

ARMENIAN CHRISTOLOGY IN THE  
SEVENTH AND EIGHTH CENTURIES  
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO  
THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF  
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THE period under review is generally viewed as marking the closure of the patristic age, in which the fundamental aspects of the Church's creed, constitution, administration, and liturgical expression attain a certain stability. The activity of St John of Damascus is often viewed as emblematic in this regard for the Byzantine Church, and I would argue that a similar judgement might apply to the achievements of John's Armenian contemporaries Catholicos Yovhan Öjniec'i (d. 728) and the learned vardapet Xosrovik (d. c.730).<sup>2</sup> Öjniec'i's convocation of the Synod of Duin in 719 constitutes a crucial milestone in the development of Armenian canon law.<sup>3</sup> No concerted deliberation had been directed upon the subject since 645, although the situation on the ground had been significantly altered after the state's establishment of peace with the Arabs in 652.<sup>4</sup> For the first time since 387 the western lands of Byzantine Armenia were united again with the eastern core, requiring integration in doctrine and practice.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the synod addresses the centralization of eucharistic celebration, fasting regulations, feast days, the sanctoral, etc., preparing for the creation of the first compilation of Armenian canon law in the following year. Subsequently the offices of the breviary were also codified.<sup>6</sup> The synod also treated theological issues, canon 29 condemning Chalcedonians as schismatics<sup>7</sup> and canon 32 proscribing the

<sup>1</sup> An earlier draft of this article was presented as a paper at a conference on Armenian spirituality at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, organized by the Catholicate of the Great House of Cilicia in 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Altaner (1960), pp. 549–50.

<sup>3</sup> For the synodal canons, see Hakobyan (1964), pp. 514–37. In this connection, see also Öjniec'i's synodal address (Yovhan Öjniec'i [1833], pp. 9–33).

<sup>4</sup> Ter-Ghewondyan (1976), pp. 20–1. On the previous synod, see n. 86.

<sup>5</sup> Mahe (1993), pp. 479–80.

<sup>6</sup> For a recent consideration of further liturgical activities traditionally associated with Öjniec'i, see Findikian (1997).

<sup>7</sup> Hakobyan (1964), p. 533. As the late seventh-century diophysite tract *Narratio de Rebus Armeniae* indicates, Byzantine emperors had periodically

Paulicians,<sup>8</sup> a sect which after censure by the Synod of Duin of 555 had taken refuge in the border region with Byzantium in the West and had now re-entered Armenian jurisdiction through the redrawing of the boundaries alluded to above.<sup>9</sup> The question of the Aphthartodocetists or Phantasiastae and their central tenet of the incorruptibility of Christ's flesh would be broached in 726 at the Synod of Manazkert, which was also of importance for renewing relations with the West Syrian Church under Patriarch Athanasius III.<sup>10</sup> This is the main topic I should like to concentrate on in the second half of this study.

attempted to resolve the christological dispute with the Armenians until the time of Justinian II, albeit the agreements reached tended to be short-lived and inconclusive: see Garitte (1952), pp. 46–7, 350–6. Consequently, although Ōjnc'ī did not devote much specific attention to the Chalcedonian christological definition in the writings generally attributed to him (see Tournebiz [1910], pp. 99, 140–2), his rejection of the Council in this synod became his delineating trait for a number of medieval Armenian historians. See, for example, Step'anos Taronac'ī (1885), p. 103 (early eleventh cent.), Vardan Vardapet (1862), pp. 72–3 (d. 1271), Kirakos Ganjakec'ī (1961), p. 69 (1201–72) and Step'anos Ōrpēlean (1756), p. 178 (d. 1304), although there is no mention of this point in the early tenth cent. historian Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'ī (1867), pp. 128–33 (Armenian) and (1987), pp. 109–11 (English). More recently, it has been argued that he authored one work against the Chalcedonian position (see Tēr-Mkrčēan [1896]). Certain modern Catholic scholars have argued variously that Ōjnc'ī's christological views do not oppose Chalcedon (Kogian [1961], p. 268), that Ōjnc'ī strove to maintain communion with Rome (Čamčēanc' [1785], pp. 573–6, 653–70), and even that he was a proponent of Chalcedonian Christology through attributing to him a series of six anonymous diophysite *opuscula* preserved in a single manuscript of the fourteenth century, which defend such premises as the disjunction of nature and hypostasis and the corruptibility of Christ's flesh (see Akinean [1911]). However, the latter cannot be seriously countenanced as it finds no support in Ōjnc'ī's authentic corpus. One might rather place these translations in the context of an Armenian Chalcedonian community, which is probably responsible for the preservation of Eutychius of Constantinople's *On the Distinction of Nature and Person* (on which see Ananean [1969]) and for the creation of several other tracts during the period under review (see Cowe [1992], pp. 133–57).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. pp. 534–5.

<sup>9</sup> See Cowe (1996), pp. 652–3, and the classic treatment of the subject in Garsoñan (1967).

<sup>10</sup> For the background, see Hage (1966), pp. 79–80, and for the Armenian canons of this important synod, see Ter-Minassiantz (1904), pp. 77–80, and for the variant Syriac acts *ibid.*, pp. 170–97 and Michael (1901), vols. 2, pp. 499–500 and 4, p. 461. The synod has been variously interpreted by scholars: many older writers regarded it primarily as a reaffirmation of traditional Armenian 'monophysitism' after a certain Chalcedonian hiatus, while others have viewed it as an official endorsement of Aphthartodocetism in the Armenian Church (Ter-Minassiantz [1904], pp. 51–2). It appears that for a short time after the synod the project was broached of training young translators in a Syro-Armenian monastery to render the works of Syriac Fathers into Armenian; however, the experiment

Thereafter, no major synod was held for over a century.<sup>11</sup> Conditions for the Armenian polity and the church declined significantly in the second half of the century. Armenia had to bear reprisals from the victorious 'Abbasid dynasty for its continued support for the Umayyads in the war of succession and the Mamikonean-led revolt of 774 in protest against high taxation led to a decisive rout of the Armenian nobility and the later strategic resettlement of Arab and Kurdish tribes on Armenian territory to undermine subsequent moves to form a common cause.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, contacts with Byzantium, which had stimulated theological discussion over the last four centuries, entered a period of decline as the latter became preoccupied with the internal iconoclastic dispute.<sup>13</sup>

When they became revitalized in the second half of the tenth century in the wake of Basil II's eastern conquests, the atmosphere was markedly different: the major issues emanating from the Chalcedonian debate, such as monothelitism and monergism, as well as the doctrine of sacred images, in which churchmen were creatively engaged during the era under discussion, were already fixed and formulated.<sup>14</sup> A series of rigid lines of argument had been drawn which theologians were now called to defend through an ever expanding plethora of patristic citations as well as a higher degree of philosophical underpinning drawn from studies of Aristotle, and to a lesser extent Plato, conducted at the Armenian monastic academies in the course of commenting on seminal Greek works rendered into Armenian during our period.<sup>15</sup>

did not endure very long. See the evidence on this presented in Mathews (1998), pp. xlviii–xlix.

<sup>11</sup> The next synod of comparable magnitude was that of Širakawan in 862, which also raised major christological issues. See Mxit'areanc' (1874), pp. 101–02 and Maksoudian (1988–9).

<sup>12</sup> Ter-Ghewondyan (1976), pp. 21–35.

<sup>13</sup> Hussey (1986), p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> On the circumstances surrounding the renewal of the doctrinal debate, see Cowe, 'Sebastia'. For later Armenian treatment of the issues of will, energy, and the theology of icons, see Aramian (1999), pp. 6–9 and Step'anos Örpëlean (1756), p. 14. The only major contact in the interim had been the correspondence initiated by Patriarch Photius in the second half of the ninth century, on which see Thomson (1995), pp. 76–7.

<sup>15</sup> Clearly a number of seventh and eighth century Armenian translations from Greek were effected for their utility in theological debate. Of these one might highlight St Gregory of Nyssa's *De officio hominis* (see T'ër-Mkrtčëan [1902], p. 369) and Nemesius of Emesa's *De natura hominis*. Even *opuscula* such as the fragment "The Rhetor "On Nature"" (Arevšatyan [1960], p. 374) were of value in distinguishing the central characteristics of the divine and human realms. For an

At the same time, one has to admit that Byzantine discussions with the Armenians in the sixth and seventh centuries on the problems raised by Chalcedon lacked the vitality and interplay of those with the West Syrians, in part because the latter were largely citizens of the empire and had an important stake in the outcome of the religious deliberations.<sup>16</sup> For the Armenians in the Persian sphere, maintaining their opposition to Nestorianism in the light of Ephesene orthodoxy provided the main basis for the groundbreaking synods of 505 and 555, whose decisions were then applied *mutatis mutandis* to the Chalcedonian Christology as being in essence crypto-Nestorian.<sup>17</sup> For the brief period of Maurice's repartition of Armenia (591–607) in which the Byzantines held four fifths of Armenia and established a Chalcedonian anti-catholicos Yovhannēs Bagaranc'i, the situation changed.<sup>18</sup> For a time the Caucasian Albanians to the East and the region of Siwnik' in South-Eastern Armenia seceded from communion with the Armenian Church, while the Georgian schism initiated at this point was to become permanent.<sup>19</sup> A significant factor in the outstanding revitalization of the fortunes of the Church from this nadir during the seventh and first half of the eighth century was the religious reorientation of the Persians and their successors the Arabs. Whereas during the fifth and sixth centuries the Nestorians had been perceived as the prime targets of Byzantine opposition and hence worthy of receiving the shah's favour, leaving the struggling incipient West Syrian church of Iran in a parlous condition, now the balance had shifted.<sup>20</sup> The 'monophysites' now gained in importance both for their theological opposition to the Byzantines, as well as for the latter's continuing efforts to try to reunite with them, as they

overview of the early range of philosophical and theological works rendered into Armenian by the Hellenophile School, see Arevšatyan (1971). For the later impact of such texts, see Cowe (1996), pp. 669–73, Pōlos Tarōnac'i (1752), p. 167, Aramian (1999), pp. 8–9, Step'anos Örpēlean (1756), pp. 19–34, and for the increasing role of secondary liturgical matters in later ecumenical discussions, see Findikian (1996).

<sup>16</sup> Hussey (1986), p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> Cowe (1992), pp. 136–40, and (1996), pp. 664–74, as well as Garsoïan (1999), pp. 166, 219.

<sup>18</sup> For the general background, see Cowe (1992), pp. 139–48. For the redrawing of the spheres of Byzantine and Iranian influence, see Hewsen (2001), p. 90, map 69.

<sup>19</sup> For the background to the schism, see Cowe (1991), and for the main theological issues id. (1992), pp. 138–9. For an analysis of the two primary Armenian sources on the Georgian schism, see Mahe (1996).

<sup>20</sup> McCullough (1982), pp. 158–60.

tended to be closer than the Nestorians both doctrinally and geographically. This explains some of the background to the solicitous treatment Catholicos Komitas Alc'ec'i (615–28) received from Khusrau II in the second decade of the seventh century.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the Arabs, successors to the Sasanians in the region, maintained this relationship over the next century.<sup>22</sup> Thus Ōjneg'i's predecessor, Catholicos Elia, repeated Komitas' appeal to the secular arm of the Caliph's forces to intervene to restore union with the Caucasian Albanians in the first part of the eighth century.<sup>23</sup>

As this brief overview demonstrates, the seventh and eighth centuries play an important role in the creation of a distinctive ecclesiastical polity in Armenia, with the solidification and centralization of its canonical discipline, liturgical worship, and doctrinal formulation. One salient aspect of the latter was the debate over the implications of the incorruptibility of Christ's flesh, a subject rather neglected in traditional histories of doctrine. The reasons for this may be several. It was considered somewhat limited temporally and geographically as largely a dispute within the inchoate monophysite theological sphere in the Eastern empire, most of the relevant texts surviving in Syriac not Greek. Yet, as we shall see, the debate raises significantly broader questions. During the mid-sixth century it attained such importance that, according to various sources, Justinian desired to promulgate the doctrine as the faith of the Empire. Thereafter, it continued to impact theological discussion among the Syrians and Armenians for several centuries to come.<sup>24</sup> In addition to such monophysite settings, we also find the issue occupying the attentions of Chalcedonian churchmen like Ephraem of Amida, patriarch of Antioch, who argued in favour of Christ's incorruptibility and Leontius of Byzantium, who championed the opposing view.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, there is still much in this field that requires more detailed investigation. The survey that follows should only be taken as a report of work in progress.

<sup>21</sup> Mahe (1993), pp. 462–3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p. 478.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Meyendorff (1989), pp. 245–6.

<sup>25</sup> Leontius (1860), cols. 1315–58. Although so far no Armenian translation of Leontius has come to light, it is intriguing that an allusion to one of his works emerges in a short anonymous treatise on the term 'nature' which in turn may have been translated from Greek. See Akinean (1911), pp. 340–1.

In essence, Christian theology predicates three invariable components, God, man, and salvation, the means of restoring communion between them after the rupture of the Fall. It follows necessarily that all three elements are intimately interconnected, our particular conception of one inevitably impinging on our understanding of the other two. Hence, even if our goal is not to produce a completely systematic theology, one cannot deny the underlying systemic link between the fundamental elements of the discipline. As is true of other christological debates of the sixth century, one of the most pivotal points at issue in aphotodocetism is conflicting views of postlapsarian anthropology, the account of mankind's common condition in the aftermath of Adam's Fall. Generally, discussion of the theme centres on the dispute between Julian of Halicarnassus, and Severus of Antioch during their period of exile in Egypt in the 520s.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, Julian is anticipated in some of his principal tenets by Philoxenus of Mabbug, ironically one of Severus' most devoted supporters, who had presided over the synod, which elected him to the see of Antioch in 512.<sup>27</sup> His connection with the debate is integral since he gained great status in the ensuing disputes between the protagonists' disciples as both sides quoted his writings in support of their conflicting positions.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Philoxenus exerted a clear impact on how the issue was debated in Armenia: not only was he a close collaborator with Simeon of Beth Aršam, who attended the Synod of Duin of 505 in order to promote the cause of monophysitism in the Iranian sphere, but some of his works were translated into Armenian in association with the second Synod of Duin in 555 and became influential thereafter.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, it should be borne in mind that, as De Halleux proposes, it is unlikely that Philoxenus himself had much information on the form the debate took between Julian and Severus, his primary focus being to combat Diodore and Theodore's Christology as reflected in their exegesis of the Gospels.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> For a detailed exposition of the views of both theologians, see respectively Draguet (1924) and Lebon (1909).

<sup>27</sup> De Halleux (1963), p. 47.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 232–55.

<sup>29</sup> In addition to citations of his works in the *Seal of Faith*, others are found in Step'anos the Philosopher's anthology of the early eighth century. See Tēr-Mkrčĕan (1902), pp. 379–80, 393–4. On Symeon's role at the Armenian Synod of 505, see Garsoĭan (1999), pp. 441–56.

<sup>30</sup> De Halleux (1963), p. 460.

Philoxenus espoused a version of what is generally categorized as a 'Western' view of the Fall and its enduring effect on human nature.<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, he argued that mankind endures death not as a result of individual sins, but in consequence of divine judgement of the human race in Adam. This condition of mortality is transmitted from one generation to the next through the carnal union, which in itself is a manifestation of sin.<sup>32</sup> Thus one is born in sin, reveals this in lust and desire, and bears its punishment in corruption, regarded as the dissolution of the body in death. As a Saviour 'like as we are, yet without sin' (Heb. 4:15), Philoxenus drew the conclusion that Christ had escaped the taint of sin through his virginal birth and therefore had no part either in the passions of the flesh or in the corruption of physical death. Moreover, in maintaining that one of the Trinity had taken flesh and suffered, he stated that Christ's nature is divine, in that by nature he is God (what he is) and not man (what he became).<sup>33</sup> In the incarnation Christ endured various 'becomings': birth, sufferings, and death, without undergoing any change to his nature. In consequence, his human life is above the ordinary, yet without being reduced to a mere semblance of humanity, since Philoxenus affirms Christ's consubstantiality with us.<sup>34</sup> Hence, he bore our weaknesses (ate, drank, became tired, suffered) like us, yet not of necessity as a punishment for sin, but rather of his own volition.<sup>35</sup> The whole economy is thus presented as a miracle of God's free will for humanity's purification and redemption.<sup>36</sup>

Though bearing certain similarities to Philoxenus' perspective, Julian's overall interpretation of man's condition is altogether more negative and severe.<sup>37</sup> In his estimation, Adam was intended for immortality. Consequently, his suffering and death were not according to his nature but the result of sin, a sin, which was then transmitted by physical generation.<sup>38</sup> Thereafter the whole human race has been corrupted by Adam's sin, so that now corruption is 'natural' or endemic to man's fallen nature. Man is now guilty and is punished by death, experiencing corruptibility as part of the same process, involving subjection to

<sup>31</sup> Draguet (1924), p. 236.

<sup>32</sup> De Halleux (1963), p. 503.

<sup>33</sup> Draguet (1924), p. 240.

<sup>34</sup> Chesnut (1976), p. 143.

<sup>35</sup> Draguet (1924), p. 240.

<sup>36</sup> Chesnut (1976), p. 143.

<sup>37</sup> Draguet (1924), p. 248.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 86.

weakness and suffering, which is 'naturally' inherited along with Adam's sin.<sup>39</sup> Like Philoxenus, he argues that it is therefore Christ's virginal birth which frees him from the cycle of physical retribution. Consequently, his flesh is incorrupt since the union and impassible and immortal in his sufferings and death.<sup>40</sup> As his suffering was not a punishment for a sin of nature, it must therefore be acknowledged as the result of his good pleasure. Once more, Christ's consubstantiality with us is upheld, in being born in Adam's prelapsarian nature in order to return us to our original destiny.<sup>41</sup>

The essence of Severus' critique of Julian's Christology is located in his contrasting account of human nature. Death resulting from the separation of the soul from the body is the result of natural corruption, one natural to humanity from the outset.<sup>42</sup> Averring that incorruption belongs by nature to God alone, Severus describes Adam's paradisaical state as one of enjoying the divine grace of incorruptibility and immortality, a grace then removed by God at the onset of sin. Hence, human nature did not undergo any fundamental change as a result of the Fall.<sup>43</sup> In fact Severus condemned the notion that man is born in sin as Manichaean in inspiration. Adam's transformation from corruptibility to actual corruption occurred as a result of his will being deceived by the devil. Consequently, Severus argues that aspects of the human psyche like fear are not to be automatically interpreted as negative and shameful and therefore attributed to the Fall. In contrast, he underlines their positive application by Adam in paradise. There fear functioned as a means of deterring the protoplast from committing sin.<sup>44</sup> As man had to triumph over Satan in order to be redeemed Christ could not save mankind in his divine nature alone, but had to assume human nature in order to defeat the devil thereby.<sup>45</sup> In consequence, Christ's humanity had to be consubstantial with ours in being corruptible, mortal, and naturally passible, embracing also the progressive growth of his flesh. Moreover, Severus introduced an important distinction between natural passions associated with suffering and death, of which Christ also partook, and others designated as reproachable, which were associated with

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 221.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p. 220.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 221.

<sup>42</sup> Lebon (1909), p. 21.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. 19.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.



sin, of which he was innocent.<sup>46</sup> Advancing his Christology in reaction against diophysites, Eutychians, and Julianists, Severus maintained that in Christ the sole agent and hypostasis was the Logos, whose nature had previously been single, but had become composite in the union by assuming full humanity with a single will and energy. He is at pains to maintain the Cyrilline position that the properties of divinity and humanity are preserved intact in the union.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, the only occasion on which he is prepared to countenance language relating to Christ's flesh as incorrupt is through reference to the *communicatio idiomatum*, since the one who assumed flesh is God himself.<sup>48</sup>

As noted above, the debate between Julian and Severus quickly spread, developing into factions which tended to simplify and further polarize the points at issue, entering also into the Chalcedonian mainstream. One of the more important texts from this confession is Leontius of Byzantium's *Dialogue with an Aphthartodocetist*. However, in employing this work to reconstruct the latter's views one must naturally exercise caution, since polemicists naturally tend to exaggerate their opponents' views in order to discredit them.<sup>49</sup> Thus, although the Aphthartodocetist interlocutor speaks, like Julian and Philoxenus, of Adam's original incorruptibility, he is also cited as holding that the incorruptibility of Christ's flesh resulted from a transformation within time of his human nature into something superhuman by the presence of the Word. Obviously this leaves him open to the charge of permitting some form of mixture in the union which compromises the integrity of Christ's humanity, so that his position is approximated to that of Eutyches.<sup>50</sup>

In contrast, Leontius argues that if the Virgin Mary was untransformed by the incarnation, then this should also apply to the child born from her womb. Diverging neatly from Philoxenus' formulation, he contends that Christ's miracles are the exception to the rule, insisting that human suffering marked part of the daily pattern of his human life. As he states, the supernatural 'does not abrogate the natural faculties, but develops them and enables them both to perform their activities

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p. 31.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p. 232.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p. 237.

<sup>49</sup> Daley (1978), pp. xlii-xlviii.

<sup>50</sup> Leontius (1860), col. 1321.

and to receive power to do what is beyond them'. Christ's passion occurred because although the Word could have prevented it, he did not intervene.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, the incorruption of the flesh in death resulted not from transformation of the flesh in the union, but from the will of the one united, whose divine will intervened to exempt the human nature from its lot at exceptional moments.<sup>52</sup> This intervention also preserved Christ's human will free from sin, thus granting humanity victory over sin and death, because of his consubstantiality with us in a full corruptible human nature. Leontius' approach is therefore quite close to Severus' in its broad lines, apart from the issue of the two wills.

Early data regarding Armenian perspectives on the incorruptibility of Christ's flesh are rather sparse and brief and do not afford us a clear insight into their character. The first discussion of the subject occurs in a series of four letters penned by 'Abdišo, leader of a Syrian Julianist community of Iran situated near the Armenian border, to the Armenian catholicos Nersēs II in the 540s.<sup>53</sup> As a result, we note a series of formulaic repudiations of 'Severus and his writings of corruption' in a series of catholicosal missives till the end of the century.<sup>54</sup> No mention of his main adversary Julian appears till the mid-seventh century. However, it may be worth pausing on a cryptic remark by Catholicos Movsēs II Ełuardec'i (574–604) in connection with an invitation from the emperor Maurice to attend a doctrinal discussion in Constantinople. In rejecting the overture he commented that 'he would not cross the Azat River (into Byzantine territory) nor partake of leavened bread and warm water'.<sup>55</sup> In addition to being the first indirect reference to the Armenian use of unleavened eucharistic bread, it seems also capable of being construed as the first hint of a singularly Armenian integration of liturgical and christological symbolism. The Armenian tradition of unmixed wine and unleavened bread is associated with the incorruptibility of Christ's flesh in contrast to the mixing of the eucharistic wine with water and leavening of the bread in the practice of other confessions, which are viewed as emblematic of corruption issuing from the union, as leavened

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. col. 1331.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. col. 1329.

<sup>53</sup> *Girk' T'it'oc'* (1901), pp. 58–69. For details on its location, see Garitte (1952), pp. 149–50.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. p. 55.

<sup>55</sup> Garitte (1952), p. 40.

dough was viewed as signifying mould, and wine mixed with water was regarded as producing vinegar.<sup>56</sup>

Equally important in underpinning the development of the doctrine of incorruptibility among the Armenians was the translation of certain works of Philoxenus brought to the second Synod of Duin by the Syrian priest 'Abdišo mentioned above.<sup>57</sup> This may already have taken the form of a florilegium, since three passages of his, which may well have been rendered into Armenian at this time, now survive in a larger christological anthology, which emanates from the early seventh century.<sup>58</sup> There is therefore great probability that they significantly influenced the growth of what developed into a particular doctrinal school in Armenia over the next few centuries. The excerpts affirm central Philoxenian tenets such as the physical transmission of sin and corruption within the human race as a result of Adam's Fall, characterized by a range of spiritual and fleshly weaknesses to which mankind is subject. However, Christ assumed flesh in likeness to the protoplast and hence is above all concupiscence and weakness, so that his passions of hunger, thirst, weariness, sleep, etc. are voluntary, not natural and were accomplished for the salvific economy, not according to man's true nature. Hence, for example, 'when he wished, he hungered, not because his stomach was empty like other men, for he experienced no need or lack'.<sup>59</sup>

This christological anthology, which seeks to defend ten doctrinal tenets by ample citation of patristic authorities, has come down to us as the *Seal of Faith*, the origins of which have been sought during the time of Catholicos Komitas (615–628).<sup>60</sup> Constructionally, it has benefited from two earlier such

<sup>56</sup> For a detailed discussion of the theological implications of this liturgical practice, see Pōlos Tarōnac'i (1752), 191–9, Step'anos Ōrpelean (1756), p. 62, and Mxit'ar Sasnec'i (1993), pp. 97–8.

<sup>57</sup> Ananean (1958), pp. 117–31 and Schmidt (1989), pp. 154–5.

<sup>58</sup> Tēr-Mkrtčean (1914), pp. 253, 260–1, 286. Two further independent citations of statements ascribed to Philoxenus are attested by the early thirteenth-century theological compilation the *Root of Faith* (see Vardan Aygekc'i [1998], pp. 151, 173).

<sup>59</sup> Tēr-Mkrtčean (1914), p. 261.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. p. ix. For the anthology's influence on the mid-eleventh century theologian Anania Sanahnec'i's similar compilation of patristic authorities in support of the doctrine of Christ's incorruptibility, see K'yoseyan (2000), pp. 265–83. Indeed, the citation from Philoxenus, which the *Seal of Faith* adduces on pp. 260–1, is quoted almost verbatim by Sanahnec'i (see ibid. p. 277). A generic debt is also owed to the compilation by the *Root of Faith* (see Vardan Aygekc'i [1998], pp. 71–315).

collections, Timothy Aelurus' refutation of Chalcedon<sup>61</sup> and the first compilation of the *Book of Letters*, portions from which have been included in support of the faction's creed.<sup>62</sup> The association of the *Seal of Faith* with the controversial theologian Yovhannēs Mayragomec'i is rendered all the more tangible by insertions from some of his discourses, which appear to have been effected after the completion of the work's first recension and are introduced by the reverential formula 'our blessed Father, the Hermit and Confessor' which would imply that at that time he was already deceased.<sup>63</sup> His followers' allusion to him as a hermit may refer particularly to his retreat to Mayravank' in the vicinity of Bĵni and his subsequent expulsion to Gardman where he is said to have died.<sup>64</sup> His designation as a confessor probably relates to the same events as well as possibly his official branding as a heretic after making an attempt to stage a comeback under Nersēs III Iṣxanc'i (641–61), as recorded in the *Narratio de rebus Armeniae*.<sup>65</sup> One aspect of his discomfiture relates to his refusal to attend the Synod of Theodosiopolis convened by Heraclius in 632–3, at the behest of Catholicos Ezr and his rejection of the synodal acts.<sup>66</sup> Exception was taken to several of his doctrinal statements as reflecting a sectarian perspective not congruent with the orthodoxy of the Armenian Church. This is evident already from the short citations inserted in the *Seal of Faith*. According to these, Mayragomec'i upheld Philoxenus' argument regarding Christ possessing one nature and hypostasis, which is consubstantial with the Father in all his actions great (miracles) and small (human passions). Indeed, he underscores his subordinationist Apollinarian approach by contrasting his stance with that of the major christological trends of the time in the following comments.

Now they state that Christ is out of two and then they turn and say that he is one (pre-Chalcedonian Christology of the East continued by the mainstream 'Monophysites'): sometimes [they state] from two and say two (possibly Nestorians and Chalcedonians) and have destroyed the faith of the world.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Ter-Mekerttschian/Ter-Minassiantz (1908).

<sup>62</sup> Ter-Mkrtčean (1914), pp. 114–26, 133–42, 260, 280–1, 358–63.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 253, 281, 288, 327, 363.

<sup>64</sup> Garitte (1952), p. 344.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* p. 46.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* p. 43.

<sup>67</sup> Tēr-Mkrtčean (1914), p. 146.

In keeping with this, he denies the possibility of maintaining the Chalcedonian preservation of the integrity of the two natures in the union, or the Cyrilline integrity of the properties of Godhead and manhood in Christ. One may not say incorrupt (in his divinity) and corruptible (in his humanity), ignorant (in humanity) and omniscient (in divinity), since he is God in all respects. In commenting on the scriptural citation concerning Christ's being in the likeness of sinful flesh, Mayragomec'i distinguishes similarity from actuality, arguing that Christ hung on the cross with the immortal nature of the flesh (consubstantial with that of prelapsarian Adam). Once more he follows Philoxenus and Julian in averring that as a result of his birth from a virgin, Christ was not subject to weakness or passion and hence accepted these voluntarily, not of necessity.

However, Mayragomec'i's zeal to exalt the efficacy of divine power at work in Christ leads him to exceed his masters in undermining the reality of any lowly act recorded of Christ in the gospel in a highly docetic manner, charging Nestorians with having corrupted the biblical account at various points, as the *Narratio* states him doing in the aftermath of the Synod of Theodosiopolis.<sup>68</sup> He was never without reason as a child, since he is God the Word. He was only thought to be without sense or strength. He did not become sorrowful in the Garden of Gethsemane concerning his impending death, but with regard to the perdition of the ungodly.<sup>69</sup>

Mayragomec'i considered that fear in particular was one of the most inappropriate qualities to be predicated of Christ, since it seemed to arise from scepticism, not faith, and was wholly negative. It had no place in Adam's original human nature, far less in the divine. Consequently, he argued that it lay beyond both natures.<sup>70</sup> A review of the tenets advanced in the *Seal of Faith* is sufficient to establish their identity with Mayragomec'i's own teaching, further suggesting that the work was compiled in his circle. Moreover, the ninth section of the work explicitly states that Christ had no fear of death and no bloody sweat or strengthening by an angel.<sup>71</sup> The reference, of course, is to the pericope of the bloody sweat in Luke 22:43-4, the only gospel account to mention the incident.

<sup>68</sup> Garitte (1952), p. 43.

<sup>69</sup> Tēr-Mkrtčean (1914), p. 288.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. pp. 293-341.

Although the *Narratio* mentions Mayragomec'i's proximity to and amity with Komitas, doctrinally, at least, they are poles apart.<sup>72</sup> Komitas is the first to offer a fuller account of what would become the normative position for Armenian doctrine. Instead of postulating incorruption of Christ's flesh *per se* in the company of Philoxenus and Julian, he predicates this only of the union.<sup>73</sup> Confessing the reality of the passions which are imputed in Cyrilline fashion to the union without distinction of subject, Komitas avers that Christ underwent the cross 'of his own will', yet in light of the preceding, this can hardly be identified with the 'voluntary sufferings' of Philoxenus and Julian, as these depend on Christ's incorrupt birth from the Virgin, releasing his flesh from the 'natural' passions of postlapsarian humanity.<sup>74</sup>

The further development of Mayragomec'i's Christology by his disciples is testified by T'ēodoros K'rt'enawor (d. c.680), nephew of Catholicos Komitas on his father's side and of Catholicos Eyr on his mother's, who produced the first refutation of their sect.<sup>75</sup> The latter focuses almost exclusively on their rejection of the pericope in question and their denial of the appropriateness of positing fear of Christ, since he overcame the enemy not by weakness, but strength. They defend this position with regard to Mayragomec'i's view, in succession to Philoxenus and Julian, that fear was not inherent in original human nature, and bring forward a natural example in support of their contention, suggesting that a child hugged at the bosom does not exhibit its effects.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, sweating blood is not part of human experience, and therefore a priori it is unsuitable to apply to Christ. A final argument is adduced from Armenian ecclesiastical precedent remounting to its fountainhead St Gregory. Since, they maintained, the latter discussed in detail all relevant portions of the gospel, but did not refer to this section, it cannot have been integral to the original Armenian Bible, and must constitute a secondary interpolation.<sup>77</sup>

In his rebuttal T'ēodoros broadly follows Severian arguments, stating that all passions characteristic of man were ordained by God, the good creator, for some positive use. Fear was to play a role in the development of Adam's moral sense. Only when his

<sup>72</sup> Garitte (1952), p. 42.

<sup>73</sup> Komitas (1896), p. 532.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> T'ēodoros K'rt'enawor (1833), pp. 171-83.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* p. 178.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 179-80; Cowe (1994), pp. 41-2.

autonomous will yielded to the blandishments of sin did fear assume a more negative quality.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, he argues that the latter's origin lies not in God or man, but in the prior fall of the devil through lack of the proper fear or awe of the divinity. Consequently, with Severus he argues that there can be no talk of any thoroughgoing change in human nature and certainly no physical transmission of corruption, since the flesh *per se* was not the primary organ by which sin entered, but the will.<sup>79</sup> Rather it is implied that each person is subject to corruption and death as a result of the sins they have individually committed.

Accordingly, Christ assumed human nature like ours, endowed with a rational mind and soul in which he conquered corruption and death, also growing in stature as a man, as Severus had stressed. Moreover, the anxiety Christ felt in the Garden of Gethsemane is significant precisely as an indication that he possessed a mind and rational soul.<sup>80</sup> Because the Word did not work iniquity, no corruption was found in him. Death was a punishment for transgression, of which the Word was free, and therefore he was incorrupt and immortal with his flesh, though he truly died. The last formulation is noteworthy in that incorruption is not posited of Christ's human nature *per se* when viewed as a distinct entity, but rather of his humanity sharing what was fundamentally a divine attribute through the union in consequence of the agency of the Logos in overcoming sin and death in the flesh.<sup>81</sup> T'ēodoros is at pains to exclude any transformation of the properties of the humanity by underscoring the lack of any confusion in the union. Naturally, this final point differs from Severus' emphasis on the natural corruptibility of the flesh, though it is not incompatible with it.<sup>82</sup> Again it is important to observe that when T'ēodoros employs the term voluntary with regard to the passions, it refers to the Word's free choice to accept the human condition in the economy, not to the sinless quality of the flesh he assumed.

T'ēodoros dismisses his opponents' other arguments in short order, suggesting it is preposterous that young children do not experience fear, that the Lukan pericope relates not to sweating blood as such, but rather shedding beads of sweat resembling drops of blood.<sup>83</sup> Ultimately, too, he undermines their appeal to

<sup>78</sup> T'ēodoros K'rt'enawor (1833), p. 175.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p. 173.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p. 174.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>82</sup> Lebon (1909), p. 21.

<sup>83</sup> T'ēodoros K'rt'enawor (1833), p. 178.

St Gregory's teaching as a reliable source on the basis of *argumentum ex silentio*, adducing a broader patristic dossier in favour of the originality of the pericope.<sup>84</sup>

The Synod of Duin of 645 bears further testimony to the continuing spread of Mayragomec'i's teaching, commenting on the appearance of heretical writings in the name of the founder of the movement. This may refer to the discourses alluded to above, as well as the circulation of translations of works by Julian perpetrated by his disciple Sargis, which have not come down to us.<sup>85</sup> Further indirect data are recorded in the refutation penned by T'ēodoros' pupil Catholicos Yovhan Ōj nec' i around the twenties of the next century against groups which he cites as Phantasiasts.<sup>86</sup> The title correlates with the view attributed to them of accepting that Christ's fleshly existence was in appearance only.<sup>87</sup> This recalls Mayragomec'i's introduction of a distinction between similarity and actuality to argue that Christ is God in all respects. Likewise, Ōj nec' i's interlocutors argue that human nature, which derives from Adam, is corruption of body and spirit.<sup>88</sup> Significantly, they draw the extreme conclusion from this that Christ was not born of a virgin, but in a virgin, maintaining with Philoxenus that Christ's single nature was divine, and that the body he assumed cannot be described as a nature, but merely a condition of being enfleshed.<sup>89</sup> In turn, the group denied that Christ had undergone passions in the flesh, but after the fashion of God, as in his feeling hunger only after a fast of 40 days. Man's hunger, in contrast, revealed nothing but corruption and decay.<sup>90</sup> In consequence, Ōj nec' i states that they objected to certain parts of Scripture, of which we are probably to deduce that one of the most problematic was the Lukan pericope already discussed.

Faithful to his teacher's largely Severian doctrine in the main, but expressing it in more sophisticated terms, Ōj nec' i develops the distinction between natural and reproachable passions. He contends that the former were not only constitutive of Adam,

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. pp. 180-1.

<sup>85</sup> Mxit'areanc' (1874), pp. 86-86 (*sic*). On this issue, see also Ač'aryan (1972), vol. 4, p. 405.

<sup>86</sup> Yovhan Ōj nec' i (1833), pp. 61-97. For an English rendering of this treatise, see Arpee (1946), pp. 325-54.

<sup>87</sup> Yovhan Ōj nec' i (1833), pp. 61-2.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. p. 62.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. p. 74.



but that the attempt to deny this renders much of the creation account illogical. Eating could hardly be a passion associated with the Fall, otherwise the whole conception of a garden would be meaningless. Similarly, fear in his rational soul assisted the protoplast in keeping the commandment. He also expressed sadness in lacking a helpmate, so setting the scene for the creation of Eve.<sup>91</sup> Underlining the primary role of free will, not the flesh, in precipitating the Fall, *Ōjnec'i* demonstrates that it is the basic facet of the human being to bear its adverse effects. Whereas before it was prone to perform the good, now it adduces a predilection for evil. When, as a result, we commit sin, we become subject to death as its punishment. Yet human nature *per se* is not corrupt. Corruption is the penalty for the sins of the individual and is not propagated by sexual concupiscence.<sup>92</sup> Still, man has fallen into a corruptible life in which he is so enslaved as to be unable to moderate his passions. *Ōjnec'i* is careful to outline that in the incarnation Christ's Godhead and manhood remained unchanged, and that their properties remain intact in the union.<sup>93</sup> At the same time, Christ forms a unity of one hypostasis, person, and nature. His experience of human passions was real, not illusory: he was indeed born of the Virgin and underwent genuine physical growth, both with passible flesh and impassible deity, the passible uniting with the impassible by *communicatio idiomatum* in the one person.<sup>94</sup> As God he had no consciousness of passions, but when he so willed, he signified to his flesh to bring the natural to the fore, permitting the natural, though without corruption. Thus he did not overcome sin and death purely as God, but in the flesh and rational soul he assumed from humanity, voluntarily accepting the penalty of death in solidarity with humankind.<sup>95</sup>

Xosrovik Targmanič' was a younger schoolmate and close confederate of *Ōjnec'i*, who was to present an even clearer and

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. pp. 83-4.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. p. 90. In this view *Ōjnec'i* is anticipated by a writing of Dawit' Hark'ac'i. See Tēr-Mkrtčean (1902), pp. 965-6.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p. 64.

<sup>94</sup> A similar account of the subject is given in a short erotapocritic work attributed to the mid-sixth century author Petros, Bishop of Siwnik', but which is probably roughly contemporary with those of *Ōjnec'i*. In dialogue with an Albanian diophysite, the writer emphasizes that Christ's one incarnate nature is composite (divine and human), maintaining the integrity of the properties of each. Christ grew in stature in his flesh and experienced sorrow and sadness (as in the pericope of the bloody sweat) in his rational soul, while being impassible in his divinity. See Tēr-Mkrtčean (1902), pp. 22-39.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p. 73.

more comprehensive treatment of the subject in a series of works written in the aftermath of the Synod of Manazkert, at which he was also present and in which he seems to have exerted some influence. Granted that background, we note that the tenets he combated were similar to those of Ōjnec'i and thus likely emanated from the same circle of Mayragomec'i's supporters. These included, for example, the maintenance of the Philoxenian formula devoting the term nature only to Christ's divinity and therefore denying the traditional affirmation that he is 'one out of two' and thus applying the terms impassible and immortal directly to Christ's flesh, which is argued as being that of Adam before the Fall, so that his participation in certain aspects of the human condition like ignorance and fear were more an appearance than reality. In addition, Xosrovik offers a broader discussion of the historical issues debated by Julian and Severus two centuries earlier.<sup>96</sup>

Accepting Ōjnec'i's account of the Fall, the most important clarification Xosrovik introduces in talking about Christ's human nature is to distinguish the levels of its inherent characteristics and those of the union in a balanced, eirenic fashion. In abstraction, he admits that Christ's humanity is passible and mortal, but impassible and immortal in being united to the Word.<sup>97</sup> From Xosrovik's perspective Severus spoke according to the abstract nature in arguing for the corruptibility of Christ's humanity until the cross, while Julian's perspective related to the union.<sup>98</sup> Although Xosrovik maintains with the latter and all the previous Armenian theologians we have reviewed the doctrine of the incorruptibility of the flesh, his account of this is very different. Holding firm to the salvific efficacy of Christ's humanity being consubstantial with us in his suffering, he also affirms that he revealed his power and glory in his humanity where and when he wished, as in rising from the sealed tomb.<sup>99</sup> He poses the crux of the problem in querying how Christ remained incorrupt, if a corrupt movement rules human flesh. He argues that the divine nature provided a bulwark to withstand the attack of corruption, by preventing the human nature from falling into sin through resisting temptation and therefore escaping the contingency of corruption and death, and thus offering a foundation for the extension of this power to

<sup>96</sup> Xosrovik T'argmanič (1899), pp. 152-3.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. p. 157.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. p. 160.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p. 169.

those who believe in his name.<sup>100</sup> It is precisely this distinction between Christ's human nature taken separately and within the union, which characterizes the canons of Manazkert also, indicating that the latter functioned at least as much as a means of re-establishing internal doctrinal order within the Armenian church as in improving relations with the West Syrian church, some of whose bishops were also present at the conclave.<sup>101</sup>

In this way, we observe that just as the debate between Julian and Severus had created a schism in the West Syrian confession and to a lesser extent in Byzantium, so also this serious divergence in the interpretation of anthropology and the effects of the Fall provoked an equally contentious debate in Armenian theological circles. However, in contrast to evaluations of the situation there such as that proposed by Tēr-Minaseanc', I would suggest on the basis of the evidence adduced that Julianism did not typify the normative statements of the Church as embodied in synodal acts and pronouncements by the catholicoi of the period and those in their confidence, which actually reveal a greater resonance with tenets of Severus as well as Leontius, although maintaining their own distinct emphasis. Rather, the Julianist standpoint represents the perspective of Yovhannēs Mayragomec'i and his followers, who are thereby marginalized in terms of their ability to represent the Church, albeit they attracted much support among Armenians over several centuries to come.<sup>102</sup> From examination of early Armenian gospel codices it emerges that the Lukan pericope of the bloody sweat is absent from all pre-twelfth century witnesses and only becomes common in the thirteenth century.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, other compilations constructed on the model of the *Seal of Faith* continue to appear, like that of Step'anos the Philosopher<sup>104</sup> and the persona of Mayragomec'i undergoes a partial rehabilitation in the tenth and eleventh centuries for his stalwart opposition to Chalcedon in a period characterized by sustained doctrinal pressure from the diophysite Byzantines and Georgians.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. p. 173.

<sup>101</sup> Michael (1901), 2, pp. 496-8; 4, pp. 459-60.

<sup>102</sup> Cowe (1993), n. 48.

<sup>103</sup> Id. (1994), p. 48.

<sup>104</sup> For this anthology, see Tēr-Mkrtčean (1902), and for a broader discussion of the compiler's possible relation to the acclaimed translator of the early eighth century, see Grigorean (1958), pp. 37-8, (1965), p. 216, and (1966), pp. 446-7.

<sup>105</sup> For the origins of this trend see Yovhannēs Drasxanakerc'i (1867), p. 102 (Armenian) and (1987), p. 100 (English).

At the same time, the definitions and approach of Yovhan Ōjnec'i and Xosrovik are taken up and further exploited in the monastic academies of the subsequent era, as already alluded to, by figures such as Yovhannēs Sarkawag and Pōlos Tarōnac'i in the twelfth century<sup>106</sup> and Step'anos Ōrpēlean and Mxit'ar Sasnec'i in the fourteenth.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, this understanding of the incorruptibility of Christ's flesh provided a rich symbolic means of integrating Armenian theology and liturgical life through the unmixed cup and unleavened eucharistic bread. Additionally, already differentiated from both the Nestorians and Chalcedonians by the two nature dispute, this doctrine neatly served to distinguish Armenian orthodoxy from both the mainstream and dissident branches of the West Syrian communion (Severian and Julianist) and hence to grant it a unique profile, which in our own day is reclaiming the attention of theologians of a neo-patristic persuasion within the Armenian Apostolic Church.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> The difference in perspective with regard to Christ's incorruptibility is well attested by Tarōnac'i's contention that Chalcedon's distinction of two natures after the union leads to the coexistence in Christ of the corruptible and incorrupt, whereas he approaches the issue from the composite nature of the union, raising additionally the more fundamental question of whether corruptibility is indeed a true characteristic of human nature (see Pōlos Tarōnac'i (1752), pp. 41, 68, 137–8, 144–5. Yovhannēs Sarkawag's approach was heavily dependent on Xosrovik's thought, which he, in turn, developed in refutation of the charges levelled at the Armenians of both Eutychnianism and Apollinarianism (see Aramian [1999], pp. 7–8, 23–7).

<sup>107</sup> Whereas the two twelfth-century theologians entered into debate with Georgian and Byzantine diophysite opponents respectively, their fourteenth-century counterparts were in dialogue with Rome. The former upholds the importance of Christ's rational soul enduring temptation but highlights the Word's empowerment in the soul's resistance and hence maintains the validity of the doctrine of incorruptibility (see Step'anos Ōrpēlean [1756], pp. 14–15). The latter was one of the first Armenian theologians to offer a sustained defence of Armenian theology to the Dominican missionaries of northern Iran. While continually emphasizing the ineffability of the mode of the incarnate union in contrast to his antagonists' more rationalist, scholastic approach, he summarizes the Armenian position quite succinctly in the following passage. '[Christ] was not incapacitated like us through having only a single power, but had a double power in accord with the goodpleasure of his will. Therefore, he has the power to transform the extremely lowly things into the greatest and most exalted by the application of his almighty power as well' (see Mxit'ar Sasnec'i [1993], p. 202).

<sup>108</sup> See, for example, Aramian (1992) and Ollukean (2001).

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