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NERSES IV “THE GRACIOUS”, MANUEL I KOMNENOS, THE  
PATRIARCH MICHAEL III ANCHIALOS AND NEGOTIATIONS  
FOR CHURCH UNION BETWEEN BYZANTIUM AND THE  
ARMENIAN CHURCH, 1165–1173

Few areas of scholarship invite more animated discussion than theology. This discipline, however, cannot be avoided in the study of the Byzantine empire, including the study of its relations with the other “nations” (ἔθνη) which surrounded it. One such nation, key to relations with the east, was Armenia (in the time that we are considering not yet divided into the homeland Greater Armenia and the daughter kingdom of Lesser Armenia in Cilicia, although there were already Armenian baronies in the latter).

The ecclesiastical scholars of this nation have been drawn to the magnetic personality of one of their saints, largely due to his seemingly “ecumenical” agenda, the twelfth-century *katholikos* Nerses IV Klayetsi, better known by the epithet Shnorhali, “the Gracious”. Nerses is remembered by the Armenians of our own time not only for his dialogues with other Churches (Greek, Syrian and Roman), but a famous encyclical letter to his flock, and his numerous hymns and reformation of the Chant (bringing it closer to contemporary folk music). He is best remembered by the Church at large, however, for overseeing, between his assumption of the catholicate in 1167 and his death in 1173, negotiations with the Orthodox Church of Byzantium.

Unfortunately, from the point of view of objective scholarship, those who have studied Nerses’ agenda have tended to have their own particular Christological axe to grind and wish to prove him “orthodox” in his faith in accordance with their individual notions of what constitutes orthodoxy. Representatives of both of the main two schools of thought, the Chalcedonians and the Monophysites (although this is admittedly a somewhat simplistic representation of affairs), have adduced parts of the profession of faith of Nerses out of context in support of their own opinions. This has created division, rather than reconciliation, and therefore has worked against Nerses’ own aims. It is only more recently that this conflict over

the Christological question has begun to be resolved by the modern ecumenical movement, which urges that the controversy between the two schools arose largely out of a misunderstanding of each others' terminology<sup>1</sup>. We shall largely sidestep this linguistic question, best left to those with a knowledge of both Armenian and Greek, and concentrate on the historical background, working towards the adduction of recently-published source material in Greek.

This article is not concerned to vindicate a Christological position and prove Nerses orthodox according to Armenian, Syrian Jacobite, traditional eastern Orthodox or western notions (either Catholic or Protestant), or otherwise. The premise is that, from a historical point of view, it would be profitable to stand outside the theological debate, take a neutral stance, and consider, in the light of the new evidence alluded to, the question of what actually, historically, did happen between Nerses and the Byzantine theologian Theorianos at Hromkla in Lesser Armenia in Cilicia in the negotiations for communion between the Armenian and Byzantine Churches. This new evidence is comprised of two rhetorical accounts of what seemingly happened in two contemporary debates at Constantinople, Eustathios of Thessaloniki's 1173 annual oration to the Greek Patriarch Michael III Anchialos and another oration by Michael Choniates for the same man<sup>2</sup>. An English translation of Nerses' profession of faith has been published by Poladian<sup>3</sup> and a translation of his encyclical letter has been published by Alajalian<sup>4</sup>. I shall, however, be concentrating on the Greek sources just alluded to.

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<sup>1</sup> I do not have command of the Armenian language and am dependent on English and French translations of Nerses' professions of faith, e.g. POLADIAN, cited in note 2 below. I have, however, read the English article by Archbishop H. KHATCHATOURIAN, *The Christology of St. Nerses Shnorhali in Dialogue with Byzantium*. *Miscellanea Francescana* 78 (1978) 413–434, which is a concise overview written by a scholar with a command of the sources in the original language, to which I am indebted for the references to CAPPELLETTI's Latin translation, the full text of which I have been unable to obtain.

<sup>2</sup> P. MAGDALINO, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180)*. Cambridge 1993, 175–176, who to my knowledge has recognised the relevance of the oration to this question. For the modern editions of the speeches in question, see notes 40 and 41.

<sup>3</sup> St Nerses Shnorhali, *The Profession of Faith of the Armenian Church*, tr. and commented upon by T.V. POLADIAN. Boston 1941, hereafter cited as POLADIAN, *Profession*; for a free Latin translation, see Nerses Klajetsi, *Sancti Nersis Clajensis Armeniorum Catholici Opera nunc primum in latinum conversa notisque illustrata*, ed. D.J. CAPPELLETTI. Venice 1833, 173–194. Nerses' works in CAPPELLETTI's edition will henceforth be cited as Nerses, *Opera*.

<sup>4</sup> St Nerses Shnorhali, *General Epistle*, ed. and tr. Fr. A. ALJALIAN. New York 1996.

We need first, however, to introduce the protagonists other than Nerses. Michael Anchialos had been promoted to patriarch from the position of “consul of the philosophers”. The emperor Manuel I Komnenos, a keen student of theology, will have endorsed his candidature due to his support of the imperial stance in an internal Byzantine religious controversy over the meaning of Christ’s saying, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14.28). His patriarchate also saw the promotion of Eustathios to the metropolitanate of Thessaloniki (1176). Michael Choniates became Metropolitan of Athens some time later (1182).

Eustathios needs little introduction to a student of Byzantine culture. He is also known as an erudite commentator on the Homeric poems, and would become a stalwart champion of the cause of the citizens of Thessaloniki during its sack by the Sicilian Normans in 1185. Some time prior to this, however, he was engaged in an activity that concerns us here, since he was “master of the rhetors” at Constantinople from the late 1160s until 1176. He was canonised by the ecumenical patriarchate in the year 1976. Michael Choniates, on the other hand, was probably a deacon at the time of the debates with the Armenians of the 1170s, and, like Eustathios, also a writer of speeches.

Let us now put the events described by our main source, Eustathios’ oration for Michael Anchialos, into a historical context. The theological questions, though important, will be treated in a minimalist way: for fuller discussion of these issues there is above all the monograph of Tékéyan<sup>5</sup>; also, with a useful bibliography, there are two, complementary articles by Zekiyán<sup>6</sup>. We must also mention the summary of Nerses’ Christological position by the Armenian Archbishop Khatchatourian<sup>7</sup>. There is further an earlier monograph by Ter-Mikélian on relations between Byzantium and the Armenian Church<sup>8</sup>, although this latter work is inclined to illustrate negotiations with pictorial detail from the works of Nerses at the expense of discussion of the theological issues, and where it does discuss doctrine,

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<sup>5</sup> P. TÉKÉYAN, *Controverses christologiques en Arméno-Cilicie dans la seconde moitié du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle (1165–1198)*. OCA 124. Rome 1939.

<sup>6</sup> B.L. ZEKIYAN, *St Nerses Snorhali en dialogue avec les Grecs*, in *Armenian Studies/ Études Armeniennes In memoriam Haïg Berbérian*. Lisbon 1986, 861–83; *id.*, *Un dialogue oecuménique au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle: les pourparlers entre le catholicos St. Nerses Snorhali et le légat impérial Théorianos en vue de l’union des Églises arménienne et byzantine*, *Actes du XV<sup>e</sup> Congrès International d’études byzantines, Athènes Septembre 1976*. Vol. IV. Athens 1980, 420–441.

<sup>7</sup> See note 1.

<sup>8</sup> A. TER-MIKELIAN, *Die armenische Kirche in ihren Beziehungen zur byzantinischen (vom IV. bis zum XIII. Jahrhundert)*. Leipzig 1892.

it is concerned to vindicate Nerses as being orthodox in a monophysite Armenian sense of the word. Khatchatourian likewise defends Nerses' Christology as "Cyrillian" (he avoids the term "monophysite") but not "Chalcedonian". Zekiyani is also concerned to demonstrate Nerses as conforming to his own personal notions of orthodoxy, this time a more Chalcedonian position (i.e. more in line with Greek orthodoxy), but he argues more cogently than Ter-Mikelian and there is much to recommend his interpretation. One other author interested in the "ecumenical" nature of negotiations, like Khatchatourian, is Suttner<sup>9</sup>, who represents Nerses as the prime mover in attempting to achieve a *rapprochement* between the two churches, and suggests that Nerses, like modern-day proponents of ecumenicalism, sought to achieve compatibility of the Armenian and Greek Orthodox theologies.

#### A. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND 1165–1173

First, let us present a brief history of relations between Byzantium and the Armenian Church from 1165 until Nerses' death in 1173. It was at this point in Byzantine history that the so-called "Comnenian restoration" was at its height. Significantly, from the point of view of Church history, Pope Alexander III had held out "the vanity of vanities" (which modern scholars generally understand to be the imperial crown of the Holy Roman Empire) to the incumbent Byzantine emperor, Manuel I Komnenos, in return for Church communion between Rome and Byzantium and recognition of him as supreme pontiff.

The twelfth century was also the era of the Crusades, a movement which the Byzantines regarded with deep distrust. The Armenian Church resented the persecution it had suffered under the Byzantines, and resisted the pressure to conform to the Byzantine brand of orthodoxy (indeed, the Armenians had suffered more under the Byzantines in recent memory, i.e. the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, than they had under the Turks). The friction intensified when the Armenians co-operated with the crusaders. Anti-Armenian literature circulated at Constantinople.

The patriarchal throne of Greater and Lesser Armenia had been situated at Hromkla<sup>10</sup> since 1151, and occupied by the *katholikos* Grigor (Gregory) III even before this translocation. Grigor had sent his brother

<sup>9</sup> E. SUTTNER, 'Eine 'ökumenische Bewegung' im 12. Jahrhundert und ihr bedeutendster Theologe, der armenische Katholikos Nerses Schnorhali. *Κληρονομία* 7 (1975) 87–98.

<sup>10</sup> To the north-east of Gaziantep and north of Birecik, on the western bank of the Euphrates.

Nerses, a bishop (hence his surname Klayetsi, after his see), into Cilicia in 1165 on a diplomatic mission, where he met with the Byzantine governor of Cilicia, Alexios Axouch, the *protostrator*, son-in-law to Manuel, at Mopsuestia. At this stage there had already been diplomatic exchange between the catholicate of Armenia and the emperor John II Komnenos (1118–1143)<sup>11</sup>. Alexios, after interviewing Nerses at length, was surprised to discover the relatively few differences that existed between the respective theologies of the Byzantine and Armenian Churches<sup>12</sup>. Accordingly the Byzantine asked Nerses to write down a profession of his faith, which he duly did. We shall come to this profession a little later; let it be said here that Nerses diplomatically refrained from directly attacking the Council of Chalcedon, the main bone of contention between the two churches. Nerses' motive in seeking reconciliation with the Byzantines seems to have been nothing less than a genuine attempt to put an end to Byzantine persecution and create harmony within the Christian ecumene.

Manuel now seized the opportunity presented to him to pursue a more fully ecumenical agenda. It can be seen, therefore, that both Manuel and Nerses had reason to seek reconciliation, without which the dialogue between the respective churches could not have taken place.

So it was that in September of 1167 Manuel wrote to Grigor III<sup>13</sup> and requested that he send Nerses to Constantinople to participate in a synod there. Unfortunately, when the letter arrived at Hromkla, Grigor had already died and Nerses succeeded him. Nerses could not countenance making the trip with his new-found responsibilities. He did, however, write to the emperor<sup>14</sup>, expressing his joy at Manuel's desire to effect a union of the churches. We shall come in due course to the question of an Armenian delegation participating in a Byzantine synod.

As has been mentioned, the main point of doctrine dividing the Byzantine and Armenian churches was the Christological question. This is extremely complex, and the different churches have developed precise positions on the question, which have evolved in the debates which have taken place over the centuries. For the purposes of this article, the question

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<sup>11</sup> J. DARROUZÈS, Trois documents de la controverse gréco-arménienne. *REB* 48 (1990) 89–153, esp. 94–96 and 132–145.

<sup>12</sup> This is no doubt due to the fact that he would have been exposed to the anti-Armenian polemics that we have alluded to above, a popular form of literature of the time. For examples of these, refer to K. KRUMBACHER, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur*, 2nd ed. Munich 1897, 89–91.

<sup>13</sup> DÖLGER, *Regesten*, vol. 2, no. 1478.

<sup>14</sup> Nerses, *Opera*, 195–204.

will be discussed using only broad outlines. To attempt to put it in a nutshell, the Byzantines were Chalcedonians (defenders of monophysite Christology often use the somewhat pejorative term “dyophysites”, something which many Chalcedonians deplore, with its Nestorian overtones); their position was that Christ had two natures, a human and a divine, in hypostatic union, i.e. in union in the one substance, in the one person. This, in the eyes of the Armenians, made them guilty of the Nestorian heresy, condemned by the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesos, which was the error of dividing the human and divine natures of Christ too radically (the Byzantines themselves anathematised this extreme form of dyophysitism). The Armenians were by tradition subscribers to the formula of Cyril of Alexandria, *μία φύσις τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου σεσαρκωμένη*, “one nature of the Word of God incarnate”. Khatchatourian insists that the Armenians are not monophysites, that is believers in one divine nature in Christ. They were not at least as extreme in their monophysitism as the Syrian Jacobites, but, nevertheless, their adherence to Cyril’s formula made them, in Byzantine opinion, in turn guilty of heresy, and even that form of monophysitism known as Eutychianism, in which the human nature of Christ was subsumed by his Godhead, which implied a confusion of the human with the divine.

Scholarship has addressed the question of precisely what Nerses’ position was, and whether it changed in the ensuing debates. Central to the profession of faith of Nerses to Alexios in 1165 were the following ideas: “We confess the very Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, divided into three persons, and united in one nature and divinity”<sup>15</sup>; that Christ, when he descended into the womb of the Virgin, “became of two perfect natures, divine and human, in one perfect person immutable and indivisible”<sup>16</sup>; and finally, “He died willingly according to human mortal nature, but remained alive by His immortal and divine nature. He is not a dead being and a living being as some do divide Him, but the One and the Same Person, Jesus Christ”; and citing St Athanasius, “The mortal body did not injure the immortal divinity because it was sinless”<sup>17</sup>. But let us return to our narrative.

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<sup>15</sup> POLADIAN, *Profession*, 33; Nerses, *Opera*, 173–174, 206–209, 233–238.

<sup>16</sup> POLADIAN, *Profession*, 34; Nerses, *Opera*, 174–175.

<sup>17</sup> POLADIAN, *Profession*, 37. TER-MIKELIAN glosses this by saying, “the nature which died is also living; one should not say that one nature suffered and died and the other did not” (for this would be to subscribe to the heresy of Nestorius). Refer to KHATCHATOURIAN, 430.

Manuel wrote back to Nerses in 1169<sup>18</sup> praising him for his wisdom and devoutness, and sent him the philosopher/theologian Theorianos and John Utman, abbot of the Armenian monastery, of the Byzantine rite, of Philipopolis (probably to act as interpreter), to debate and conduct negotiations with him. This embassy arrived on the 15th of May 1170<sup>19</sup>. In characteristic Manuelian and Byzantine imperial fashion the emperor also offered the *katholikos* earthly gifts.

The discussion of Christological doctrine between Theorianos and Nerses lasted approximately for a month, and, due to the discretion of the latter, took place behind closed doors. Theorianos' detailed, but biased and suspect, account of the proceedings of this first interview is preserved<sup>20</sup>. In addition, Nerses of Lampron, Nerses Shnorhali's nephew, has left an account of proceedings, and there is also one in the latter's biography. According to Theorianos, Nerses was convinced by his argumentation and persuaded to accept the decisions of the council of Chalcedon<sup>21</sup>; for he had cited the authority of Athanasius (in addition to other Fathers) in reply to Nerses' adduction of the Cyrillic formula *μία φύσις τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου σεσαρκωμένη*, "one nature of the Word incarnate"<sup>22</sup>; Nerses of Lampron, however, claims that Nerses gave qualified approval to both formulae, refuting simultaneously both Nestorius and Eutyches by talking of "one person united from two natures"<sup>23</sup>. The *katholikos* in his account provided capable and precise answers to all of Theorianos' questions.

Whom then do we believe? Scholarly opinion as to the veracity of Theorianos' account in relation to the Armenian accounts is divided along lines indicated by Zekiyan<sup>24</sup>. In particular, Tournebize tended to believe that Nerses actually did become a convert from the Armenian monophysite position and accepted the authority of Chalcedon<sup>25</sup>, whereas the Armenian patriarch of Constantinople, Ormanian, is dismissive, thinking that the

<sup>18</sup> DÖLGER, Regesten, vol. 2, no. 1489; See ZEKIYAN 882, TÉKÉYAN 21; Ter-Mikelian erroneously dates the embassy to 1167.

<sup>19</sup> ZEKIYAN, St Nerses, 863; F. TOURNEBIZE, Histoire politique et religieuse de l'Arménie. Paris 1910, 245-6.

<sup>20</sup> PG 133, 119-212; see ZEKIYAN, Nerses, 864 n. 5 for other editions.

<sup>21</sup> PG 133, 208-212; indeed Theorianos presents Nerses as weeping and begging for the patriarch's benediction on a church which was until that day in error.

<sup>22</sup> Theorianos, PG 133, 159-62.

<sup>23</sup> cf. the Encyclic Epistle, St. Nerses Shnorhali, General Epistle, 20. This formula has an Eastern Greek pedigree, being employed by such theologians as the patriarch of Alexandria, Timothy Aelurus, and in later times, Severus of Antioch.

<sup>24</sup> ZEKIYAN, St Nerses: 875-6, n. 32.

<sup>25</sup> TOURNEBIZE, Histoire, 246.

account of this first interview, as well as that of the second (to which we are coming), are apologetic and that Theorianos only pretended to have prevailed<sup>26</sup>. Tékéyan is the most balanced, steering a middle course, but agreeing with Ormanian that Theorianos was wrong to have claimed to have converted Nerses<sup>27</sup>; Ter-Mikelian insists on Nerses' adherence to the formula *μία φύσις* throughout<sup>28</sup>. Zekiyan takes into consideration his first profession of faith and the encyclic epistle. His suggestion is that Nerses did not so much go back on his previous Christological position, as Theorianos would have us believe, as express regret that the misunderstandings of each other's positions was so harmful to the Church. He also argues that Nerses now recognised that the Greek, Chalcedonian, position was not Nestorian. On the face of it, Zekiyan has a good case. This is where the oration of Eustathios of Thessaloniki to Michael Anchialos which will be cited below will prove a useful adjunct. Finally we have the appraisals of Suttner and Khatchatourian. As we have seen, they present Nerses as a proto-ecumenicalist, and Suttner argues for the compatability of the Chalcedonian and Armenian formulae, which is in some ways (particularly if taken in combination with Zekiyan) the most attractive of all the interpretations (and is, as we have seen, supported by Nerses of Lampron's account of this first interview).

At any rate, at the end of this first round of discussions, Nerses entrusted to Theorianos and Utman two letters to Manuel (or so say the Greek sources)<sup>29</sup>, one official, one private. In the official letter, Nerses "announces with joy that the ill-will separating the two churches has been dissipated"<sup>30</sup>, that they have decided on a formula equally removed from Nestorianism and Eutychianism, and that he would convene a council of the Armenian Church. This he needed to do so as not to cause trouble among his own bishops and prelates. The Byzantines claimed that in the private

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<sup>26</sup> M. ORMANIAN, *The Church of Armenia: her history, doctrine, rule, discipline, liturgy, literature and existing condition*, tr. from the French edition by ORMANIAN himself. New York 1988, 63.

<sup>27</sup> TÉKÉYAN, *Controverses*, 24-5; although he notes that Theorianos, *PG* 133, 217, claims that Nerses conceded that it was correct to speak of two natures in the sense of Gregory of Nazianzos in the second interview, Theorianos could not have converted Nerses if he had written to Manuel after the first interview in the terms that he had used; cf. S. DER NERSESSIAN, *Armenia and the Byzantine Empire*. Cambridge 1947, 46; ZEKIYAN, *St Nerses*, 865, n. 7.

<sup>28</sup> TER-MIKELIAN, *Kirche*, 93.

<sup>29</sup> The existence of the private letters has been questioned, by e.g. DER NERSESSIAN, *Armenia*, 46.

<sup>30</sup> ZEKIYAN, *St Nerses*, 865.



letter Nerses had declared his acceptance of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, that is, Chalcedon. Since the patriarch and the synod which he convened were not satisfied with the official letter, Manuel found it necessary to reveal the contents of the “private” one<sup>31</sup>. This created general enthusiasm at Constantinople, although this is attributed by Nerses of Lampron to the official letter, and he tells us that the Armenians, formerly vilified, now began to be liked<sup>32</sup>.

Towards the end of 1171<sup>33</sup> Theorianos and Utman once again took the road to Hromkla with presents, with a personal letter of the patriarch Michael III Anchialos, which, although it insisted on the respect due to the emperor, praised the saintly dispositions of Nerses and said that the Greek church would accept the Armenian with open arms<sup>34</sup>, and with two letters of the emperor, one open, one secret<sup>35</sup>. These were accompanied by a long profession of faith from the Byzantine patriarch in the emperor’s name<sup>36</sup>. Theorianos then presented Nerses with the famous “Nine Chapters”, the conditions proposed by the Byzantines under which Church union, or communion, could take place<sup>37</sup>. Upon being asked by Nerses if all these condi-

<sup>31</sup> ZEKIYAN, St Nerses, 865; cf. *PG* 133, coll. 240, 248f, 273.

<sup>32</sup> Nerses of Lampron’s edition of Nerses IV Shnorhali’s works, Encyclical letter (in Armenian). Istanbul 1825, 95; *cit.* TEKÉYAN, Controverses, 26.

<sup>33</sup> *PG* 133, 231-4: “Anno ab orbe condito 6680 ... indictione quinta, die mensis secundi vigesima”, that is, October 1171.

<sup>34</sup> This will be reproduced in part below (*PG* 133, 236–240).

<sup>35</sup> DÖLGER, Regesten, vol. 2, no. 1505; See note 29.

<sup>36</sup> *PG* 133, 224–232.

<sup>37</sup> These were:

- 1) Those who taught one nature in Christ should be anathematised, such as Eutyches, Dioscorus, Timothy Aelurus and all those who accepted their doctrine.
  - 2) They should affirm in Christ one person, but two natures.
  - 3) The liturgy *Trisagion* should be sung without the addition “Who has been crucified, etc”, which was absent from the Greek version (this was made by the patriarch of Antioch, Peter the Fuller, and it is a question of the recipient of the liturgy).
  - 4) Festivals should be celebrated at the same time as the Greeks (in the Greek church the Saint’s Feast Days were on set calendar days, whereas the Armenian sanctoral was dependent on which day Easter was celebrated, and accordingly the Feast Days were celebrated on different days every year).
  - 5) The Eucharist should be celebrated with leavened bread (not unleavened, as was and still is the Armenian practice) and wine mixed with water (not pure wine).
  - 6) The Chrism should be made from olive, rather than sesame seed, oil.
  - 7) All should remain in the church during the mass.
  - 8) The first Seven Ecumenical Councils should be accepted.
  - 9) The election of the Armenian *katholikos* should be confirmed by the emperor.
- As can be seen, these conditions were somewhat severe.

tions were essential for Church union, Theorianos said that the settling of the question of the use of yeast in the bread of the Eucharist and the nomination of the *katholikos* by the emperor were the only definite prerequisites for it to proceed. Although some discussion over all nine points was undertaken by the two parties, Nerses said that he could not accept any of these conditions on behalf of his church and that he needed to convene a synod before he could give his final answer. However, as a preliminary, he was prepared to abstain from use of the formula “one nature” (although modern Armenian scholars maintain that this was not a rejection of the formula, which Nerses still believed to be correct, if properly understood<sup>38</sup>).

What became of these preliminary negotiations? Unfortunately for the “ecumenical” cause the promised synod did not take place in Nerses’ lifetime, for he died in 1173. His successor Grigor IV Tghay continued his uncle’s “ecumenical” agenda, but when presented with a profession of faith from Manuel that was Chalcedonian<sup>39</sup>, faced dissension from many of the bishops of (Greater) Armenia, i.e. those in northern and eastern parts, who had found Nerses’ profession orthodox, but Manuel’s, with its Chalcedonian Christology, heretical. Although Grigor was able to pour oil on the troubled waters, and the Armenian synod took place in 1179, it was too late, for Manuel died before the outcome, a reaffirmation of Nerses’ position (for now it was only the Christological question which was the stumbling-block to Church communion), could be communicated to him.

#### B. THE EVIDENCE OF MICHAEL CHONIATES AND EUSTATHIOS

Now it is time to consider the above proceedings in the light of two extant panegyrics addressed to the patriarch Michael III Anghalos. Mention has already been made of the Eustathian encomium of 1173 for

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<sup>38</sup> cf. e.g. ZEKIYAN, *Les pourparlers*, 430. This second controversy was complicated by the involvement of a third party, a representative of the Syrian patriarch Michael, one Theodore bar Wahboun. The historian and Jacobite patriarch Michael claims that Theodore succeeded in refuting Theorianos using the teaching of Aristotle, thereby beating him at his own game. This is discussed and dismissed by TĒKĒYAN (30–31; see Michael the Syrian, *Chronique*, ed. CHABOT, vol. 3, 335).

<sup>39</sup> Despite sleight-of-hand; Manuel claimed that he had previously understood the Armenian word for “nature”, *bnutün*, to mean “person”, and therefore believed that the Armenians had accordingly talked of two natures in the one person, and therefore thought them orthodox in the Greek sense of the word; TER-MIKELLAN, *Kirche*, 100.

Michael<sup>40</sup>. Likewise, we have also mentioned another oration for Michael Anchialos, probably delivered one year before, this time by Michael Choniates<sup>41</sup>. These orations were offered on a Lazaros Saturday, that is, the Saturday immediately prior to Palm Sunday. It was customary for orations to be made to the incumbent patriarch on this day, presumably in the presence of the clergy. If, as we assert, debates between Armenian clergymen and their Byzantine counterparts, led by the patriarch, took place in Constantinople, this would have generated popular interest among the Byzantines, always keenly interested in matters theological, and the occasion will have afforded Eustathios and Choniates two key themes on which to elaborate: the superior force of persuasion of the patriarch (divinely furnished as a result of his affirmation of the “orthodox” position), and the duplicity of the Armenians.

This is what Choniates, who is briefer, has to say:<sup>42</sup>

But it is not so, since we are roused by your trumpets to the spiritual war, the trumpets that I am also able to say are the voice of the Lord, which cut through the tasks to which he submits us with a flame of fire; they will go by this means through the future flame continuing to be unburnt. But this (trumpet) has shaken the desert; and the gathering of the Armenians from the ecumenical Church would be a desert, uninhabited far and wide and being deserted evilly of its own doing. For the foresight of the Arch-shepherd has surveyed it and looked over their land and made them tremble throughout this affair, since he has frightened them with letters of persuasion, and he has shaken them, if in some way they will be turned around and array themselves alongside us, even if Armenian duplicity and evil practice has blocked off their ears like a shield and has shut out from itself your administration of the drugs of salvation. The Lord, having cried out with this loud voice has not returned them to life again in four days today, but has often made myriads of Lazaruses, who have been corpses many days due to their falling by the wayside, live again.

The first feature of interest here is the fact that, while Nerses clearly hoped for peace to ensue between the Byzantine and Armenian churches, Choniates talks of a “spiritual war”. This would seem to be a reflection of the attitude to the Armenian church of the Byzantine clergy as a whole. The Byzantines, despite the overtures of the Armenian *katholikos* and the “ecumenical” agenda of their emperor, remain hostile. What of Anchialos?

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<sup>40</sup> Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Eustathii Thessalonicensis opera minora*, ed. P. WIRTH (*CFHB* 32). Berlin and New York 2000, 100–140. This work will henceforth be cited as “Eustathios”. The date of the oration is supplied by mentions of the recent rebellion of the Serbian zupan Stephen Nemanja, which took place in 1172.

<sup>41</sup> Michael Choniates, *Μιχαὴλ Ἀζομνάτου τοῦ Χωνιάτου τὰ σοφώμενα*, I. Athens 1879, 72–92. It seems likely that this oration was delivered on the same day of the ecclesiastical calendar as the Eustathian oration.

<sup>42</sup> Choniates, 91/14–30.

There is clear reference here in the “letters of persuasion” to Anchialos’ letters to Nerses. Choniates and modern-day Armenian historians alike are agreed that Anchialos hoped in part to intimidate the *katholikos*. However, the text of one of these letters, Grumel’s no. 1123<sup>43</sup>, is on the contrary most pacific. Anchialos says:

[The scriptures (Psalm 118.65)] declare abundant peace to those who love the law; there is no impediment among them, but the bond of God, the love of God ... as much as he who loves discord distances himself from the Lord and the light from his knowledge, the one who prefers peace to all other things draws near to him ... In the midst of this light, our most divine emperor does not stop pursuing the peace of God night and day ... Friend of the common good, true king and father, he wishes all to be blessed, and nurtures the ardent desire to reunite all the churches into one faith ... We and our holy and apostolic Church extend our arms to you in our holiness ready to receive you.

One thing that impresses us about this excerpt from Michael’s letter, which could reasonably be identified with the official letter that Michael dispatched with Theorianos (in view of its pacific tone, in keeping with a diplomatic mission), is the all too unsubtle expectation that the Armenian Church would submit to the authority of the larger Greek Church. The tone of such works as that of Ormanian makes it quite clear that, although the Armenians expected to be in communion with the other churches as a result of the “ecumenical” movement of the late twelfth century, they did not want to be coerced into submission.

I would suggest, therefore, that Michael Anchialos had a double agenda. On the one hand, he wished to do his imperial masters’ bidding, and seek reconciliation between the Byzantine and Armenian churches. This explains the irenic tone of his surviving letter. However, he intended that this should be done on Byzantine terms, as our history of negotiations between Nerses and Manuel shows (take for example the “Nine Chapters”). Whatever his personal views (to which we will come), he may not have been in the position, due to pressure from his fellow Byzantines, to accept any compromise with the Armenians.

Another point of interest from this first passage is that there is no direct mention of Armenians at Constantinople (which is why I believe Choniates’ speech to be earlier than Eustathios’); if we were left only with the evidence of Theorianos’ first and second disputes, Nerses of Lampron’s writings, and Michael Anchialos’ letter, we would not even suspect that such

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<sup>43</sup> V. GRUMEL, *Les registes des actes du patriarcat de Constantinople*, vol. I, *Les actes des patriarches*, fasc. ii and iii, *Les registes de 715 à 1206*, reviewed and corrected by J. DARROUZÈS. Paris 1989, 550 = *PG* 133, cols. 236–240.

a thing had taken place. This is where Eustathios provides some intriguing additional information.

Eustathios does not treat of the question of the dialogue with the Armenian church until the sixteenth paragraph (Wirth's divisions) of his lengthy 1173 encomium for the patriarch, introducing the Armenians with the following words:<sup>44</sup>

I expect that many will still register themselves under you, most holy patriarch, and adorn this neck of yours, among whom I number among the Armenian tribe, who will not constrict you, men whom your high and your thundery-voiced instruction which has preceded a little beforehand will not fail to turn to the Highest One, who thundered to them through the agency of your words, and it will increase thereby the possessions of God.

Some explanation of the image is required. Eustathios has been using a typically biblical image of jewels on the stole which adorns the patriarch's neck (a reference to Aaron's ephod) as a point of comparison for the virtues with which he is endowed. The mention of "thundering" implies that Anchialos assumed a hostile attitude when he encountered resistance in the disputations which took place in Constantinople. The implication of the final words of this paragraph is, as we have already commented, that Manuel and Michael fully expected that the Armenians would be converted to their brand of orthodoxy and that they could subjugate the Armenian church. We should remember here the Byzantine demand that the Armenian *katholikos* be appointed by the emperor. However, Anchialos possibly was less inclined to make any compromises than his imperial master. Can we substantiate this suggestion? Let us read on:<sup>45</sup>

But may time henceforth, which has shown clearly that this thing will accompany you, also bring praise among them when it happens; but we are concerned with earlier things, since, taking it upon your own shoulders, you restore both those who have strayed and were a little earlier torn away from their plotting against our souls and, breathing life into those who were like corpses, and who had obliterated (faith) from their hearts, you have engraved the stones of a memorial and placed them on your shoulders, on which you have reassumed and borne the weight lightly because of the cessation of labours which remains in our hopes and comes from God himself as a result of bearing this burden, through which, though it is tiring, it is very readily endured and you bear it as the easily-borne yoke boasted of in the Gospels, which is in other ways also beneficial on account of the eternal nature of that rest.

The reference to the Armenians as plotting is interesting. This assertion should be viewed against the background of the Armenians co-operating with the crusaders as well as the co-operation of the new Armenian prince

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<sup>44</sup> Eustathios, 121/47–53.

<sup>45</sup> Eustathios, 121/54–63.

Mleh with the Turks in this period, something that Byzantines may well have regarded with suspicion. And, as we have seen, there was much anti-Armenian polemic at Constantinople. Michael has, however, as our rhetor claims, worked for the saving of their souls. The eternal rest of which Eustathios speaks is of course that of eternal life, the reward for bearing the easy yoke of Christianity. The wording of this passage is clearly meant to evoke Matthew 11.28-30.

If we need more substantial evidence that there was a party of Armenian church representatives at Constantinople in 1172, we need only consider the following two excerpts of the Eustathian oration. We have first the following from paragraph seventeen:<sup>46</sup>

This time in which you applied yourself with an infinite zeal to bringing back the whole flock which had been driven away by Satan was not to be measured with many suns, since he, removing it from the good shepherd and leading it astray into the desert, also wished to tear it apart in destruction, when it was my experience to watch with wonder at the affair, seeing that those men were held in the mouth of the destroyer and were yet able to escape destruction, but in preference to being saved they made the choice to be taken and descend into his stomach and be in darkness rather than survive and be in the light and join in a covenant with the one who saved them; but you, placing yourself in the jaws of the beast (and these jaws formed the deceitful mouth which distorted the divine scriptures, through which (the evil one) chewed up the softer and simpler to destruction), forced his pharynx into choking.

It would seem that despite Theorianos' claims to have persuaded Nerses to accept Chalcedonian orthodoxy, debates continued at Constantinople in 1172. This Eustathian oration must belong to 1173, since it mentions the subjection of the Serbian prince Stephen Nemanja (which can clearly be dated to 1172). We might consider the possibility that this dialogue between Michael Anchialos and the Armenian envoys took place prior to the second dispute at Hromkla in 1171, but a date of 1172 for the Constantinopolitan dispute seems to me more likely, and Theorianos' account is therefore a misrepresentation, or, perhaps in part, a misunderstanding, of what took place behind closed doors at Hromkla in his two interviews with Nerses<sup>47</sup>. We might also note here that Eustathios takes the traditional line against the Armenians, in part for reasons mentioned above. Attitudes towards the Armenians, even if they had briefly been favourable, were rapidly becoming unfavourable again.

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<sup>46</sup> Eustathios, 121/63-74.

<sup>47</sup> Theorianos' account of proceedings, in which Nerses bursts into tears and begs for forgiveness for the Armenian Church, would seem to have involved some misrepresentation on the part of the Greek philosopher: cf. note 18.

However, Eustathios claims that his patriarchal overlord was successful in retrieving the Armenians of the delegation from a false position (delivering them from the Devil). Eustathios therefore wishes to represent the patriarch as a sure advocate of the Chalcedonian (in the twelfth-century interpretation of the word) position. This theme is elaborated on the second passage.

What really concerns us in this passage, which is perhaps even more conventional in its imagery, is the allusion to a sizeable delegation of Armenians:<sup>48</sup>

And (the Evil One), permitted them, though semimortal, after they had been spewed forth by him, to lie (sick) so that they could come to the peak of health only with long tending and difficulty, when it was also possible to see your medical versatility in those affairs, through which you raised them, each in a different way, in many ways working their total cure with the Spirit, fashioning in some of them soothing with the anointment of care for the body and things by which their flesh is pampered, and effecting the salvation of others through enchantment with instructive words and correctness in the scriptures, which they had twisted out of line, and for yet others applying the cautery-iron, the more severe treatment of enforced attention, for those whom there was necessity for this on account of the difficulty in recovering them by any other method.

The imagery of sickness and health to describe one's state of salvation is totally typical of the time, for Byzantines and Armenians alike. Indeed, Eustathios works the metaphor at length, *ad taedium*. However, while maintaining such imagery, he introduces the theme of the demons with which he represents the Armenians as being possessed. Anchialos is described as taking different measures to convert the members of the delegation, on a case-by-case basis. Again there is an emphasis on his being implacable in his defence of the Greek orthodox position. All of the delegation, asserts Eustathios, were converted (to Chalcedonian Christianity), with only one particularly difficult case. This obdurate person is introduced as follows:<sup>49</sup>

And they receive the rest of the cure except one certain person who (and that man especially deeply stained himself with the evil in his soul) has taken care to spew forth his soul in preference to being restored to perfection in faith; and you brought forth the drugs of salvation, but he put them away and spurned health ...

Gentle remedies had no effect on this individual, Eustathios claims, continuing to labour the pharmaceutical metaphor:<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Eustathios, 121/74–122/83.

<sup>49</sup> Eustathios, 122/91–96.

<sup>50</sup> Eustathios, 122/10–14.

And because he was embittered because of your sweetening, you are using bitterness on him in return, and henceforth the sweetness from the spiritual words of wisdom which have gone down his gullet will become sweeter than honey in his mouth, and the one who did not respond well to honey will be fortified by wormwood.

The succeeding lines, concerning the battle between the Evil One and Christ for this man's soul, again use commonplaces to describe the debate that seems to have happened at Constantinople. The conventional imagery continues in the lines that follow:<sup>51</sup>

And this man, with respect to the things in which the Wicked One was deceiving him, recurses to repentance and, shouting out against the Contriver of Evil, overcomes His trickery and reveals what sort of man he was, contemning his former life, and brings those who had thought the same into the light, naming them publicly and, as if a fox was stuffed within an evil pit, he has showed them with his guidance how to find the trail which leads out.

This passage can be interpreted as saying that even this most obdurate of the Armenian envoys, to coin a phrase, "saw the error of his ways". The metaphor of a fox is as always being used to represent a man of guile and is typical of the imagery used to characterise the Armenians. We are told more about this man in the following lines:<sup>52</sup>

Out of both those who had fallen to the beast, and those who took their stand beside you in the midst of the illustrious synod, the man who stood over this beast with great wisdom, the greater part divested themselves of the fox, quietly resigning the man (to his fate), but frequently exhorting that this animal be put away altogether, and they had been shrinking in the meantime from coming to a perfect man and were not desirous of being refashioned from the crushing of a divine pot, but further, being dull of vision because they were shrouded in shadow, they looked upon your sun, that of truth, until (O light commensurate!) in short order opening their eyes they saw again and finally (O this light greater than word can express, which shone down on the Saul who became Paul!) they appeared noble and were illuminated with great clarity, renewed as eagles.

The passage introduces more tantalising clues as to what happened at Constantinople. It would seem that most of the Armenian delegation "took a stand" by Anchialos, and, even more, Eustathios claims that they even condemned the obdurate one for his error! Naturally, Michael is represented as the cause of these Armenians seemingly accepting Byzantine orthodoxy.

It seems then that Michael Anchialos and Manuel may have been at variance to some degree when it came to the question of achieving Church union with the Armenian Church. Manuel, it has been shown, was more

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<sup>51</sup> Eustathios, 123/22–27.

<sup>52</sup> Eustathios, 123/27–37.



prepared to make compromises in his endeavours to achieve Church union with the Roman Church<sup>53</sup> and this was probably no less true of his endeavours to achieve reconciliation with the Armenian church, if he was prepared to waive all of the “Nine Chapters” save the question of the *azymes* and the appointment of the *katholikos*. Of course, Michael had to respect his master’s wishes. But he was also answerable to the Byzantine synod, and the Greek Church was not inclined to compromise their Chalcedonian position in the Christological debate. Eustathios and Michael Choniates imply that Michael Anchialos showed some passion in his defence of Chalcedonian Christianity; this suggests that it was a matter of personal conviction.

Be this as it may, Eustathios’ chief concern is to represent his subject as victorious in his debate. This is how he winds up the section of his oration dealing with the Armenians:<sup>54</sup>

At that time I saw the dumbfoundment arising from those matters which was truly also celebrated; I saw a rock being struck and pouring forth waters, these streams of tears gushing forth from a hard and rigid heart, which the staff of compunction, in dividing the springs of salvation, has made gush forth as a result; I saw tares transformed to wheat and was amazed at it, because you did not pull them out at that hour from the crop of your faith, but with foresight let them stay in a divine manner, awaiting their reversion and turning back to the useful substance of wheat; I am amazed how those who were sullen in the meantime and those who entrusted themselves to nothing other than to engendering evil and being silent for the most part, have said everything, if nothing appropriate, and having become their own condemners, have also given birth to the spirit of salvation and, relaxing the composure of their faces, some in one way smiling cheerfully, others mixing in grace so that they both smile and cry, in some ways smiling from untruth, due to which their predecessors have been led astray, but in others bursting into tears on account of their former lives; I was moved to marvel, when men constrained by the persuasiveness of your words admit their perversions totally, if they had previously built in the depths some kind of evil, and, spitting out the slime within, they drew instead divine myrrh and were no longer unclean vessels.

Thus you brought back those peoples who were scattered and straying; thus you led worthy men out from among the unworthy; thus you refashioned the race that was crushed.

The comparison to Moses and his staff, which brings forth water from a rock and divides the Red Sea, is but another commonplace, as is the allusion to the parable of the tares. We might care to add to this list of Biblical echoes the reference to spiritual treasure in clay pots in this and the previous passage (2 Corinthians 4.7; an allusion that passed undetected

<sup>53</sup> e.g. P. MAGDALINO, *Empire*, 90–91.

<sup>54</sup> Eustathios, 123/37–124/56.

by Wirth). Two points: first, emotions evidently ran high; and second, it can be seen that our rhetor spares us no hyperbole to demonstrate the totality of Anchialos' victory.

### C. CONCLUSIONS

But was Anchialos successful in persuading the Armenian delegation to accept Chalcedonian Christianity? And how do the Greek sources further our knowledge of the well-trodden path of scholarship on the Byzantino-Armenian debates of the 1170s?

First, Theorianos does seem to have misrepresented proceedings in his two disputations with Nerses. This must be the case for debate to have flared up again at Constantinople. Admittedly, it is possible that Nerses personally had sufficient sympathy with the Chalcedonian position as explicated to him to accept it as orthodox and not Nestorian as he had previously believed. The obdurate Armenian at Constantinople may then have been a representative of that party of eastern Armenians who were to object to Grigor IV's compromises in the succeeding years. But we must remember that firstly even the eastern Armenians found Nerses' profession of faith orthodox, and, secondly, one would think that Nerses would have sent envoys who understood and were sympathetic to his position. Therefore the theory that Nerses stood by his original profession of faith to Alexios, no matter what his attitude to the Chalcedonian formula as enunciated by Theorianos, seems to hold water, and Zekiyan, though anxious to vindicate a Christological position, seems to be justified in his assumptions.

What then of the claims of Choniates and Eustathios with regard to Anchialos' success in the Constantinopolitan disputations of 1172? The most likely explanation for the fact that Choniates and Eustathios could claim a victory is that the Armenian delegation, like Nerses, realised that the Byzantine position was not Nestorian, and that the misunderstanding was one of their respective terminologies. Suttner would then be vindicated when he talks of an "ecumenical movement" ahead of its time.

In conclusion let us note how even this most allusive of genres, Byzantine panegyric, can be adduced and applied to historical problems, and even reveal happenings that might otherwise go undetected. We know more about the dealings between the Armenian and the Byzantine churches in the 1170s thanks to Eustathios, and further mining of his panegyrics will doubtless yield more secrets.