

CHAPTER 19

Gregory of Narek

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Introduction

Gregory of Narek remains largely unknown in western scholarship on medieval spirituality – regrettably so, since he deserves to be anthologized among its best representatives. Born near Lake Van, in the then Armenian Kingdom of Vaspurakan, c. 945, he spent his entire life at the monastery of Narek in the District of Āshtunik’ – three miles from the lake’s southernmost shore, today’s Yemişlik Köyü – where he died in 1003. Consequently, in Armenian he is called Narekats’i, after the place with which he is associated; similarly, his renowned *Book of Lamentation*, which will be discussed herein, is called *Narek* for short.

Gregory was the son of Khosrov, a scholar who, after his wife’s death, when Gregory was a child, became Bishop of Vaspurakan’s District of Andzewats’ik’. This was before 950 (Khach’atryan 1996: 21–32, 36); however, some place Gregory’s birth in the year 951, misreading the year of Khosrov’s defying the authority of the catholicos who consecrated him, 954, as that of consecration (cf. Cowe 1991: 11). Khosrov, then an aged widower, took his younger sons, John (Yovhannēs) and Gregory (Grigor), to be educated at the famed monastery, whose abbot Anania was a paternal cousin of his deceased wife. Khosrov’s eldest son, Isaac (Sahak), remained with him as his amanuensis. Our knowledge about the family mostly derives from four colophons by Gregory himself, transmitted by subsequent scribes. The first was appended to a manuscript of his father’s two liturgical works (*Exposition of the Daily Office* and *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, in *Matenagirk’ Hayots’* (MH) 10: 35–227; Cowe 1991), copied by Sahak and owned by Gregory (where Khosrov’s title “Lord Bishop of Andzewats’ik’” is given with the date of completion, 950), and the others were appended to his own works (below, nos. 1, 3, and 7). Apart from information from these colophons and the “innerman” emerging from the prayers, we know little about Gregory’s life – hagiographical

embellishments notwithstanding. Some sparse, supplementary information may be gathered from his standard monastic education and the writings of his kin, especially the abbot Anania. His first eulogizer, Nersēs of Lambron (1153–1198; Bishop of Tarsus from 1175), simply repeats the colophonic information in a colophon of his own, in a manuscript of the prayers copied for him in 1173 (Matenadaran no. 1568). Nersēs shows profound appreciation for Gregory's prayers – apparently recovered during the pontificate of Nersēs's great uncle, Catholicos Nersēs IV of Klay (in office 1166–1173), known as “the Gracious” for his passionate ecclesiastical writings and pioneering ecumenical endeavors. No medieval Armenian writer was more influenced by Gregory than Catholicos Nersēs, who probably was the first to have our author's prayers, odes, and litanies anthologized in liturgical books.

Short History of Scholarship

The gripping appeal of Gregory's *Book of Lamentation* brought about its partial publication in the relatively early years of Armenian printing, thanks to the efforts of Oskan Erewants'i, in Marseilles, in 1673. His works reemerged in Constantinople in the eighteenth century, as a result of Patriarch Yakob Nalian's keen interest in the prayer book, which he had published locally in 1701. The publication of the entire corpus followed, by the Venetian Mekhitharists in 1827 and again in 1840. The text of Gregory's works, in part or in whole, was variously published and translated thereafter. By 1875 there were no less than 50 printings of the book. His mystic poetry gave new impetus to secular Armenian poetry during the nationalism awakened in nineteenth-century Constantinople, earning Gregory such accolades as “the foremost Armenian author of all times,” “the most sacred name in Armenian letters,” and so on.

In the Soviet era the corpus of his writings was viewed as exclusively poetry rather than essentially prayer, and the author was seen as an anti-clerical proto-communist. This was sufficient to justify the publication of a critical text of the book, the first such edition, sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR (Khach'atryan and Ghazinyan 1985). Two good western translations followed, one into French (Mahé 2000; rev. ed. 2007) and another into English (Samuelian 2001). To commemorate the millennial of Gregory's death, the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia (headquartered in Antelias, Lebanon) published his collected works, utilizing the 1985 critical edition of the prayer book (albeit without the *apparatus criticus*) and the best available editions of the author's other works, with significant emendations (Aznaworian 2003). The 1985 critical edition, along with a more definitive text of the author's other works – thanks to newly collated manuscripts at the Matenadaran in Erevan – appeared in vols 12 (2008) and 10 (2009) in the ongoing series *Matenagirk' Hayots' (MH; “Armenian Classical Authors”)*, began in 2003 under the patronage of the Lisbon-based Gulbenkian Foundation and the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia. The series may in time be dubbed as *Patrologia Armena* simply for bringing together conveniently the scattered sources for the study of the Armenian Fathers – a grossly neglected area in patristics (all references to ancient Armenian sources in this chapter are to the series *MH*). Subsequent to the publication of vol. 12, I have translated for an impending publication

all the author's poetic works apart from the prayer book: his odes, litanies, and encomia, under the title *The Festal Works of Gregory of Narek* (in preparation).

Moreover, English and French readers are fortunate to have recent translations of Gregory's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (Ervine 2007; Pétrossian 2010); and French readers, of his *Encomium on the Holy Virgin* (Dasnabédian 1995). A partial and gradually expanded Russian translation of the prayer book (Grebnev 1977) inspired Alfred Schnittke's "Concerto for Mixed Chorus," with various recordings of its performance since 1985. A complete Russian translation followed (Darbinyan-Melik'yan and Khanlaryan 1988). There are several translations of the *Book of Lamentation* into modern Western and Eastern Armenian – even two translations into Arabic and two separate, unpublished translations in Turkish (cited in Khach'atryan and Ghazinyan 1985: 228). Similarly, there are Western and Eastern Armenian translations of Gregory's *Odes* and *Exhortation*, and a Western Armenian translation of the *Encomia*.

Next to the popularity of Gregory's prayers, his odes have attracted considerable attention for their poetic excellence. Most of them appear in various translations, but not all (for a complete Czech translation, see the forthcoming work of Haig Utidjian). Together, they are ranked among the greatest and most popular works in Armenian poetry. Thus, a critical edition of the odes and the litanies, as that of the prayers, was published in the Armenian SSR (K'yoshkeryan 1981). Apart from text-critical studies, most Soviet–Armenian scholarship devoted to these odes, litanies, and prayers is flawed for want of theological input.

A flurry of publications appeared in 2003, when Armenians everywhere commemorated the millennial of Gregory's death. While most of these are irrelevant for students of patristics, special mention must be made of the published papers from two international conferences devoted to our author. These papers, assigned to specialists by the organizers, sum up fairly the better state of "Narekian" scholarship today (Mahé and Zekiyán 2006; Mahé *et al.* 2009–2010).

Overview of Monastic Education at Narek

By the tenth century Armenia had recovered from the ill effects of the Arab invasion. Relative peace, coupled with mercantile prosperity, had enabled the rise of new monasteries along the trade routes that traversed the land. And as everywhere else in the tenth century, monasteries were the centers of learning in Armenia, and that for privileged sons destined for the religious life. The basic curriculum in the monastic schools consisted of the three liberal arts of classical antiquity, known as the *trivium*: grammar, rhetoric, and logic. This was augmented by the study of Scripture; patristics, including hagiography; and theology, including some philosophy, bridged by the writings of Philo of Alexandria. Such education was considerably rich, given the availability of theological and literary works in Armenian, as hundreds of translated works and others of native origin bear witness in thousands of surviving manuscripts – despite the turbulent history of the Armenian people. Singing was inseparable from liturgy, learned through participation in the daily services. Biblical interpretation, associative as it was at the elementary level – that is, based on connecting terms and concepts in Scripture with an

eye for “fulfillment” in the New Testament – was almost entirely allegorical at the advanced level. Every versed *vardapet*, as the ecclesiastic doctor or teacher in the Armenian Church is called, thrived on allegorization.

Gregory was one of them; and like few others in this period, he was called by the Hebrew equivalent of the title, *rabbi* (*Prayer* 72.4). Moreover, children of the elite could also receive secular education in the monasteries, with the addition of the *quadrivium*: mathematics, geometry, music, and astronomy – thus completing the seven liberal arts. Lifelong monastic commitment offered opportunities for higher learning beyond these foundations. In his *Discourse*, Gregory states: “I was dropped in the womb of the church; and being nursed with milk from her spiritual breasts, I was honored as a priest in her great house, and was privileged to partake of her old and new treasures, albeit unworthily” (*MH* 10: 1041). Monastic libraries were repositories of “old and new treasures,” as further indicated by the plenitude of surviving Armenian manuscripts. The monastic complex included a scriptorium where all students were trained in calligraphy, and nearly all accomplished scribes were monks.

Gregory had the added benefit of tutelage by his learned kin. The literary tradition at the disposal of the founder and abbot, Anania of Narek, whom Gregory’s brother John succeeded as abbot, must have been considerable. The monastic community at Narek was probably one of several reestablished communities that had fled maltreatment in Byzantine Cappadocia during the Byzantine–Abbasid conflicts of 934–944 and the ensuing Byzantine expansionism (Thierry 1980: 1–2; 1989: 82). This led to ever-increasing imperial demands for confession of Chalcedonian “Orthodoxy” in the territories that came under Byzantine control, and the number of Armenian-Chalcedonians was constantly on the rise in the eastern provinces of the empire. Consequently, there was a proliferation of relocated and new monasteries in the eastern part of Armenia (Maksoudian 1990–1991; Mahé 2000: 8–33; Pogossian 2012). The historian Asoghik (d. c. 1015) lists Narek among them, as a place “with multi-talented, highly accomplished singers and literary scholars” (*History*, 3.7, in *MH* 15: 750–752). The available learning was evidently accumulated over centuries prior to the monastery’s possible relocation – rather than founding – only a generation earlier. In this sense one could speak more justifiably of the reestablished “School of Narek,” a designation used in recent scholarship that looks merely into the literary output of the few known figures associated with the monastery (T’amrazyan 1999). A case for the relocation at Narek could also be argued on the basis of the considerable Greek influence on those few (Yarnley 1976).

Our author had at his disposal a wealth of biblical commentaries translated from Greek and Syriac, and others of native Armenian authorship. Of the latter commentaries, special mention must be made of two by Bishop Step’anos of Siwnik’ (d. 735): *On the First Vision of Ezekiel* and *On the Four Gospels* (*MH* 6: 130–155); and an unusual *scholium* by Bishop Grigoris of Arsharunik’ (d. c. 730): *Commentary on the Lections*, a Christological interpretation based on the structure of the *Lectiary*, in 34 chapters (*MH* 6: 31–91). Equally massive was the homiletic literature available to Gregory, including several homiliaries by native writers. The earliest of these, from the fifth century, are by Eghishē Vardapet (*MH* 1: 960–1052; 6: 999–1005; Thomson 2000) and Mambṛē Vertsanogh (*MH* 1: 1095–1136). No less significant are the homilies and

panegyrics by Catholicos Zak'aria of Dzag (in office 854–876) on the life of Christ and on the Virgin (*MH* 9: 26–356). Equally important, in the panegyric tradition, are the encomia on the Holy Cross and the Theotokos by Bishop Petros of Siwnik' (d. 557), Dawit' of Nergin (d. c. 660), and T'ēodoros K'rt'enawor (d. c. 675).

Thanks to early translations, there was considerable interconnectedness of the various literatures of the Christian East. These permeated Armenia early in the fifth century with the invention of the Armenian letters and the rigorous translational activity that followed. Gregory, like his spiritual ancestors, is heir to the vast heritage of the Early Church, encompassing both Greek and Syriac patristic writings predating Chalcedon, which had been nurtured in the Armenian Church for the better part of the first millennium. Foremost of these are the works of Irenaeus, the Cappadocian Fathers, Chrysostom, and Ephraim of Nisibis. An understudied aspect of this inherited faith is the ascetic legacy of Evagrius of Pontus (d. 399), especially his notion of the eight evil patterns of thought and his views about unceasing, pure prayer with tears – the simplest and purest of all prayer that is contemplation. The Evagrian influence on Gregory was substantial, as seen in his repeated prayers with tears in the prayer book, and in this admonition: “Confess your thoughts to God, the Benefactor, as if thoughts were actions” (*Prayer* 45.1; cf. *Order and Rules of Prayer* 48, in *MH* 10: 1084). Of post-Chalcedonian works, those of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, composed in Syria at the turn of the sixth century and translated into Armenian by Step'annos of Siwnik' (d. 735), had considerable influence on the Armenian Church (Thomson 1987; La Porta 2007), as also on other churches in the East and the West. (The effects of the Dionysian works on historical developments in tenth-century Armenia, and more so on the monastery of Narek, will be discussed later.) To this inherited faith Gregory added his personal imprint. He is a marvelously responsive writer with that rare ability to expound the deeper issues of life, with both a theologian's precision and a poet's lyricism.

Given the wide diversity of mystical experiences and mystical theologies, it is difficult to trace the immediate influences on Gregory beyond those of the spiritual milieu of his monastic community. However, attempts have recently been made to identify Neoplatonic tendencies in his works, thought to have been influenced by Plotinian and Dionysian writings (T'amrazyan 2004). Gregory's familiarity with the latter corpus is to be expected – even though no clear terminological indications of a direct Dionysian influence are found in his works (La Porta 2009–2010). His thought patterns are quite complex and often find expression in composite neologisms. In a meritorious study of our author's use of words, Mirzoyan (2010: 163–211) lists these neologisms alphabetically; they cover 30 two-column pages. Mirzoyan goes on to provide a list of words that occur only in the works of Gregory and his father Khosrov, and another list of words that occur only in the works of Gregory and his mentor Anania.

Gregory's indebtedness to Anania is profound (see *Prayer* 28.6; cf. *Eulogy*, in *MH* 10: 1103–1105). The range of Anania's surviving works is impressive (*MH* 10: 309–657, inclusive of the introductions by T'amrazyan and Bozoyan), thanks to documentary research undertaken at the Matenadaran that has brought to light newly discovered works and has reclaimed his authorship of extrapolated texts once attributed to Anania of Sanahin (d. c. 1070). Collectively, his extant works have a curricular character, revealing much of the content of his teaching (T'amrazyan 1986).

They consist of: hortatory discourses on the priesthood, humility, transience (in verse), and careful administration of the sacraments; treatises on penitence with tears (in prosaic verse), moralia, and arithmology or number-mysticism; polemical diatribes on the Dyophysites and others; a panegyric in praise of the universal church, which a later subtitle appropriates for Ējmiatsin; and a brief denunciation of the T'ondrakeans, on whom more will be said later. The abbot's writings reflect the more immediate and lasting influence on Gregory, whose theological education is amply displayed in his early works and amplified with deeper mysticism in his later writings.

Narek in the Midst of Controversy

The tenth century was a turbulent period in the history of the Armenian Church. The catholicos see, which was moved from Vagharshapat (Ējmiatsin) to Dwin in 484 and to Aght'amar in 927 or 931, was transferred to the village of Argina, near Ani, in 947, not long after the accession of Anania of Mokka' to the see (in office 943–965). To consolidate his authority in the northern region and to reassert the waning significance of his office, the catholicos clashed with the Bishop of Siwnik', Yakob, who had cemented ties with the geographically closer catholicosate of the Caucasian Albanians, the Aghuank', an affiliate of the Armenian Church since its Gregorid beginnings. Also, early in his rule, Anania of Mokka' confronted the schismatic Catholicos Sahak of Caucasian Albania over the latter's conciliatory interpretation of the Council of Chalcedon (*Ep. i*, in *MH* 10: 258–260). This made the Armenian catholicos less tolerant toward Byzantinophiles within his jurisdiction – contrary to the spirit of the Council of Shirakawan (862), which had adopted a nonconfrontational stance toward the Byzantines, even allowing intermarriage between Dyophysites and Miaphysites (Maksoudian 1988–1989). Anania of Mokka' opposed such marriages (*Ep. i*, in *MH* 10: 256); he even required the rebaptism of Dyophysites within his jurisdiction (*Asoghik, History*, 3.7, in *MH* 15: 754). He referred to the proliferation of Dyophysitism as a spreading cancer (*Ep. i*, in *MH* 10: 259). The extent of his intolerance toward the Byzantines and their perceived sympathizers in Armenia is seen in his criticism of Khosrov, Gregory's father, for Greek influence on his pronunciation of certain Armenian words.

This surfaces in the first of two letters (ii–iii) issued by the catholicos against Khosrov after the latter's death in c. 960 and titled *The Reason for Anathematizing Khosrov the Bishop of Andzewats'ik'*. In it he gives two substantive reasons for the anathematization: (1) for considering all crosses, blessed or not, as equally sacred; and (2) for considering all bishops, including the catholicos, as of equal ecclesiastical rank (*MH* 10: 275–276; cf. Cowe 1991: 10–13). The issue of parity of bishops was instigated by the Bishop of Siwnik', Yakob, and has a history of its own in the rivalry between the two hierarchies. Khosrov, despite having received consecration at the hand of Anania of Mokka', sided with Yakob of Siwnik', who challenged Anania's lordly way over the bishops. While Yakob and Khosrov had argued – possibly in some lost works – for the equality of the catholicosate and the episcopate on the basis of the traditional hierarchy of deacons, priests, and bishops, in two other letters (i, iv) Anania of Mokka' dwells on the Dionysian triads of these three and their parallel celestial hierarchy of angels in three triads; and

he dares the opposition bishops to compare themselves with any of the bishops of the Apostolic Era – or with St Gregory the Illuminator, founder of the hierarchy of the Armenian Church (*MH* 10: 281–291; cf. *Ep.* iii, in *MH* 10: 277–280).

The sentiments against Catholicos Anania coincide, albeit for different reasons, with those of the anti-hierarchical, anti-church-establishment T'ondrakeans – a heretical movement variously identified since the tenth century with every known heresy as of Docetism. Most of what is said about them by the ancients is comparable to Nersessian's (1987: 5) observation about the earlier sects, that "many of the Armenian sources regarding the sects are ambiguous in that they do not relate to any specific sect." Notwithstanding the ambiguities even in the more reliable sources on the T'ondrakeans cited by him (55–66), and the fact that all were written by their adversaries long after the rise of the movement, the T'ondrakeans emerge not as Paulicians (contra Garsoïan (1967: 96), based on the connection she makes on the authority of Grigor Magistros (d. 1059), on whom see later) but as Aphthartodocedic-Eutychnian extremists. They gave the eucharistic flesh and blood of Jesus little or no sacramental import and saw no relevance in certain other rituals, having limited their definition of church to the community of believers – rejecting the significance of church buildings and thus disparaging the very seat of hierarchical authority. Consequently, they were identified as enemies of the Church who rejected the orthodox sacraments and practices, and were persecuted on both sides of the Byzantine–Armenian border, eventually retreating from the eastern provinces of the empire to the easternmost regions of Armenia.

The demonized T'ondrakeans were most likely Monothelite Eutychnians, having received their name from a radical understanding of *Theandrikos* in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius (*Ep.* iv), as the reception history of the latter indicates. Especially significant are the glosses attributed to Maximus the Confessor (d. 662) to bring Pseudo-Dionysius into conformity with Chalcedonian Orthodoxy (Pelikan 1987: 15–17; Luibhéid and Rorem 1987: 265 n. 8). Their appellation, *T'ondraket's'i* in Armenian (mere transliteration of the Greek word, q.v. *Theandrikos* in Lampe (1961: 615)), must have been in vogue prior to the Armenian translation of Pseudo-Dionysius in the eighth century, where this theologically significant word is rendered *Astuatsayrakan* (q.v. in Thomson (1997: 38); the same Dionysian passage is cited by Anania of Narek in his counter to the Dyophysites, *The Basis of Faith* (*Hawatarmat*, in *MH* 10: 546), and added to *The Seal of Faith*, initially a seventh-century compilation of dogma (*Knik' hawatoy*, in *MH* 4: 230)). After all, Monothelitism appeared in the western provinces of Armenia (the Byzantine east) early in the seventh century as a logical offshoot of Eutychnian Monophysitism and had a substantial appeal for a considerable period (cf. Dorfmann-Lazarev 2013: 364–365). For their Christological position the Eutychnians were repeatedly denounced by Dyophysites and Miaphysites alike, and were persecuted especially after being radicalized in Armenia by Smbat of Zarehawan early in the ninth century (Magistros, *Ep.* iv–v (lxvii–lxviii), in *MH* 16: 192–207). As they were driven eastward, they must have congregated southwest of Manzikert, in a locality that conceivably derived its name, T'ondrak (today's Tendürek), from the faith identity of the newcomers into the District of Apahunik'. The proper name, unattested in earlier sources, survives in two other districts: Tarōn in the west and Kogovit in the east. After all, it would be strange for a heretical movement to derive its name from a toponym.

Moreover, Dionysian spirituality provided ideas and formulas that generated several beliefs besides conditioning others within the bounds of orthodoxy that were anticipated by the Cappadocian Fathers. Not the least of these is the doctrine of *theosis* or deification, which was but a logical *telos* in Christian mysticism: from likeness to God to participation and communion or union with the Divine (Kharlamov 2009: 4–6, 25–34, 58–61, 135–158, 225–234). Judging from the mystical theology of Gregory's prayer book, as we shall see below, the predominantly Byzantine doctrine must have been cherished at Narek. This may have been a factor in bringing the monastery further under scrutiny by the staunchly anti-Chalcedonian and overly suspicious Armenian hierarchy of the time.

With suspicions of heresy besetting his monastic establishment, Anania of Narek was probably compelled to write a treatise against the T'ondrakeans, the arch-heretics of his time. Such a treatise is mentioned in the works of three contemporaries: (1) twice in Gregory's admonition to the brotherhood of Kchaw (*MH* 12: 1087–1089), which will be discussed further; (2) in the above-mentioned *History* by Asoghik (3.7, in *MH* 15: 753); and (3) in a letter by the savant Gregory Magistros (d. 1059), who was heavily involved in persecuting the T'ondrakeans at the time (*Ep.* iv (lxvii), in *MH* 16: 196). The treatise is mentioned also in an encyclical by the above-mentioned Catholicos Nersēs of Klay, a great-grandson of Magistros (1871: 269), who knew of remnants of the T'ondrakeans in northern Mesopotamia; but only Magistros states that this treatise was written upon the request of Catholicos Anania of Mokk'. This work, however, no longer exists except for an excerpt utilized by the prolific writer and *vardapet* John of Erzēnka (d. 1293) (*MH* 10: 436–438). Simply an ecclesiological fragment elaborating on the meaning of church, the excerpt has no mention of the T'ondrakeans or of anything inimical to the church.

Apparently the treatise was not enough to dispel suspicions, and the abbot was pressured to the very end, as revealed in a deathbed denunciation of the T'ondrakeans with a litany of anathemas attributed to him and most likely addressed to Catholicos Khach'ik of Ršhtunik' (in office 972–992), a nephew of Anania of Mokk' (*MH* 10: 649–657). There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of this coerced document sent “to the one who is ‘just’ unjustly and ‘familiar’ with the unfamiliar, an estranged relative (or, sibling), and who – being lord (or, master, used epithetically for bishops and other hierarchs) from birth to old age – does not recognize a servant's good deeds or faithful service.” Moreover, in closing, the abbot reminds of his earlier, now lost, treatise against the T'ondrakeans. It was upon Catholicos Khach'ik's request that Anania had also written his polemical response to the Dyophysites, as his contribution to the Armenian Church's counter to the Byzantines (*Hawatarmat*, in *MH* 10: 480–598). The latter work is mentioned by Ukhtanēs, who was a classmate of Gregory of Narek and later Bishop of Sebastia (970–985), and who wrote a history from biblical times to the schism because of Chalcedon upon the request of the abbot Anania for the same endeavor urged by the catholicos (*History*, in *MH* 15: 446–608). He calls the abbot Anania his “spiritual father” and himself “an unworthy disciple” (*MH* 15: 446). Of the tenth-century historians, only Asoghik mentions the T'ondrakeans, and that only in passing, as he refers to the appearance of Smbad “of the T'ondrakeans” (Arm. *T'ondrakats'*, not a toponym) when Catholicos Yovhannēs of Ova was in office (832/833–854/855); and again when

listing the great *vardapets* of his time, including “the great philosopher Anania, who is a monk at Narek. To him belongs a treatise against the sect of the T’ondrakeans [*T’ondrakats’*] and other heretics”; but he says nothing more about them (*History* 3.3, 7, in *MH* 15: 742, 753).

Gregory of Narek’s cautionary *Letter* to the brotherhood of Kchaw, a neighboring monastery in the Van region, is addressed to the abbot whose community has come under the influence of the “accursed T’ondrakeans” (*MH* 12: 1087–1089). The document – in which he draws repeated attention to the treatise by his abbot Anania – constitutes a summary of generally perceived tenets of the movement in his day. He begins with an apologetic disclaimer for “any semblance of polemics” in what he writes. He lists the sectarians’ 14 tenets, albeit some repetitious (Nersessian 1987: 57–58). The short denunciation, with the comprehensive list at its core, could well be the reason for the survival of Gregory’s works and of his saintly status in the Armenian Church. Whether or not he cherished anti-hierarchical sentiments, his father’s encounter with Catholicos Anania of Mekk’ to the point of being anathematized coupled with the mystical theology pursued at Narek and the poisoned atmosphere of the times were probable causes for his being thrown in the company of suspects. A statement of loyalty was exacted from those thus suspected, by having them denounce the T’ondrakeans in one form or another. Gregory’s framing his denunciation as a letter of concern for monastic brothers has to be seen as part of his creative genius.

Undoubtedly, the anti-T’ondrakean documents originating from Narek were coerced. A written denunciation of the T’ondrakeans, whose name in the tenth century was equated with anti-hierarchical or anti-establishment movements, was tantamount to an oath of loyalty not only to the Church but also to its hierarchy, even submission to an obstinate hierarch.

Gregory’s Works

Gregory’s renown rests primarily on the excellence of his *Book of Lamentation*, in Armenian *Matean Voghbergut’ean*, a codex of predominantly penitential prayers from the closing years of his life and reflecting the height of his spiritual and literary attainment. By contrast, his earlier works are less known. With the exception of the odes, they do not always reflect the quality of his later achievement; nonetheless, they are literary gems that deserve scholarly attention. They are quite important works for the study of medieval Armenian lyric poetry and of the liturgical development of the time. Unlike his mournful, penitential prayers, a celebratory mood permeates these works. As his colophons indicate, two of his encomia, “On the Holy Cross” and “On the Holy Virgin,” along with the *History of the Cross of Aparank’*, were commissioned works, as was his earlier *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. He must have attained recognition for his literary ability early in life to be asked to produce these compositions – to certain of which he refers in his prayers.

The expanded cataloguing of ancient manuscripts at the Matenadaran in recent years has led to forgotten works of Gregory of Narek; and the accompanying textual studies have helped settle hitherto unresolved questions regarding the authorship of

long-known others in favor of our author. Of course, the rediscovered works require authorial substantiation, and this is remarkably well done in the introductions to these works now with the others in the *MH* series, in vols 10 and 12 (the latter devoted to our author in its entirety). Both T'amrazyan and Mirzoyan follow a sound method of authentication by focusing on Gregory's distinct language with its peculiar vocabulary.

Several of Gregory's long-known works have been mentioned in the preceding pages aimed at contextualizing them historically and, earlier, to acquaint the reader with the current state of scholarship. Here, then, is a list of Gregory's established works, as found in the *MH* series, where all his works are readily accessible for the first time. The titles are followed with page numbers in this new *textus receptus*. Helpful introductions by the respective editors of the mostly diplomatic texts precede the page numbers given here. Of particular importance nowadays are T'amrazyan's introductions in vol. 10, where he argues convincingly for the authorship of the four less-known works. These I have listed after those in vol. 12.

1. *Book of Lamentation* (Arm. *Matean oghbergut'ean*, as in *Prayer* 2.2; 9.1; 53:2; 70.3; 71:5; 88.2); in *MH* 12: 49–605. This is Gregory's *magnum opus* and the last of his works, written when looking death in the eye. It consists of 95 prayers, each comprised of several sections. According to his colophon, it was assembled over a period of 3 years, from fragments to completion in 1002, with the help of his older brother John, then abbot of Narek, who was with him "in the same pathway, seeing the same mystic vision."
2. *Odes and Litanies* (Arm. *Tagher ew Gandzer*; or, collectively, *Gandztetr*); in *MH* 12: 623–745. A collection of 30 hymnic odes and 11 litanies composed – along with the *Encomia* – as festal works, for Dominical and other feasts. In *Prayer* 34.10 the author alludes to his writings in this genre.
3. *Commentary on the Songs of Songs* (Arm. *Meknut'iwn Ergots' Ergoyn Soghomoni*); in *MH* 12: 760–882. The author's colophon at the end (pp. 882–883), dated AD 977, tells that he wrote it upon the request of Prince Gurgēn Artsruni (co-reigned as King of Vaspurakan with his brothers, 977–1003).
4. *Commentary on Job: "Who is This...?"* (Arm. *Meknut'iwn "Ov ē Da"i*); in *MH* 12: 885–910. On chapters 38 and 39, the first of God's two discourses comprising the epilogue of Job, beginning with the words "Who is this...?" (38:2).
5. *The Story of the Holy Cross of Aparank'* (Arm. *Patmut'iwn Aparanits' S. Khach'in*); in *MH* 12: 913–929, on how a relic of the true Cross was brought to the monastery of Aparank' in the District of Mekk' (Gk. Moxoēnē; Syr. Bēth Moksāyē), in the Khizan region near Lake Van. The account concludes with anticipation of the next two encomia. The colophon at the end of the *Encomium on the Blessed Virgin* indicates that all three works were written for the bishop of the district, Step'anos.
6. *Encomium on the Holy Cross* (Arm. *Nerbogh i Surb Khach'n*), in two recensions: A in *MH* 12: 930–941, B in *MH* 12: 942–952. The long-known recension B preserves a preferred text. The encomium is written as a sequel to *The Story of the Holy Cross of Aparank'*.

7. *Encomium on the Blessed Virgin* (Arm. *Nerbogh i Surb Koysn*), in two recensions: A in *MH* 12: 953–963, B in 965–974. The author refers to this encomium in *Prayer* 80.1. The colophon found at the end, in both recensions (A in *MH* 12: 963–964, B in 974–975), names Step'anos Bishop of Mokk' as the receiver of the work (see above, no. 5).
8. *Encomium on the Holy Apostles* (Arm. *Nerbogh i Surb Afak'ealsn*); in *MH* 12: 976–989. The subtitle has: "An encomium recited in praise of the full circle of the twelve apostles, who are first in honor among the prominent heads, and to the seventy-two holy disciples of Christ." The author refers to this encomium in *Prayer* 82.1.
9. *Encomium on Saint James of Nisibis* (Arm. *Nerbogh i Surbn Yakob Mtsbnay*); in *MH* 12: 990–1005. St James (Jacob of Nusaybin), a signatory at the Council of Nicaea in 325, was the patron saint of the region where Gregory lived.
10. *Exhortation to Orthodox Faith and Pure and Virtuous Life* (Arm. *Ban khratu vashughigh hawatoyñ ew mak'ur varuts' arak'imut'ean*); in *MH* 12: 1022–1084). A hortatory and admonitory text, written for a certain Vardan, a relative and official in the secretariat (possibly of the royal court of the Vaspurakan Artsrunis).
11. *Letter to the Admirable and Prominent Congregation of Kchaw* (Arm. *T'ught' i hoyakap ew yakanawor ukhtn Kchaway*); in *MH* 12: 1087–1089. Sent to the abbot of a neighboring monastic community to caution about the heretical T'ontrakeans.
12. *Discourse*. "Look within Yourself: Perhaps There Is Something Errant in Your Heart" (Arm. *Char'. "Hayeats' yandzn k'o, guts'e limits'i ban tsatsuk i srti k'o anawrēn"*); in *MH* 10: 1040–1072.
13. *Order and Rules of Prayer* (Arm. *Karg ew kanon aghawt'its'*); in *MH* 10: 1081–1094. Written upon the request of an anonymous monk, the treatise carries echoes from Khosrov's *Exposition of the Daily Office*.
14. *Eulogy for Vardapets and Wise Priests* (Arm. *Vardapetats' ew imastun k'ahanayits' vakhchani ban*); in *MH* 10: 1103–1105. Written to mourn the passing of an unnamed monastic teacher, probably the abbot Anania of Narek, and used by others to eulogize later *vardapets* and priests – as the redacted title suggests.
15. *Commentary by the Holy Teachers of the Church on "The Lord's Prayer"* (Arm. *Meknut'iwn srbots' vardapetats' ekeghets'oy arareal i "Hayr mer, or yerkins'n"*); in *MH* 10: 1106–1110. A sentence-by-sentence commentary on Matt 6: 9–13, with some repeated lemmata indicating a chain of quotations, from anonymous Fathers.

Gregory's Mystic Theology

The remarks in this sketch of Gregory's mystic theology are limited to his prayer book, a book "mixed" with the Spirit (3.5). Its 95 prayers are often perceived as carrying the reader through the church: from the narthex to the nave and on to the altar, where the mystic union is symbolically realized. Just as often, this tripartite division is arbitrarily applied to the book, which does not permit such a structure. However, the author's mystic theology is much more intricate, based as it is on sacramental theology with its locus in the church.

Gregory presents his prayers, “a new book of psalms,” not only as a lasting spiritual help to posterity (3.2, 3, 5; 26.4; 54.5; 66.1; 83.1; 90.6; 93.6) but as his best offering to God (2.2; 10.2; 34.10; 55.2; 70.3; 88.2, 3); a token of reciprocity for God’s gifts that begin with birth “in the image of God.” This kinship with the Divine image, damaged by sin and restored through redemption (19.1; 20.7; 40.3; 46.2–3; 67.1; 87.3), is the starting point of his mystic theology that at its apex allows him to claim to have seen God (5.2, 3; 27.6, 9; 82.5). The vision of God is realized in encountering the unapproachable Light, one of the most recurring words in his prayers. Early in his introduction of this theme, he prays: “At the start of these prayers with sobbing, let your kind will strengthen me even here so that I, a waverer, might not be found unfit to enjoy the edification by your light when the heavens open” (2.2; cf. 18.4, 7; 20.7; 27.2; 28.6; 32.6; 93.2, 19). Not that God is defined as light – this is only a metaphor for God (82.1; 95.1) whose image could not be drawn (92.5). God is the unknowable One (*passim*); even Christ, reachable as he is (89), remains incomprehensible (90.5). Yet, one could partake of the Divine, indeed participate in the life of the Divine and thus be united with God through the efficacy of the sacraments of the Eucharist and baptism (33 and 93; cf. 14.3; 49.1).

When carried to its fullness, the theology of baptism and the Eucharist could lead to belief in deification. Gregory expresses this conviction – not just the concept – with reference to the Eucharist in 52.3: “And what is overwhelming for me to say in sequence here, in remembrance of your great beneficence, is to become divine by the grace of election and to join you, O Creator, by partaking of your lordly body, and to be united with your luminous life, which is the fulfillment of the blessed promise.” And again, with reference to baptism in 93:20: “Through this anointing we are bound again with hope to the ineffable mystery of your cross, O Christ; by being baptized into your death, O living One, we share in your eternal life, even you yourself, O God, being enabled to the utmost, eternally, fully, inseparably” (cf. 93.2, 6, 9, 11, 13, 24). It is this sacramental union with God, no less than the affinity with the Divine image, that enables the merging of the soul with the divine Spirit (78.4; 85.2; 90.5; 92.11). He considers the soul’s every movement as a reminder of God (31.3).

The word “light” appears more than 40 times in *Prayer* 93, on the Holy Myron or sacred oil used for chrismation, ever conditioning the belief that through the sacraments one can really be united with God (93.2, 6, 9, 11, 13, 24). Chrismation is tantamount to being sealed with Christ by God, a confirmation of the hope to be with the Lord always. Gregory prays: “Give me the sweetness of hope, even though I do not deserve to have any portion of the offered light. Help me loosen the knot of this hidden mystery” (93.9). And again: “And we understand from this as a fitting interpretation, that the consummation of this mystic calling is realized in us, who have the foremost honor of being called Christians” (93.13). The church, as an edifice of light, “heavenly mother of light,” indeed heaven on earth where light is dispensed, is the ideal locus for the mystic ascent to God’s light. In *Prayer* 75, where he spells out his ecclesiology and where the word “light” is used 22 times, he exclaims at the outset: “Flying on the wings of light, behold, I have arrived in heaven.”

In one of his most mystical prayers addressed to the Holy Spirit, in which he describes himself as one who has received “visions of light” and other “splendid visions” (33.3) and being “clothed with God, inside and out” (33.4), Gregory divulges a prayer he

offered habitually before celebrating the Eucharist (33.6–7). He repeated this prayer as often as necessary, until its earnest hope or wish was realized: “I shall go on repeating the same sequence of words until the certainty that comes with the contemplation of light is wondrously revealed, heralding, proclaiming anew the good news of ever more peace” (33.7). This prayer has found a rightful place at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Church, to be prayed by the celebrant (for more on this prayer, see Russell (1996–1997)).

One of Gregory’s most intimate prayers is addressed to Mary for her intercession. He pleads: “Weave me, join me – a sinner who has sighed bitterly – into the happy and incensed company of those who have looked up to you, the plant of life with the blessed Fruit” (80.1). “Glorify your Son, by performing upon me the divine miracle of mercy and pardon, handmaid and Mother of God” (80.2). The way he describes his closeness to her is possibly unparalleled in sacred literature devoted to the Theotokos. At one point he places himself in her lap, as he prays: “Please, let a drop of your virgin milk drop on me” (80.3). His intimacy extends to the Trinity: “O living Word: receive and present me, a debtor to all, atoned and cleansed, to your co-equal Spirit; that having been reconciled again through you, he may return to me; that through you the mighty One – by his own will – may present me to the Father. Thus, with him and through him, I may always be bound with grace to you – as closely as my breath, to be inseparably united with you” (24.4).

For Gregory, “Faith, that blessed and favored word, which lasts forever untarnished and unbounded, honored together with love and hope, brings the rewards of truly clear vision, perfect wisdom, intimacy with God and familiarity with the Most High” (10.4). Yet, for him, faith does not preclude doubt. “How much of the light of living hope can I mix with the darkness of doubt?” (68.4). His keen understanding of faith as emanating from doubt is a recurring theme in the prayers, even from the very first (1.2). Like faith and doubt, the duality of the mystic’s role – as one who seeks and is sought – is often blurred. Gregory was good at playing this hide-and-seek game with God. Yet, aware of the mystery of his own reality vis-à-vis the superior mystery of God, he surrenders again and again. “It is important to confess and cast the veil from my face to one who seeks to know me” (19.3).

Gregory is rightly reckoned with those who have experienced the infinite and word-defying Mystery that is God. He articulates a theologically informed and mystically contemplated faith, especially in his prayers. His writings emanate from his ancestral faith; conversely, he has strongly influenced and enriched that faith while expressing or communicating it.

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