

A Reassessment of the *History* of Ghewond

Ever since Chahnazarian's French translation of the *History* of Ghewond, much of the scholarly debate surrounding this text has centred upon its date of composition. The traditional line of argument accepts that it was compiled at the very end of the eighth century by an otherwise unknown priest at the commission of a shadowy member of the Bagratuni house. A minority of scholars, however, hold that the *History* is a product of the late ninth century and may be connected with the author Shapuh Bagratuni, of whose historical composition only fragments survive. Both positions possess merits and shortcomings. Whilst a definitive solution seems unlikely, this paper will reconsider the case for the minority view, that the *History* of Ghewond reflects late ninth-century conditions and concerns.

Three aspects of the work which support this contention will be explored:

- i) the inclusion of a prophecy, that the royal sceptre will return very soon to the house of T'orgom. This was realised with the coronation of Ashot Bagratuni on Wednesday 24 August 884.
- ii) a certain defensiveness on the part of the writer, expressing Bagratuni disquiet at the prospect of rebellion against the caliph. An interesting distinction is also made between perceptions of caliphs and governors;
- iii) the collective quality to the work, including short self-contained narratives relating to several princely families which come to be related to the Bagratuni house. This again suits a late ninth-century historical context.

If the *History* of Ghewond is a work of the late ninth century, and was influenced by contemporary concerns, this could account for its relative lack of historical purchase on eighth-century affairs. It may also lie behind the radical reshaping of the description of the Arab conquest of Armenia, which is truncated and given a surprising focus in the form of a lament for the fate of the inhabitants of Dvin. The absence of any reference to confessional controversy or doctrinal tension within an Armenian historical text is also striking. The long letter from Leo III to Umar II is admittedly theological but it addresses and confronts Islamic rather than heterodox Christian beliefs. The authenticity of this letter is considered and reaffirmed. Finally the strengths and challenges of the text are assessed.

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