



THE HOLY TRANSLATORS

The month of October is known as "Cultural Month," and rightly so, for it is within this month that the Armenian Church celebrated the memory of our Holy Translators. The Golden Age of Armenian Literature, the fifth century, and the subsequent periods of literary vitality stemmed from the work of our translators. St. Sahag and St. Mesrob should be remembered together as the co-founders of the Armenian alphabet and subsequent literature and as leaders of the group of Holy Translators.

St. Mesrob was born in the village of Hatzik in the province of Taron, from the famous Mamikonian (St. Vartan) family, several years after St. Sahag. His baptismal name is Mashdotz, and he acquired the name Mesrob after his ordination into the priesthood. Prior to his ordination, Mesrob was the chief secretary at the royal court of Armenia for a decade, serving under two kings, King Khosrov (384-389) and King Vramshabouh (389-394). Although we do not know much about his education, the exalted office that he held at the court suggests his great learning and his masterful knowledge of foreign languages. (At that time the diplomatic languages were Greek and Persian.)

Mesrob entered the priesthood at the age of 40. He was ordained by Catholicos Sahag, thenceforth becoming Sahag's chief colleague in his endeavors to nationalize the Armenian Church. First he proved to be a zealous and enthusiastic missionary. He went to preach the Christian Gospel to the remote parts of Armenia, even to the rugged and mountainous Province of Koghten, where Christianity had not yet penetrated fully. This missionary enterprise marked the beginning of his trials and labors in finding an Armenian alphabet and translating the Bible and other ecclesiastical works over a period of 30 years.

There was no Armenian Bible, and this was a real handicap in his missionary activities. Church services were conducted at that time in foreign languages such as Greek and Syriac (the language of the Assyrians). It was obvious that in these circumstances the people could understand little of anything. It soon became apparent to St. Mesrob that oral teaching was not enough and that in order to Christianize the people it was necessary to place in their hands the writings of the Church Fathers, and more especially, the Holy Bible. His primary motive was a

religious literature and finally all Armenian literature flourished.

St. Mesrob informed the Catholicos, St. Sahag, of his desire to formulate an Armenian alphabet. The two petitioned King Vramshabou for financial and protective aid which the King granted willingly and eagerly. The alphabet was realized in the year 404 A.D. after many years of tireless research and tedious effort. St. Mesrob even travelled to other lands to obtain help and advice from other linguists. Finally, he modified Greek letters and created new forms for those sounds which were distinctively Armenian. According to tradition, St. Mesrob -- unable at first to formulate the necessary new characters -- resorted to prayer, meditation and spiritual exercises. During this withdrawal from the worldly atmosphere of his studies, a vision came to St. Mesrob. In this vision from God, the long-sought letters were written on a board. This explains the centuries-old tradition of the Armenian people that their alphabet was of heavenly origin.

St. Sahag, a linguist as well as an artist and musician, gave some final touches to the Armenian alphabet. The Mesrobian characters were 36 in number. (The Armenian alphabet consists today of 38 characters; two letters being added in the Middle Ages.)

After the invention of the alphabet, a host of disciples were trained under the unfailing guidance of St. Sahag and St. Mesrob. They later became the collaborators with their master, in launching the translation of the Bible and the important works of the Church Fathers. This group of scholars came to be known as the "Holy Translators" or "Soorp Tarkmanitchk" as they are called in Armenian. After thirty years of tireless work by these scholars (said to be 100 in number), the translation of the Holy Bible was accomplished as the first work in the new language. Using primarily the Greek version of the Bible as their new guide, these translators produced a translation of great beauty and literary accuracy.

The Church commemorates the blessed memory of St. Mesrob on two occasions. First, he is commemorated together with St. Sahag in a combined feast day which occurs during the summer. Secondly, he is commemorated with the whole group of Holy Translators. This occurs in the early fall during October. Usually the first commemoration alludes to his saintliness, the second has assumed importance as a national feast of culture.

Our Church gives respect to St. Sahag by commemorating his blessed memory four times throughout the year, separately and in groupings with other saints.

MOSES OF KHOREN

He belonged to the group of the second generation of Armenian students sent to Hellenic schools. He journeyed to Byzantium, Athens, Rome, Antioch, Palestine, and Alexandria. He studied rhetoric and was an accomplished orator. Emperor Margianus, admiring his ability, said to him, "The words of your mouth are chosen in the eyes of all; you are the first among the orators." After a long sojourn in the Hellenic world, he returned to Armenia where all was in ruins, and where Persian influence was oppressing the Armenian intellectual life. He took refuge with his classmate, Keud, another Hellenist, who was the Catholicos of All Armenia. He was ordained bishop in spite

rearm of Arsharounik, and educated the Armenian youth. It was here that he wrote his famous book on Armenian history, which, in spite of its apparent defects, was comprehensive in nature, and won for him the immortal title of "The Father of Armenian History."

An interpretation of the Grammar is also ascribed to his authorship, a book which served as a textbook for Armenian youth.

DAVID THE INVINCIBLE

He was an Armenian philosopher of the first rank, whose title of honor was accorded to him by his contemporaries to commemorate the fact that he was an excellent philosopher, devoted to the study of Hellenism, and that he had won many victories in Athens during his disputations and argumentations with Greek scholars.

Like Moses, David belongs to the second generation of the Armenian students sent to Hellenic centers during the Golden Age, and is alleged to be a nephew of Moses. He studied at the schools of Alexandria, Byzantium, and Athens. Upon his return to Armenia he was saddened to see the chaotic conditions brought about by political turmoil and had to retire in a monastery of St. Lazar, in Taron, where he died. His sepulchre has become a place of pilgrimage for those who aspire to become philosophers and orators.

ST. GREGORY OF NAREK (NAREKATZY)

Saint Gregory of Narek was the son of Bishop Khosrov of Anzev, who was the Primate of Anzev near the city of Van. Khosrov, the father of St. Gregory, was married to the daughter of the brother of Anania of Narek, who was the abbot or dean of the Monastery of Narek. Khosrov had three sons, Hovhannes, Sahag and Gregory (Krikor), the youngest eventually called Gregory of Narek.

Saint Gregory of Narek was born in 951 A.D. in the village of Narek near Lake Van in Armenia, in the District of Ruchduniantz. He obtained his education at the Monastery of Narek. His teacher was Anania of Narek who was called "a great philosopher, a distinguished minister of God, and famous man of science."

Aside from the Armenian language and grammar, St. Gregory studied the Bible, the Christian religion, literature, logic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music.

When St. Gregory was graduated from the Seminary of Narek, he was ordained a Vartabed (celibate priest) and began to teach in the same monastery. At the same time, he was always busy reading and writing books.

As an author, St. Gregory has written many discourses, lyric poems, chants, doxologies, and a commentary on the "Song of Songs" of Solomon by the request of the King of Armenia. His masterpiece is the famous book of prayers named the "Narek" which is regarded as one of the most sacred books, after the Holy Bible, for the Armenian faithful.

He died in the year 1011 A.D. His memory is celebrated in the Armenian Church in the first part of October.

ST. NERSES THE GRACEFUL (SHNORHALI) A.D. 1100-1173

St. Nerses the Graceful is considered one of the foremost catholicoi of the Armenian Church. Nerses was born in

eighteenth year. At the age of thirty he was ordained bishop by his brother, Catholicos Krikor Bahlavooni. His brother was five years older than he and as a catholicos had served for a long time before him. Nerses became his advisor, managing all the arrangements of the creeds and the discussions of unity with the churches of the Syrians, Greeks and Latins.

Catholicos Krikor Bahlavooni officiated for fifty-three years. At the age of seventy, becoming feeble and unable to carry on his official duties properly, he proposed that Nerses be ordained Catholicos and take full charge of the office.

Then Catholicos Krikor Bahlavooni called a meeting of the bishops, vartabeds, monks and leading laymen for the approval of Nerses' choice. This they did, and Nerses was anointed Catholicos by his brother at the age of sixty-six in Hromgla, on the 17th of April, 1166.

He has been regarded as a saint and in the first part of October of each year he is solemnized together with "all the saints of translator vartabeds."

This information is from Living the Armenian Church Year. Another DRE publication on the Holy Translators is Mesrob Mashtotz: A Fifth Century Life.

This month the Armenian Church remembers and honors the Holy Translators, some of the greatest teachers and Fathers of the Church. Let this month mark a re-dedication to better Sunday School teaching. Towards that end, the Bulletin has compiled some useful information on good teaching in the articles below.

WHAT ABOUT REPORT CARDS?

During a recent leadership, we asked whether or not the participants were using report cards or some other system for reporting to parents; 25 responded "yes" and 25 responded "no," with a variety of explanations given.

I recalled the reflections on Religious Education of Harvey Cox: "It is important to provide places and times in the lives of young people (and others, too) where they can listen to their own inner voices, recall their deepest feelings, and learn how to cultivate an authentically interior life."

"Can a report card assess this value?" I ask.

"Education, especially in religion, is not principally the imparting of skills and information. It is the enlistment of other people, with experiences and competencies that complement mine, in the continuous development of our own lived autobiographies."

"How can a method of reporting bring about this cooperation?" I question. Surely, we cannot be content with the practices of numerical marks or alphabetical ratings of content, if what we are engaged in fostering is attitude change, value formation, faith orientation to life, a living relationship with Jesus in community.

The Bishops of the United States in their document, *To Teach As Jesus Did*, placed equal emphasis on each of the educational components: (1) understanding the Gospel