he was imprisoned in the fortress of Andmāš.¹⁴¹ However, Ammianus Marcellinus, who is considered more reliable than Movsēs Xorenac'i, states that Aršak did not commit suicide but was executed under torture with a sharp blade.¹⁴² The death of Aršak and the weakening of P'aranjem's power led to the Armenian monarchy being left without a king and to the further deterioration of the fragile bonds between the Romans and the Sasanians. This was since before the Sasanians captured Artagers Fortress, Aršak's son Pap had either been smuggled to Roman territories or had already left Armenia.¹⁴³ Supporting this view, Ammianus Marcellinus mentions that Valens had Pap lodged and educated in Neocaesarea in Pontus Polemoniacus, close to the Armenian border.¹⁴⁴ While Pap was in Roman territories, Queen P'aranjem likely sought the help of Cylaces and Arrabannes to place her son on the Armenian throne. Cylaces and Arrabannes, who spent the winter in Marcianopolis, approached Valens and requested support for Pap as the king of Armenia.¹⁴⁵ Consequently, not wanting to violate the Treaty of Nisibis of 363, Valens sent Pap to Armenia with the title of *comes et dux* (Tērent) and Adē, but without royal insignia and official support.¹⁴⁶

Learning of Pap's arrival in Armenia, Šābuhr launched another attack on Armenia around 370. Pap, realizing the power of the Sasanian forces and fearing for his safety, retreated to the mountainous regions in northern Armenia and sought refuge near Pontus.¹⁴⁷ Almost simultaneously with Pap's escape, the fortress of Artagers, which had been under siege for some time, finally fell into Sasanian hands. P'aranjem, who defended the fortress and the Armenian treasures, was ruthlessly killed, according to *Buzandaran's*

¹³⁹ P'B, 4.55; T'A, 1.10. See also, Christensen 1936, p. 233-234; Lenski 2002, p. 171-173.

¹⁴⁰ Amm. Marc. 27.12.4.

¹⁴¹ MX, 3.35.

¹⁴² Amm. Marc. 27.12.3.

¹⁴³ P'B, 4.55; MX, 3.35; Lee 2013, p. 30.

¹⁴⁴ Amm. Marc. 27.12.9; Them. *Or.* 8.116c; Dignas and Winter 2007, p. 183.

¹⁴⁵ MX, 3.36; Garsoïan 1969.

¹⁴⁶ Amm. Marc. 27.12.9-10; MX, 3.36; Braund 1994, p. 260; Rousseau 1994: 281; Greatrex 2000: 37; Cinemre 2024, p. 3.

¹⁴⁷ Amm. Marc. 27.12.11.

account.¹⁴⁸ After subjugating Armenia once again, Šābuhr appointed *ostikans* to oversee the region and then returned to Iran.¹⁴⁹

The increasing control of the Sasanian Empire over Armenia soon prompted Roman Emperor Valens to once again seek influence in Armenia through Pap. In this context, at the beginning of 370, Valens appointed the *magister peditum* Arintheus to organize the eastern border.¹⁵⁰ Learning that the Romans were refocusing on Armenia, Šābuhr attempted to bring Pap to his side through an emissary. Fearing another attack from Šābuhr and possibly the rejection of his kingship, Pap killed Cylaces and Arrabannes, who were resented by the Sasanians for their cooperation with the Romans, and sent their lifeless bodies to Šābuhr.¹⁵¹ When Valens found out that Pap was leaning towards Šābuhr, he promptly sent Arintheus to the region to counter any potential Sasanian attack. Hearing that Arintheus had arrived in Armenia and recognized Pap as king, Šābuhr sent an envoy to Valens, reminding him that he was violating the 363 Nisibis Treaty and should not defend Armenia.¹⁵² However, Valens disregarded Šābuhr's warning and dispatched Terentius with 12 legions to Iberia to reinstall Saurmag II as king. When the Roman forces reached the Kura River, Terentius negotiated with Saurmag and the current king, Aspacures, to divide Iberia into two administrative regions.¹⁵³ Valens' action to alter the status quo in Iberia and his disregard for the 363 Nisibis Treaty were interpreted by Šābuhr as a *casus belli*. Furthermore, Valens' arrival in Antioch in 370 after ending the Gothic wars, where he would stay for about eight years, resulted in a complete breakdown of relations between the Romans and Sasanians.¹⁵⁴

While the Romans and the Sasanians were inching closer to a new war, Pap appointed Mušeł Mamikonean as *sparapēt*, who then took action against many *naxarars* and various rebel regions that had revolted against King Aršak and attacked Armenia.¹⁵⁵ According to *Buzandaran's* account, the Sasanian commanders Karēn and Zik, along with their supporters in the Van region, were killed in Mušeł Mamikonean's swift and effective attacks.¹⁵⁶ Subsequently, Pap advanced to the centre of Armenia and captured the Dariwnk' Fortress, where the Aršakid treasures were kept. Additionally, Mazdean temples were destroyed, and the churches damaged by Šābuhr were restored. During this same period, Pap began to establish dominance over the *naxarars* and nobles. He sought to punish those responsible for his mother P'aranjem's death just as he had done for his father Aršak. King Pap sent a letter to Mušeł Mamikonean, who was at Olakan Fortress, instructing him to execute the hayr mardpet. Upon receiving the letter, Mušeł Mamikonean summoned the hayr mardpet, then had him thrown into the frozen Euphrates

¹⁴⁸ Amm. Marc. 27.12.12; P'B, 4.54.

¹⁴⁹ P'B, 4.56-58; Lenski 2002, p. 172.

¹⁵⁰ Amm. Marc. 27.12.13.

¹⁵¹ Amm. Marc. 27.12.14; Lenski 2002, p. 173.

¹⁵² Amm. Marc. 27.12.15.

¹⁵³ Amm. Marc. 27.12.16; Lenski 2002, p. 173.

¹⁵⁴ Soc. HE, 4.14; Soz. HE, 6.13; Malal. Chron. 13.29; Zos. 4.11; Jones 1986, p. 140; Greatrex 2000, p. 36.

¹⁵⁵ Garsoïan 1997, p. 90.

¹⁵⁶ P'B, 5.1.

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River during the winter, where he died.¹⁵⁷ Through Mušel Mamikonean's harsh policies, Pap managed to restore monarchical control over Armenia after approximately 4-5 years.

Pap, having relatively established the power of the monarchy and trying to control the internal anarchy in Armenia, found himself in a tense situation as the fragile peace between the Roman and Sasanian armies, established only eight years earlier in the 363 peace treaty, erupted into open conflict in 371 at Bagawan, located at the foot of Mount Tašteker (Niphaten).¹⁵⁸ According to Ammianus Marcellinus, when the Roman commanders Traianus and Vadomarius arrived at Bagawan with the intent of observing the Sasanians rather than engaging them, they were suddenly attacked by Sasanian forces and found themselves forced into breaking the peace and joining the battle.¹⁵⁹ However, *Buzandaran* presents a different account, stating that the Armenian and Roman armies were not taken by surprise but had instead prepared for the battle by digging trenches together. Adding to the accounts of the battle, Movsēs Xorenac'i, who mistakenly conflates the battles of Bagawan and Jirov, claims that Pap fought alongside the Romans and attributes the victory over the Sasanians to the prayers of *kat'olikos* Nerses on Mount Tašteker and the bravery of the Armenian armies.

The Armenian armies, having managed to halt the Sasanian activities in Armenia with the Battle of Bagawan, quickly launched a series of attacks towards the border regions of Armenia. Under the leadership of Mušel Mamikonean, the Armenian forces advanced into Atropatena, resulting in the temporary subjugation of regions and regional leaders (*ostikan*, *bdeašx*, *naxarar*) in areas such as Nor Širakan, Korduk', Kordik', Tmorik', Mark', Arc'ax, Ałuank', Kazbk', Virk', Ałjnik', Cop'k', Angeł-tun, and Anjit.¹⁶⁰ Following these efforts to regain lost power, Pap's adoption of Valens's moderate policies regarding Arianism led to a conflict with *kat'olikos* Nerses.¹⁶¹ Due to his perceived distance from the Christianity interpreted by the Armenian Church, Pap was labelled as irreligious by Armenian sources. Additionally, influenced by the rules on marriage and circumcision set by *kat'olikos* Nerses, Pap inevitably entered a struggle for influence with the clergy.¹⁶² This struggle continued in 373 when Pap invited *kat'olikos* Nerses to a banquet at his palace in the village of Xax in Acilisene under the pretence of reconciliation. Detailing the banquet and the poisoning of *kat'olikos* Nerses, *Buzandaran*

¹⁵⁷ P'B, 5.3.

¹⁵⁸ There are several inconsistencies in the sources about the Battle of Bagawan. First Ammianus Marcellinus and then *Buzandaran* give information about the Battle of Bagawan in the same region, while Movsēs Xorenac'i and Vita Nersēs confuse it with the Battle of Jirov. See, Amm. Marc. 29.1.2-3; P'B, 5.4; *Nersēs, St. Vita*, 11; MX, 3.37; Them. Or. 11.149B; Lenski 2002, p. 174-175.

¹⁵⁹ Amm. Marc. 29.1.2-3; P'B, 5.4; *Nersēs, St. Vita*, 11; MX, 3.37.

¹⁶⁰ P'B, 5.8-19; Toumanoff 1963, p. 181.

¹⁶¹ Soc. HE, 4.1; Soz. HE, 4.7.6; Theod. HE, 4.12; Malal. Chron. 13.14, Theoph. AM5857; Garsoïan 1997, p. 91; Cinemre 2024, p. 5.

¹⁶² P'B, 5.22-23; Anon. (*Pseudo-Šapuh*), 39. See also, Sargsyan 1983, p. 128-129; Russell 1987, p. 341-342.

notes that Pap's actions demonstrated open hostility towards the church and the lineage of Saint Grigor.¹⁶³

Pap's open attack on the Armenian Church brought an end to the tradition of electing *kat'olikos* based on the bloodline of Saint Grigor. Consequently, Pap removed the office of *kat'olikos* from the lineage of Grigor and appointed Sahak I, a priest from Manzikert and a descendant of Ałbianos, to the position.¹⁶⁴ The appointment of Sahak as *kat'olikos* was met with resistance in Caesarea, where *kat'olikoses* had been consecrated for nearly 60 years. By ending the tradition of consecration in Caesarea, Pap soon found himself at odds with the Roman Empire, despite previously maintaining good relations with them. According to Movsēs Xorenac'i, Pap openly challenged the Romans, having fallen out with the commander Terentius, who sought to resolve theological issues, especially after learning that Emperor Theodosius [*sic*] was on a campaign in the west. In response, Terentius reminded Emperor Valens that Pap had killed his friends Cylaces and Arrabannes in 370 to curry favour with Šābuhr.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, during the same period, Pap sought to collaborate with the Sasanians and demanded the return of ten cities, including Caesarea, from the Romans. Upon learning of this, Valens sent a secret message to the Roman commanders in Armenia, Terentius and Adē, concerning Pap, who had disobeyed orders to come to Tarsus or had fled.¹⁶⁶ In 374, acting on the secret message, the Roman commanders, along with Gnel, the lord of Anjewac'ik', invited Pap to a banquet and killed him, thus ending the reign of a ruler marked by persistent and stubborn governance.¹⁶⁷

After the assassination of Pap, Varasdates (374-378), who Movsēs Xorenac'i describes as being as powerful as Tiridates IV, ascended to the Armenian throne.¹⁶⁸ Pap's death, who had pro-Sasanian inclinations, and Varasdates's rise prompted the Sasanians to adopt a different strategy to dominate Armenia. Consequently, in the autumn of 375, Šābuhr sent an envoy to Valens to negotiate over Armenia and Iberia. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, Šābuhr demanded the return of territories that had been ceded to the Romans after the Battle of Bagawan in 371. However, Emperor Valens responded by refusing to alter the territorial division, suggesting that the distribution of land was agreed upon by both sides.¹⁶⁹ The cold war and negotiations between the two superpowers over Armenia and partially Iberia were on the brink of escalating into a hot conflict by the end of 376 when another Sasanian delegation arrived. Just as tensions were peaking, Valens received news in 377 of the Gothic rebellion in Thrace. Recognizing the severity of the situation, the Emperor adopted a more conciliatory tone toward Šābuhr, proposing solutions or peace overtures. Moreover, Valens withdrew his armies from Armenia to

¹⁶³ P'B, 5.24; MX, 3.38; T'A, 1.11; Asohik, 2.1; YD, 13.6; KG, §2.

¹⁶⁴ P'B, 5.29; MX, 3.39.

¹⁶⁵ Amm. Marc. 30.1.3; Lenksi 2002, p. 178.

¹⁶⁶ Amm. Marc. 30.1.1-7; P'B, 5.32; *Nersēs, St. Vita*, 15; Marquart 1901, p. 160; Garsoïan 1967, p. 313-320.

¹⁶⁷ Amm. Marc. 30.1.1; P'B, 5.32; YD, 13.8; Rousseau 1994, p. 282.

¹⁶⁸ P'B, 5.34; MX, 3.40;

¹⁶⁹ Amm. Marc. 30.2-2-3; Lenski 2002, p. 182.

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confront the Goths in the west, providing Šābuhr with a significant opportunity to assert control over Armenia.¹⁷⁰ This strategic shift highlighted the volatile and precarious nature of Armenian sovereignty amidst the power struggles of Rome and Persia.¹⁷¹

Shortly after the Roman armies withdrew from Armenia, Valens was killed in the Battle of Adrianople in 378.¹⁷² Ammianus Marcellinus describes Valens's death as either being inflicted by a severe arrow wound or being slain by a sword.¹⁷³ Upon learning of Valens's death, Šābuhr likely saw that Armenia had become vulnerable and that the balance of power was rapidly shifting. Moreover, the withdrawal of Roman forces from Armenia opened the door for a power struggle between the monarchy and the Mamikonean family. The young king Varasdates, influenced by the *naxarars*, initially fell out with his regent, *sparapēt* Mušeł Mamikonean, and eventually had him killed under the guidance of his mentor Bat Saharuni.¹⁷⁴ Following this, Varasdates appointed Bat Saharuni as the new *sparapēt* and declared Vač'ē the tanuter and *nahapet* of the Mamikonean family. However, the assassination of the *sparapēt* by the monarchy was met with anger within the Mamikoneans, naturally transforming the situation into open hostility between Varasdates and the Mamikonean family.¹⁷⁵ This internal strife further weakened Armenia at a time when it could ill afford it, given the external threats from the Sasanians and the precarious political landscape following the death of Valens.

With the return of Manuel and his brother Koms from the Mamikonean family, who had been held hostage at the court of Šābuhr, the enmity escalated. This animosity reached its peak when Varasdates prepared his army and attacked the Mamikoneans. The civil war between the monarchy and the *naxarar* families in Armenia culminated in 378 with Manuel, the leader of the Mamikonean family and the *sparapēt*, killing Bat Saharuni and forcing the king into exile.¹⁷⁶ At the same time, Movsēs Xorenac'i tells a different story, stating that Varasdates assured the Sasanian control over Armenia by agreeing to marry one of Šābuhr's daughters. Learning of this, Emperor Theodosius I [*sic*] ordered Varasdates to be captured and brought forcibly if he did not come willingly. Varasdates, who voluntarily went to Theodosius I [*sic*], was arrested and exiled to the island of T'uli, where he was forced to live until his death. This sequence of events exemplifies the internal instability of Armenia and the external pressures it faced.¹⁷⁷ The downfall of Varasdates and the victory of the Mamikonean family reshaped Armenia's internal politics and positioned it amid ongoing Roman-Sasanian conflict.¹⁷⁸

The departure of Varasdates from Armenia prompted Manuel Mamikonean to act as a *de facto* king, thereby facilitating closer ties between the monarchy and the Sasanians.

¹⁷⁰ Amm. Marc. 30.7.1; Eunap. *Hist. Fr.* 42; Oros. 7.33.13; Lenski 2002, p. 184.

¹⁷¹ Jones 1986, p. 153; Lee 2013, p. 30.

¹⁷² Amm. 31.13.14-6

¹⁷³ Amm. Marc. 31.13.14-6; *Cons. Const.* 378.1-2; *Epit. de Caes.* 46.1.

¹⁷⁴ P'B, 5.35-36.

¹⁷⁵ P'B, 5.37.

¹⁷⁶ P'B, 5.37. Also see, Lang 2006, p. 531.

¹⁷⁷ MX, 3.40.

¹⁷⁸ P'B, 5.37; YD, 13.8; KG, §2.

Although Movsēs Xorenac'i narrates that after Varasdates, Theodosius I placed Pap's sons, first Aršak III (circa 379-387?) and later Vologases III (384-386?), on the Armenian throne, it is evident that *sparapēt* Manuel Mamikonean was more aligned with the Sasanians than the Romans.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, Manuel Mamikonean honoured Pap's wife Zarmanduxt and her two sons, Aršak and Vologases, thereby maintaining the monarchy under Sasanian protection.¹⁸⁰ Manuel sent Małkaz Garjoyl to the Sasanian court, gaining the favour of Šābuhr. Moreover, seeing the opportunity due to the absence of the Romans in the region, he received a force of 10,000 men led by Suren, who was given the title of *marzpan*.¹⁸¹ However, the harmony between *sparapēt* Manuel and the monarchy with the Sasanians was disrupted, according to *Buzandaran*, by the *jealousy* and *deceit* of Meružan Artsruni.¹⁸² The story goes that fearing for his life, *sparapēt* Manuel assembled his army and attacked the camp where Suren and his troops were stationed, killing everyone except Suren.¹⁸³ This unexpected event led to a new Sasanian assault on Armenia. The Sasanian armies, commanded by Gumand Shapuh, Varaz, and Mrkan, were consecutively defeated by *sparapēt* Manuel, according to the *heroic* accounts of Armenian historians.¹⁸⁴

Understanding the content and scope of the conflicts in Armenia is challenging due to a lack of chronological clarity. In this context, *Buzandaran* refers to a seven-year peace between Armenia and the Sasanians. It is plausible that this peace began in 379, the year of Šābuhr's death, as his death likely caused internal turmoil within the Sasanian administration and presented an opportunity that the Armenians were inclined to exploit.¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, during this period, *sparapēt* Manuel Mamikonean, after eliminating Meružan Artsruni, installed Aršak III as king.¹⁸⁶ Manuel, who was working to stabilize Armenia's internal issues, went to Caranitis to be with Aršak and his mother Zarmanduxt. He married his daughter Vardanduxt to Aršak and the daughter of Sáspeir *aspet* Bagratuni to Vologases III, supporting Aršak as the primary king and Vologases as the secondary king.¹⁸⁷ However, shortly after these arrangements, likely in 385, the Armenian monarchy, having significantly lost power with Manuel's death, lacked the resolve to resist the peace treaty being discussed between the Romans and Sasanians. After Aršak fled to the Acilisene region, Vologases, who took over the administration of Armenia, also died in 386 without leaving an heir. The lack of a strong *sparapēt* and a co-ruler for Aršak led to joint efforts by Ardašir II (379-383), Šābuhr III (383-388), and

¹⁷⁹ P'B, 5.38; MX, 5.41; T'A, 1.11.

¹⁸⁰ P'B, 5.37-38; Garsoian 1997, p. 91-92.

¹⁸¹ Amm. Marc. 31.13.14-6; P'B, 5.38.

¹⁸² The fact that Meružan Artsruni and various *naxarars* refused to accept Sasanian hegemony and favoured independence may have played an important role in the monarchy's attitude towards the Sasanians. See, Blockley 1992, p. 38.

¹⁸³ P'B, 5.38.

¹⁸⁴ P'B, 5.39-41.

¹⁸⁵ Agath. 4.26.1; Mes'üdi, 2.189; Pourshariati 2008: 57-58.

¹⁸⁶ P'B, 5.42-43.

¹⁸⁷ P'B, 5.44; MD, 1.11. Asolik 2.1; YD, 13.10; KG, §2.

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Theodosius to resolve the Armenian issue. As a result, the region of Armenia was divided administratively and geographically between Rome and Iran.

Fork in the Road: The Division of Armenia

The balance of power policy generally pursued by Armenia and its intermittent desire for independence created various problems for both the Roman and Sasanian empires. Among these issues were border security between the two superpowers and the chaos in their relations with different peoples. Consequently, after the power shift in both the Roman and Sasanian thrones in the year 380, the nature of relations transformed from warfare to either voluntary or coerced peace.¹⁸⁸ In 383/4, Sasanian *shah* Šābuhr and Roman Emperor Theodosius I, realizing that they could not resolve their issues through their conflicts, decided to reach an agreement concerning Armenia.¹⁸⁹ Concurrently, as *Buzandaran* records, many *naxarar* families abandoned their support for Aršak III and requested that the Sasanian rulers appoint a different king for Armenia. Seizing an important opportunity to dominate Armenia, Šābuhr III agreed to the *naxarar*'s request and married his brother Zruanduxt to the Aršakid prince Khosrov IV (384-389), subsequently sending Khosrov IV to rule Armenia.¹⁹⁰ With Khosrov's arrival, Aršak III, who lost his supporters, fled to the west, seeking refuge with the Romans in the region of Acilisene. The fifth century historian Łazar P' arpec' i attributes Aršak III's abandonment of Armenia to the pride of a Christian king unwilling to be crushed by the Zoroastrian Sasanians.¹⁹¹ Nonetheless, this development ultimately resulted in the Romans and Sasanians, who had been exchanging envoys for some time, finalizing their planned peace treaty and likely dividing Armenia into western and eastern parts around 387.¹⁹² *Buzandaran* describes the intention of the two empires in this regard: *This powerful and wealthy kingdom stands between us. It would be beneficial for us if we confuse them and destroy their kingdom. First, we will divide them with the two appointed Aršakid kings, then influence, impoverish, and strive to annex them so that they cannot rise against us.*¹⁹³ The potential threat from the northern Huns at the time also played a role in the reconciliation between the two states.¹⁹⁴ However, on the other hand, the internal fragmentation of Armenia into various groups, feudal lords, and even linguistic distinctions significantly contributed to this division, as these local divisions were fundamental factors enabling Roman and Sasanian intervention in Armenia.¹⁹⁵

The arrival of Khosrov in Armenia is described in Movsēs Xorenac' i's work with a different narrative, referring to the period following the shared events. Movsēs

¹⁸⁸ Blockley 1985, p. 66; Greatrex 2000, p. 41.

¹⁸⁹ On the peace negotiations between Romans and Sasanians see, Oros. 7.34.8; Them. *Or.* 16.212d-213a; *Pan. Lat.* 2.22; *Chron. Pasch.* 563; Greatrex and Lieu 2002, p. 16-17.

¹⁹⁰ P'B, 6.1.

¹⁹¹ ŁP', 1.8.

¹⁹² *Epit. de Caes.* XLVIII.5; Bullough 1963, p. 59; Mitchell 2016.

¹⁹³ P'B, 6.1.

¹⁹⁴ Howard-Johnston 2010, p. 856.

¹⁹⁵ Jones 1998, p. 225; Greenwood 2017, p. 200.

Xorenac'ı, continuing a chronological error, states that the agreement over Mesopotamia and Armenia was made during the reign of Arcadius (383-408) rather than Theodosius I.¹⁹⁶ According to the same account, after learning of Aršak III's flight to Roman territories, Šābuhr III sent a threatening letter to Aršak III, warning that if he did not return, all of his properties would be transferred to the monarchy.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, Aršak's failure to return resulted in the direct transfer of the administration of his lands and the protection of significant centres such as Artaxata and Dwin to Khosrov IV. The efforts of Aršak to the west and Khosrov to the east were followed by the Romans and Sasanians delineating the final boundary between their two empires. Under Roman hegemony, Armenia was renamed *Roman Armenia*, encompassing Caranitis and Martyropolis south of Saspeir (Sper). In contrast, Armenia under Sasanian protection was designated as *Persarmenia*, covering the region from Tayk', Aštišat, and the fortress of Balalēš to the Aras River in the east, with the regions of Gogarena (Gugark') and Otena (Utik') included within Albanian territory.¹⁹⁸

The division of Armenian territories led to a dual monarchy. In the west, Aršak assumed control, while in the east, Khosrov established absolute dominance over the lands that constituted the centre and homeland of Armenia. After the decree of Šābuhr III, the *naxarars* who had accompanied Aršak to the west abandoned him and returned to the central territories, which Roman sources would now refer to as *Persarmenia*. However, the territories left to the Romans still contained properties and settlements belonging to Armenian families, and according to Movsēs Xorenac'ı, there were disputes between Aršak and these land-owning families. These disputes, along with the rivalry between the western monarchy and the *naxarars*, provided Khosrov with partial opportunities to intervene. Particularly, the discord between Aršak and his brother-in-law, *aspet* Sahak, who was the father-in-law of Vologases III, created a rift between western and eastern Armenia. The root of the problem was *aspet* Sahak's flight to the east and his appointment by Khosrov as the leader of the army.¹⁹⁹ According to Movsēs Xorenac'ı, the direct conflict between the western and eastern armies was ultimately due to Khosrov's success in obtaining Aršak's treasures under the command of *aspet* Sahak.

In contrast to early Armenian sources, only Movsēs Xorenac'ı claims that a battle occurred between Aršak and Khosrov IV in the Vanand region.²⁰⁰ However, *Buzandaran* does not address such a battle, while Movsēs Xorenac'ı and his follower T'ovma Artsruni state that an earlier battle occurred between Aršak (II) and Šābuhr (III).²⁰¹ Thus, Movsēs Xorenac'ı may have either fabricated a battle by confusing Aršak and Šābuhr or provided erroneous information. Therefore, there is no definitive evidence regarding the reality of

¹⁹⁶ MX, 3.42. See also, *Narratio*, §10-12; Toumanoff 1963, p. 151-152.

¹⁹⁷ MX, 3.42; Thomson 2008, p. 160.

¹⁹⁸ P'B, 6.1; MX, 3.42; *Narratio*, §10-12; Proc. Bell. 2.24.11, Aed. 3.1.1-15; Evagr. HE, 5.203; Greg. Tur. Hist. 4.40; Marquart 1901, p. 114; Adontz 1970, p. 8-12, 178-180; Frye 1984, p. 317; Hewsen 2002, p. 37; Speidel 2007, p. 75.

¹⁹⁹ MX, 3.44.

²⁰⁰ MX, 3.46.

²⁰¹ P'B, 4.22; T'A, 1.11; Thomson 1978, p. 309.

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the battle between the East and the West. However, it is clear that after the death of Aršak III in 387 (?), the western part of Armenia was abolished and became a part of the Roman territories under the direct administration of the *Comes Armeniae*, known as *Armenia Inferior*.²⁰²

After the death of Aršak III and the Romans' failure to appoint a new king, the *naxarars* who had remained with Aršak also returned to their homeland.²⁰³ According to the letter described by Movsēs Xorenac'i, the *naxarars* gathered and communicated to Khosrov their desire to return to their native lands.²⁰⁴ Pleased with this, Khosrov permitted their return. Thus, Khosrov, who was the sole legitimate king of Armenia and had the support of the *naxarars*, made a significant change in the election of the *kat'olikos* by transferring the office held by Pap of the Albianos lineage to the Grigor lineage specifically through Saint Sahak in 387/8.²⁰⁵ However, not long after taking control of the Armenian monarchy, Khosrov's relations with the Sasanians deteriorated due to his association with Arcadius, according to Łazar P'arpec'i. Movsēs Xorenac'i maintains a similar perspective, stating that Khosrov did not receive the expected support from Roman Emperor Arcadius or any other nation and consequently lost his throne. Following this, Khosrov was summoned by Wahrām IV and imprisoned in the fortress of Anuš.²⁰⁶ In response to the *naxarars*' wishes, Khosrov's brother Vramšapuh (389-c.415) was installed as the new king.²⁰⁷ The new king's name, combining Wahrām and Šābuhr, exemplified the dominant Sasanian influence in Armenia.²⁰⁸

The reign of Vramšapuh coincided with a period when political turmoil between the Romans and the Sasanians had largely subsided. Indeed, although Armenia was undoubtedly affected by the invasions of the Huns across the Caucasus Mountains in the 395s, this situation served more as a unifying force rather than a point of contention between the Romans and the Sasanians.²⁰⁹ Indeed, Latin poet Claudianus intriguingly refers to the Sasanian king as a *loyal friend* in the late fourth century.²¹⁰ Consequently, during Vramšapuh's administration, the focus in Armenia was predominantly on peace efforts, the work of *kat'olikos* Sahak, and the contributions of Mesrop Mashtots, who invented the Armenian alphabet.

Conclusion

²⁰² the region was divided into *Armenia Prima* and *Armenia Secunda* during the reign of Theodosius I. See, Garsoian 1988, p. 254.

²⁰³ Garsoian 1997, p. 92.

²⁰⁴ MX, 3.48.

²⁰⁵ MX, 3.49. Not to be confused with Sahak I (373-377).

²⁰⁶ MX, 3.50; T'A, 1.11.

²⁰⁷ ŁP', 1.9; MX, 3.50; Christensen 1936, p. 249.

²⁰⁸ Hübschmann 1897, p. 78; Justi 1895, p. 365; Daryae 2012, p. 194.

²⁰⁹ Claud. *Ruf.* 2.28-30; Claud. *Eutr.* 1.245-51; Phil. *HE*, 11.8; Soc. *HE*, 6.1.5-7; Soz. *HE*, 8.1.2; Greatrex and Lieu 2002, p. 19.

²¹⁰ [... *fidumque Saporem*]. See, Claud. *Eutr.* 2.486.

The complex interplay of political, religious, and social factors during the late fourth century significantly shaped the trajectory of Armenia's history. The period was marked by a delicate balance between the Roman and Sasanian Empires, which sought to manage and manipulate the region's internal dynamics to their advantage. The division of Armenia into Roman and Sasanian spheres of influence following the agreements of 387 created a dual monarchy with distinct administrative and political realities. Under Roman rule, Armenia was divided into regions such as Caranitis and Martyropolis, while Persarmenia was established under Sasanian control, encompassing a substantial portion of Armenian territory. This bifurcation was not merely a geopolitical manoeuvre but also a reflection of deep-seated internal divisions within Armenia itself.

A crucial factor contributing to this division was the rivalry among the *naxarars*, the local aristocratic families who wielded significant influence over the Armenian nobility. The internal discord among these *naxarars*, exacerbated by their shifting loyalties and competing interests, allowed both the Romans and Sasanians to exploit and influence Armenian politics. The *naxarars*' factionalism created an environment ripe for external intervention, as their divided support facilitated the imposition of foreign control and influence. The religious dichotomy between Christianity and Zoroastrianism further complicated the political landscape. The Armenian Church's alignment with Christianity, particularly its adherence to the lineage of Saint Grigor, clashed with the Zoroastrian policies of the Sasanian Empire. This ideological conflict was more than a theological dispute; it had tangible political implications. The imposition of Zoroastrianism under Sasanian rule and the subsequent Christianizing efforts under Roman influence exacerbated internal tensions. The Christian aristocracy's resistance to Zoroastrian dominance fueled further political instability, contributing to the erosion of centralized control and the eventual fragmentation of Armenian authority.

The assassination of King Pap and the subsequent rise of Varasdates marked a period of intense internal strife, which further weakened Armenia's position. Varasdates's reign was characterized by an internal struggle with the Mamikoneans, culminating in a civil war that significantly undermined Armenia's stability. This internal conflict, combined with external pressures from both the Roman and Sasanian powers, highlighted the precarious nature of Armenian sovereignty during this period. The eventual installation of Khosrov IV and the subsequent division of Armenia between the Romans and Sasanians illustrated the culmination of these intertwined political, religious, and social factors. Khosrov's tenure was marked by attempts to navigate these complex dynamics, but his reign ultimately failed due to a lack of support and mounting internal and external pressures. The appointment of Vramšapuh and the subsequent consolidation of Sasanian control marked a new phase in Armenian history, characterized by relative stability but also continued subservience to the dominant powers of the time.

In summary, the late fourth century in Armenia was a period of significant transformation driven by external imperial ambitions and internal divisions. The rivalry among *naxarars*, the clash between Christianity and Zoroastrianism, and the shifting alliances all played crucial roles in shaping the political landscape. The interplay of these factors underscores the complexity of Armenian history during this era, reflecting a region caught between competing imperial powers and struggling with its internal discord.

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