

Movses the Historian

My “Family Tree”



1. On the tree's roots, write the names of as many of your grandparents, great-grandparents and other ancestors as you know.
2. On the trunk, write the names of your immediate family members.
3. On the larger branches, write a word or phrase to signify important events in your ancestors' history (examples: immigration of some members, places they lived or moved to, jobs, degrees).

4. On the smaller branches, write words that you think describe your immediate family or your ancestors.
5. Draw leaves on some of the branches. In the leaves, write about qualities in yourself that you feel you got from being a member of this family. If you wish, do some leaves for other members of your immediate family, too (put their names by the leaves).

Movses, Armenia's Historian

Movses' Early Years

You probably know that the fifth century was called the "Golden Age" in Armenia. St. Sahag and St. Mesrob translated the Bible and many other books into the Armenian language, so that all the people could understand them and learn more about the Christian faith. They also started schools so that children could learn about Christ and his love.

Movses was born in Khoren about the year 415, and studied at one of the schools started by Sts. Sahag and Mesrob. Right from the start, he loved to learn and study, and by the time he was a teenager he was learning Greek and Assyrian as well as Armenian.

About the year 431, Movses and several other promising students were sent to Alexandria, in Egypt, to study Greek, writing, speech-making, interpretation of the Bible, and philosophy. Alexandria had a world-famous library, and Movses made good use of it. When he had finished his studies in Alexandria he set sail for Greece, but strong winds blew the ship instead in the direction of Italy. Movses took the opportunity to visit Rome, and then went to Athens and Constantinople. Finally, he was ready to go home.



Movses Returns to Armenia

Eager to share his learning and to teach others, Movses was overjoyed to see his homeland come into view. But he was in for a sad surprise, for he soon found that nobody really cared to welcome him. Some of the nobles and educated people seemed jealous and fearful of Movses' gifts. Others ridiculed his "foreign learning." It was a hard and painful experience for this young man who wanted so much to share what he had learned.

For many years, Movses hid away in a small village where he tutored students and did his solitary reading and writing. The life of the city and court completely passed him by. It would be forty years before he became involved in it again.

The way it happened was this: the Catholicos visited a neighboring town, and recognized his old classmate in the crowd. "Movses!" he called out, and the two men embraced. Not long after this, the Catholicos persuaded him to be consecrated a bishop, and then came an important request: would Movses write a history of the Armenian people?

Movses' History

It was a huge task, Movses knew. But he was ready to take it on because as he wrote, "although we are a small patch in the garden and are very limited in numbers and have often been subdued by foreign kingdoms, in our country, also, there have been deeds of valor worthy of writing and recording..."

Using several older historians' work as sources, Movses produced a wonderful history, including in it some of the legends and tales which had been passed down for generations. He wrote about Haig, the father of the Armenian people, and of the first Christian king, Drtad. He traced the time of Armenia's power under Dikran the Great, and the glorious days of St. Gregory when Christianity first flourished in the land.

The last part of Movses' work is sad in tone — it tells of internal fighting in the country, and the increasingly selfish atti-

tude of many of her leaders. Yet the last words of the book are for God: "May Christ the Lord save us and all who truly worship him... Glory to him from all the created. Amen."



Some Writings of Movses the Historian

Concerning Mesrob's letters, given by grace from on high

Then Mesrob, with the aid of Bishop Babylus, passed through Phoenicia and made for Samosata. Epiphanius had died, leaving a pupil called Rufinus, wonderfully skilled in Greek calligraphy, who had become a hermit at Samosata. Mesrob went to him, but still gaining no result in this matter, he took refuge in prayer. And he saw not a dream in sleep, not a vision while awake, but in the depths of his heart there appeared to the eyes of his soul a right hand writing on rock; for the stone retained [the shapes] as tracks are traced in snow. And not only did he have this vision, but all the details were gathered in his mind as in a vase. Arising from prayer he fashioned our alphabet with Rufinus, who gave shape to the script prepared by Mesrob, altering the Armenian letters according to the exactness of the Greek syllables. Then straightaway he set to

translating, wisely beginning with Proverbs. Completing the twenty-two famous books, he also translated the New Testament into Armenian — he and his pupils John of Ekeleats and Joseph of Palin. At the same time he had the art of writing taught to his younger disciples.

The departure from the world of Sahag the Great and blessed Mesrob

Vram the Second died after ruling over Persia for twenty-one years; he left the empire to his son Yazkert. The latter, forgetting the treaty, as soon as he gained the throne attacked the Greek army at Nisibis and ordered the forces of Azerbaijan to enter our country. They arrived and camped in disorder near the "town of altars" (Bagavan).

Then a mortal illness befell Sahag the Great, and his pupils took him to the village called Blur, as a place very familiar [to him] and which offered safety from the harassing Persian troops. There he died after being the archbishop for fifty-one years, beginning with the third year of the last Khosrov, king of Armenia, down to the beginning of the [first] year of the second Yazkert, king of Persia, at the end of the month of Navasard on his own birthday. Although he was born a mortal, he left an immortal memory. He honored the image and was fearful of his caller; he changed his life [for life]; and he led such a life that there was no imperfection found in him from old age nor did he suffer any illness. We should speak of him in majestic terms in a eulogy worthy of this holy father. But to prevent the length of our discourse from causing tedium to the readers, we shall leave this for another place and time outside this book, as for the early period we promised to compose one.

But his archdeacon Jeremiah, with his fellow pupils and the Mamigonian princess, his granddaughter-in-law whose name was Dstrik, the wife of Vartan the general, took [Sahag's] venerable body and laid it to rest in their own village of Ashtishat, which is in the province of

Taron. His disciples scattered as zealous monks to each one's province, built monasteries, and gathered brethren.

After six months had passed since Saint Sahag's death, on the thirteenth of Mehekan the blessed Mesrob also departed the world in the city of Vagharshapat, having surpassed all those who at that time were virtuous. Pride or flattery were never able to find a place in his way of life; but he was gentle, kind, and benevolent, and he showed everyone that he was adorned with the virtues of angels. He was angelic in appearance, fertile of mind, glorious of speech, persevering in action, resplendent of body, ineffable in habits, noble of counsel, unswerving in faith, long-suffering in hope, honest in love, tireless in teaching.

But because I am unable to describe all his virtues, I shall turn my account to the burial of his relics. As I heard from many trustworthy men, there shone a light like a ray in the form of a dim cross over the house where the blessed one gave up the ghost. This was not something that quickly faded or was visible to a few, but it was visible to the whole multitude, so that many of the unbelievers were baptized. Then there arose a tumult in the crowd that divided into three groups over the burial of that venerable body, which had prepared for death even before dying. Some said it should be taken to his own native province of Taron; others to the province first instructed by him, Golt'n; and others [that it should be buried] in that same city of Vagharshapat in the resting places of the martyrs. But the valiant Vahan Amadouni won the argument, for he was powerful both in faith and in secular authority, because at that time the Persians had entrusted him with the governorship of Armenia. He took Mesrob's body with a worthy escort to his own village of Oshagan. And the same vision of the luminous cross moved over the bier in front of the entire crowd, until Vahan and Tatik his servant had laid him to rest; then the sign disappeared.

Nersess of Lambron

Use this shield to express some of the beliefs that tell where you stand.

Here I Stand	
1. I'm concerned about	4. It's good to
2. If I were President, I would	5. I think people should stop
3. There isn't room in this world for	6. I really hope that someday

Nersess of Lambron — He Stood Firm

In 1152, a descendant of two princely houses was born in the chateau of Lambron. He was baptized Sempad.

The child had every advantage that wealth and noble rank can provide, but chose to turn aside from them and take on the simple and demanding life of the monastery while he was still young. He seemed to prefer learning to almost anything else, and amazed the monks by his intelligence and concentration.

At sixteen, he was told that his adored father had died. Sempad wanted to leave the monastery and go off by himself to mourn, but his mother reminded him that his father's last wish had been that the boy should be ordained. So Sempad let himself be put under the care of the great St. Nersess the Grace-filled, who loved him so much that he gave Sempad the name Nersess when he ordained the boy. So diligent was the young priest, so completely dedicated to the Church, that by the age of twenty-three he had been consecrated an archbishop.

Nersess was a writer — he wrote about the liturgy, translated the Book of Revelation, and wrote commentaries on the Book of Proverbs and on the canons (laws) of the Church. And he was a traveler — to Cyprus, Byzantium, Jerusalem and the rugged Cilician mountains.

But most of all, Nersess was a man who desired that all Christian churches should be united, no longer separated and divided but *one*, as they had been in the time of the apostles. So for much of his life he traveled to the centers of the Greek Orthodox Church, stressing in his learned way how similar the Armenian Church's beliefs were and trying to bring about reunion. It was a difficult effort in two ways. When he spoke with the Greeks, Nersess was careful to defend the particular practices and traditions of the Armenian Church, which



he would never compromise. Yet some of his fellow Armenians, when he returned home, would accuse him of trying to “sell out” to the Greek Church. Very few were willing to recognize that Nersess was doing a hard but most necessary thing: trying to heal the wounds within the Church.

The problem became even more complicated when Nersess talked about reunion with Roman Catholic bishops. The divisions between our Church and the Roman Church are much more serious than our differences with the other Orthodox. When he went to Rome, Nersess found that the Catholics wanted to make the Armenian Church take on their practices, and submit totally to their authority.

Nersess, of course, flatly refused any such arrangement. But he was under terrible pressure to give in to the Roman de-

mands. Prince Levon, the ruler of Cilician Armenia, wanted to establish an independent Armenian kingdom on Cilician soil. He hoped that Rome would back his plan and give him a crown, so he pushed Nersess to give the Roman bishops whatever compromises they asked for.

But Nersess stood firm. He would not be swayed by the political ambitions of princes, nor the fear and jealousy of some critical people. He disapproved wrong practices in the Armenian Church, but always defended and loved her anyway. He worked to change the bad things and support the good ones.

Till his death in 1198 at the age of 46, Nersess stood for the unity of the Christian Church. It is an example we still need to follow today.

(From *Pillars of the Armenian Church* by Dickran Boyajian)

Nersess Lambronatzi
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Movses Khorenatzi
Մովսէս Խորենացի