

Stephen of Siwnik' (680c.-735) and the Development of Armenian Theology under Arab Domination

Between the years 693 and 702, the Caliphate established direct control over the countries of the South Caucasus. Stephen's writings reflect the shaping of Armenian theology and anthropology during the first decades of the new era, when the church remained the only political institution of the Armenians. His works also witness to the way in which the Armenian church was trying to redefine its orientation and articulate its new rôle in this situation.

In the eyes of the Caliph's administration, the exchanges between Armenia and the Empire could compromise the loyalty of the Armenians in their quality of *dhimmi*. Nevertheless, the Armenian ecclesiastics continued to attach importance to the contacts with the Greek theological tradition. This is witnessed by Stephen's protracted sojourn in Byzantium between c.710-c.725 and notably by his activity in the Byzantine capital. His sojourn coincides with the time of annual Arab incursions into the territory of the Empire, which once more impelled the Byzantines to seek strategic cooperation with the non-Chalcedonians and, therefore, a doctrinal agreement.

In the letter of the Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople, which Stephen brought to Armenia, the author exhorted Armenians to accept both the definitions of the council of Chalcedon and of Constantinople III. Stephen replied to Germanus rejecting the doctrine of the two activities and two wills in Christ, and also affirming the incorruptibility of Christ's body. The refutation of the Byzantine appeal seems to be in harmony with the Catholicos John of Ōjun's stance at the Armeno-Syrian council of Mantzikert of 726. The marking of doctrinal difference from the church of the Empire ought to reassure the Caliphs' administration regarding the allegiance of the Armenians.

The analysis of Stephen's *Response* gives us also a chance to see how the Armenian miaphysite Christology could stand the test of a new problematic which had been discussed in Byzantium whilst Armenia had been cut off from the political body of Christendom, and in particular the question of Christ's wills. Stephen's *Response*, which regards the relationships between Armenia and the Empire, i.e. across the Arab-Byzantine frontier, is to be examined in conjunction with another letter composed by him, *On the Incorruptibility*, which concerns the inner relationships between the Miaphysite churches subdued to the Caliphate. There he discusses one of the central questions that had occupied the minds of the anti-Chalcedonian theologians and had continued to divide their churches since two centuries, i.e. the 'incorruptibility' of Christ's humanity. Stephen excludes every Aphthartodocetist idea, which had been imputed to Armenians since the sixth century. His argument reflects the preparatory stage of the council of Mantzikert, at which was found a middle ground between the Armenian and the West-Syrian churches regarding this problem.

The search for such an accord was particularly timely: after the suppression of Armenian autonomy, not only the intercourse between Armenia and the Empire became difficult, but also the communication between different Christian nations subdued to the Caliphs' rule was put under surveillance. Unless a cooperation and an agreement were searched for between different communities of *dhimmi*, the Armenians and the West-Syrians were deemed to isolation which would have ultimately endangered their survival.