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Pagan and Christian Interpretations of Dream-visions in “History of Armenia” Published by Hakobos Issavertents

Abstract. The article focuses on analyzing two dream-visions outlined in the synopsis of Armenian medieval literature: the dream of Azhdahak and the vision of St. Gregory the Illuminator. The study is based on the “History of Armenia” published by the Mekhitarist Congregation of Venice, incorporating literary texts and engravings by Italian artists on these subjects. On one hand, the article draws parallels between the pagan worldview, exploring its associated dream symbolism and value system. On the other hand, it delves into the Christian reinterpretations of the same symbols within the framework of medieval canonical vision. The methodological foundation involves myth-critical, psychoanalytical, hermeneutic (literary studies), and historical-comparative (art studies) approaches.

Key words: pagan dream, medieval Christian vision, Mekhitarist Congregation, Armenian literature, Italian art

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Языческие и христианские интерпретации сновидений и видений в «Истории Армении», изданной Аякобосом Исавертентцем

Аннотация. Статья посвящена анализу сновидения Аждаака и видения Святого Григория Просветителя, описанных в средневековой армянской литературе. В качестве исследуемого материала рассмотрена книга «История Армении», изданная Конгрегацией Мхитаристов в Венеции, включённые в неё литературные тексты и гравюры, созданные итальянскими художниками. В статье проводится изучение, с одной стороны, языческого мировоззрения с присущей ему символикой сновидений и системой ценностей, а с другой стороны – христианских преобразований тех же символов уже в структуре средневекового канонического видения. В работе использованы следующие методы: мифо-критический, психоаналитический, герменевтический (литературоведение) и историко-сравнительный (искусствоведение).

Ключевые слова: языческое сновидение, средневековое христианское видение, Конгрегация Мхитаристов, армянская литература, итальянское искусство

Introduction

In literary and theological texts, vision and dreams serve as manifestations of divine revelation. Through providential visions, conveyed in immaterial images, realities are communicated or subtly alluded to, encompassing the realms of the past, present, and future. The prevailing focus, however, lies on future-oriented visions characterized by their prophetic nature [Kyoseyan, 2002, 1004].

Dreams hold a central role in almost all organized religions. In the 5th century, the era following the invention of Armenian alphabet, this literary device becomes a pivotal means for predicting the future, engaging in conversations with God, fulfilling God's word, or realizing prophecies. This holds true in both pagan and Christian periods, as evidenced in texts exploring diverse worldviews and perspectives in theological and historical literature.

In Koryun's "The Life of Mashtots" [Koryun, 2012] and Movses Khorenatsi's "History of the Armenians" [Khorenatsi, 2006], the vision of Mesrop Mashtots, sent by God in the form of the Armenian alphabet, assumes a central role. Agathangelos in his work "History of the Armenians" [Agathangelos, 1983] emphasizes Gregory the Illuminator's vision of Christ and the construction of the Etchmiadzin Cathedral, while Ghazar Parpetsi's historical account highlights Sahak Partev's dream about the future of Armenia [P'Arpec'i, 2021], among others. Furthermore, a striking example of a vision in Armenia Medieval folklore is Grigor Narekatsi's vision of Mother of God with the Child [Devrikyan, 2023]. Alongside these sacred Christian visions, a notable place is given to the dream of "Azhdahak" presented in the pages of Khorenatsi's history. This dream serves as a unique example of pagan thinking, worldview, and artistic expression.

These dreams and visions, initially found in 5th-century historical fiction, undergo further transformation and find new expression through literary, theological, historical works, and paintings in subsequent centuries.

This article delves into the analysis of two themes within the extensive French book-album "History of Armenia" [Issaverdens, 1888], published by the fathers of the Mekhitarist Congregation [Mirzoyan, 2008] on St. Lazarus Island, Italy, and their respective sources. Archimandrite Hakobos Issavertents (1835–1902), the author, selects and presents significant cases and events from Armenian history for the European reader, employing illustrations by prominent Italian artists of the time: Giuliano Zasso (1833–1889), Giovanni Fusaro (1803–1894), and Giuseppe Canella the Younger (1837–1913). While presenting Armenian history to the French-speaking reader, the Archimandrite places particular emphasis on two dreams from the 5th century: the dream of Azhdahak, representing the Armenian pagan worldview, and the adoption of Christianity in Armenia, and, consequently, the narrative surrounding St. Gregory. In rendering the first dream, however, the Catholic author opts for a figurative interpretation of a mythical dream, while in the second, a form of disguise is employed.

The given research aims to examine these two medieval dreams and their literary, artistic, and religious representations within the pages of the book published by the Mekhitarist Fathers. Being an interdisciplinary research, the article utilizes myth-critical, psychoanalytical, hermeneutic (literary studies), and historical-comparative (art studies) methods as its methodological foundation.

Azhdahak's Dream as a Reflection of the Pagan Value System

Azhdahak's dream is a part within Khorenatsi's "History of the Armenians" cycle titled "Tigran and Azhdahak". This cycle unfolds the narrative of the Armenian king Tigran, detailing his reign and his interactions with Azhadahak, the king of Media.

Throughout his history Khorenatsi adheres to the principle of presenting historical events as reality. He endeavors to extract possible, factual stories from the rich folklore material and present them to the reader while leaving the mythical and unrealistic aspects in the shadows. Accordingly, the medieval Armenian historian follows the path of separating reality from imagination. In the "Tigran and Azhdahak" cycle, two parallel narratives coexist: the tangible connection and relations between Tigran and Azhdahak in the "real" historical context and their symbolic realization in the dream realm, openly expressing pagan myths. Numerous researchers have traced elements of thunder myths in the story dedicated to the pagan Armenian king [Abeghyan, 1966, 97–156; Abeghyan, 1985, 178–242], conducted structural-symbolic analyses [Harutyunyan, 2017, 173–176], and explored comparative aspects [Russel, 2008; Petrosyan, 2020].

In the narrative's actual sequence of events, Azhdahak, the king of Media, seeks to foster friendship with the Armenian king and ward off potential threats by marrying Tigran's sister, Tigranuhi. However, his anxiety grows when he becomes suspicious of Tigran's closeness to the Greek king Cyrus. Consumed by these thoughts, Azhdahak

experiences a prophetic dream during the night. Upon awakening, troubled by fears of a potential attack by Tigran, he summons his advisers and decides to betray and defeat Tigran through his wife. Tigranuhi, remaining loyal to her brother, reveals the impending betrayal. In the ensuing battle, Tigran defeats Azhdahak, captures his first wife, Anuysh, and settles them at the base of Mount Ararat near a grand cave. This “possible” chain of events itself carries concealed layers related to the thunder myth: (1) King Tigran as a dragon-fighting hero, (2) the dragon symbolizing the foreign king Azhdahak, described as “the hybrid dragon-man Azi Dahäka is to the propagandists of his victorious enemies both non-Iranian and sub-human, hence the appropriateness of the usage here, perhaps, of the mounted dragon-with-man” [Russel, 2008, 63], (3) Tigranuhi as a woman or sister freed from the dragon's captivity, and (4) the captive wife of a foreign king, portrayed as the mother of dragons, etc. [Harutyunyan, 2017, 173–174].

This veiled mythic narrative, however, is interspersed with a dream-narrative where the mythic layers operate openly. Khorenatsi, the Christian historian, seemingly regarded the dream as secondary, less real and credible, presenting it without significant alterations or filtering. It is noteworthy, that over 1300 years later, Hakobos Issavertents, one of the Mekhitarist Fathers, followed a similar approach. He presented the cycle and dream of the Tigran and Azhdahak story without changes or interventions, even commissioning the Italian artist Zasso to paint and decorate Azhdahak's dream, portraying the pagan aspect according to the characteristics of Italian art at that time.

Before delving into the analysis of the dream itself, let's set the stage by exploring the context and the process of its creation. As documented by Khorenatsi and reiterated by Issavertents, Azhdahak harbored fears regarding the friendship between Tigran and Cyrus, feeling threatened by this alliance, and these anxieties weighed heavily on him: “Sleep often fled from Azhdahak when he thought of this ... While he was troubled with these thoughts, he had a vision of the future through a prophetic dream” [Khorenatsi, 2006, 111].

Drawing upon predictive dreams, psychoanalyst C.G. Jung observes that in the Middle Ages, dreams were primarily viewed as a form of prophecy. The events and thoughts that occupy individuals' waking minds find expression in their dreams. Something that is of a more or less unknown nature has been intuitively grasped by the unconscious and submitted to an archetypal treatment [Jung, 2016, 64].

Azhdahak's dream employs a pagan symbol system to symbolize potential events in the narrative, introducing ominous openings that instill fear in the hero but foreshadow future occurrences.

In the dream, Azhdahak finds himself “in an unknown land near a mountain rising high from the earth, its peak shrouded in thick ice” [Khorenats'i, 2006, 112]. Within the mountain's ice, he perceives “a woman dressed in purple and wrapped in a veil the color of the sky <...> Her eyes were beautiful, her statue tall, her cheeks red, and she was seized with the pains of childbirth <...> The woman suddenly gave birth to three heroes, fully formed in statue and form. The first was mounted on a lion and flew to the west; the second on a leopard looked on the north; but the third rode a monstrous dragon and launched an attack on our empire” [Khorenats'i, 2006, 112].

Soon the dream changes its spatio-temporal inclusion and Azhdahak appears on the roof of his royal palace, where he started to honor his gods with sacrifice and incense. A hero riding a dragon, attacks the castle, destroying statues dedicated to the gods and engaging in a fierce battle with Azhdahak. The foreboding dream concludes with the defeat of Azhdahak.

The archetype of the mountain, signifying the center of the world, takes prominence in the dream. In his monograph on the Mountain archetype, Hersh delineates 8 stages of archetype expression: (1) the mountain is a God, (2) the Gods live on the mountain, (3) men on the mountain, (4) the artificial mountain, (5) the mountain in visions and dreams, (6) the mythic mountain, (7) the pre-psychological approach, (8) the psychological approach [Hersh, 2016, 3–5].

From the perspective of the examined dream, levels 2, 5, and 6 are significant. Initially, the mountain is portrayed as the abode of the gods, where a goddess gives birth atop it, bringing forth three colossal gods. The mountain, central to the world, assumes a

masculine function in its initial perception – a symbol of masculinity and procreation that links the three rings of the world: the underworld (foot), the world (the mountain itself), and the sky or the abode of the gods (top). The woman in labor symbolizes the archetype of the Great Mother, representing the initiation of motherhood. The fusion of male and female results in the birth of the three godchildren.

In his monograph on the archetype of the Great Mother, E. Neumann associates the transformation mystery of the archetype of the Great Mother and connects with three mystery phases of blood transformation – (1.) menstruation blood (when a child becomes an adult girl, acquiring some feminine characteristics), (2.) pregnancy blood (when she is getting ready to give birth to a new “God”, but they are still in the one identity), (3.) giving birth and transformation of blood into milk (the birth of the “God” and the “Great Mother”) [Neumann, 2015, 31–32].

The mysterious woman in Azhdahak's dream resides between the second and third transformations identified by Neumann. Experiencing the throes of childbirth, she is on the brink of bringing forth world-altering deities who, upon birth, ride/conquer the three mighty animals – lion, leopard, and mythical dragon – flying to the four corners of the world to dismantle the old order of life and establish a new one. The appearance of this goddess on the verge of motherhood is intentional: a purple dress, a veil matching the color of the sky, a tall stature, and red cheeks. These colors symbolize the third stage of transformation, signifying the journey from the intense red of blood and labor pains to the purity of white milk, culminating in the complete realization of deification and embodying the archetype of the Great Mother.

When discussing the Mother archetype, C.G. Jung delineates various aspects of its symbolic manifestation: from the personal realm of an individual's mother, grandmother, or tribe progenitor to the mythical realm of the young virgin destined to become a Mother of God. According to Jung, the archetype of the Great Mother, beyond its positive attributes, can also embody negative images of motherhood, such as the witch, demon, or evil mother [Jung, 1996a, 30–50].

In the cycle of Tigran and Azhdahak, beyond the dream narrative, we observe a covert realization of the great mother archetype in the cycle's reality. In this case, the archetype manifests as both a young and devoted woman and, simultaneously, as the mother of evil.

Tigranuhi presents herself as a virgin held captive/a wife by a demon (Azhdahak), and has not yet undergone the two transformations to become a mother – pregnancy and childbirth. Nevertheless, she remains dedicated to her homeland and her brother.

Azhdahak's first wife, Anuysh, is depicted as the mother of dragons, representing the negative aspect of the great mother archetype. After defeating Azhdahak, Tigran settles her and her descendants near Mount Ararat. As Khorenatsi attests, it is not coincidental that in old Armenian folklore songs, Azhdahak is referred to as a dragon, and his descendants are known as dragon descendants. Examining the historical-mythical foundation of this part of the myth, M. Abeghyan notes: “At the foot of Masis, the Median people living on both sides of Aras to the east of that mountain, who had already become Armenians before the 5th century, were considered to be dragons, as descendants of the dragon Dahak <...> In other words, the dragon or the dragon Dahak was considered to be the totem of the tribe of Median origin living east of Masis” [Abeghyan, 1966, 134].

The archetype of the Great Mother, in fact, assumes three manifestations in the cycle of Tigran and Azhdahak: the birthing goddess, the virgin woman, and the mother of evils. This negative realization of the archetype also aligns with the second level of the mountain archetype. According to Hersh, the gods can dwell not only on the summit of the mountain but also within it (in this case, the mother dragon with her dragons resides in the crevice of the mountain). Besides the sacred residence on the mountain, there can also be an entrance to the underworld [Hersh, 2016, 53].

In the 5th stage (Mountain in the Visions and dreams) the mountain becomes a visionary and external one that appears in dreams and visions and has a symbolic meaning. Mostly it is expressed as a not certain mountain but its reflection in the imagination and memories. In the considered cycle, the mountain is realized at this level in two expressions. First, it appears as a nondescript mountain in a dream; the dreamer purely subconsciously

perceives that it is located somewhere in the country of Armenians, having no specific characteristics or name and being identified with Mount Ararat only through parallel association. However, in the cycle's reality, the mountain is distinctly outlined as Ararat, at the base of which the demons settle.

The second realization of the dream expression of the mountain involves a shift in spatial dimension, as Azhdahak transitions from the foot of the mountain to the roof of his palace. Here, he commences offering sacrifices to the gods alongside his subjects. As noted by M. Eliade, “The architectonic symbolism of the Center may be formulated as follows:

1. The Sacred Mountain – where heaven and earth meet – is situated at the center of the world.

2. Every temple or palace – and, by extension, every sacred city or royal residence – is a Sacred Mountain, thus becoming a Center.

3. Being an axis mundi, the sacred city or temple is regarded as the meeting point of heaven, earth, and hell [Eliade, 1959, 12]. In the examined dream, the mountain, symbolizing the axis mundi, at the point of the narrative transforms into the roof of the palace – a tangible embodiment of a real sacred mountain, a site for pagan worship where gods, in the form of idols, reside.

At the sixth level, the perception of the real mountain archetype becomes entwined with myth. “Here the mountain has become a content of a myth. It is no longer conceived it as a physical mountain or even a visionary mountain <...> It has become a public symbol that appears over and over again in the literature and art of a culture” [Hersh, 2016, 4]: The example of this stage is the Mount Ararat in Armenian oral and literary tradition [Karagyozyan, 2023].

The subsequent archetypal realization in the cycle unfolds as the Godchild born of the Great Mother, symbolizing the feminine, and the mountain, symbolizing the masculine. This deity embarks on a mission to destroy and rebuild the world. The parallel between the newborn hero Tigran riding a dragon and the god Vahagn, his son in Khorenatsi's history, has long been recognized [Russel, 2008, 63; Petrosyan, 2020]. As highlighted by C.G. Jung, Vahagn uniquely embodies the god-child archetype in Armenian pagan mythology, being both newborn and young, masculine, and engaging in heavenly duels with demons and dragons [Jung, 1996b, 50]. In contrast to Vahagn, born from the four elements and soaring into the sky to combat dragons upon birth, Tigran (his father in the cycle) is born riding a dragon, symbolizing the prophecy of defeating Azhdahak.

Hakobos Issavertents of the Mekhitarist (Armenian Catholic) Monastery grasps the essence of the entire pagan symbolic system. He not only incorporates this part of Khorenatsi's story into his French work but also commissions the Italian artist Zasso to vividly depict this dream, offering a more explicit portrayal of the myth-ritual layers of the narrative (illus. 1).

The painting illustrates the dream's second scene – the symbolic mountain – the image of the roof of Azhdahak's palace. The roof, adorned with statues of idols depicting human and human-animal (eagle) expressions. In his depictions of idols, the Italian artist also emphasized the role of the solar cult of the Persians. On the statues' pedestals, symbols of sun-headress can be discerned, consecrating them with a crown-like manifestation. Young lions depicted on the central statue's pedestal, shrouded in the mystery of fire and light, also serve as an expression of solar worship.



Illus. 1. *The Dream of Azhdahak* [Issavertents, 1888, 21].

Azhdahak and his subjects, attired in regal robes, are captured in the act of offering a sacrifice, attempting to shield their idols from the dragon-fighting hero descending from the sky. The Italian painter accentuates their opulent clothing, reminiscent of more Asian courtly attire, complete with crowns, weapons, and court hats.

In the right section of the painting, the mythical essence of the dream is actualized. Three heroes are visible in the cloudy sky. Heroes riding lion and leopard are captured from the back during the flight as they each head out into the world to fulfill their providence in the designated quadrant of the world. Meanwhile, the third character hurtles directly toward the rampart, clearly visible in his appearance. The Italian artist imparts the Armenian hero with a demeanor reminiscent of Greek mythology, somehow linking him to regular Italian classicist art. Standing triumphantly, with a naked and masculine body draped in a wind-blown cloak, the hero exhibits gestures suggesting a transformative moment during the attack. The painting portrays a hairy face, tousled hair, and a thick beard – distinctive traits of the Armenian appearance. The hero's muscles are clearly delineated. Tigran, in the act of riding the dragon during the impending assault, symbolizes the imminent destruction of Azhdahak's castle, with the dragon's tongue signifying fire.

The Transformation of Archetypes in the Christian Vision System

The next renowned dream-vision recounted in Armenian historiography from the 5th century is the vision of Gregory the Illuminator, as depicted in the history of Agathangelos. Unlike the mythical dream of the Dragon, the dream of the Illuminator belongs to the genre of regular medieval Christian visions. Russian philosopher and literary theorist Boris Yarkho conventionally divides medieval visions into two groups: single-peaked and multi-peaked. Single-peak visions revolve around a single event and consist of the following sections: (a) a description of the setting, (b) the vision itself, and (c) a didactic or prophetic section. Multi-peaked visions, more characteristic of works of art, have a more multi-polar structure: (a) prologue, (b) description of the environment and characters, (c) the vision itself and the events that take place in parallel with it, (d) conclusion [Yarkho, 1989, 131].

The vision of the Illuminator, a classic example of a single-peaked vision, comprises two parts: “The first part explains the siting of the three martyria and the principal church, the *kat'olikē*, at Vałaršapat, modern Ėjmiacin; the second is a prediction of divisions and confusion in the future” [La Porta, 2014, 285].

In the first part, the vision unfolds as the founder of the Armenian Apostolic Church, St. Gregory, experiences a revelation after liberating the Armenian king Trdat the Third from the form of a wild pig. Unlike Azhdahak's dream, which visits the dreamer during sleep, St. Gregory sees the vision while awake, in the middle of the night when the entire city sleeps, consumed by his inability to rest, fervently praying for divine mercy on his nation and seeking the conversion of the people. This vision becomes a symbolic response to the seer's thoughts and concerns.

In the dream, a sudden loud sound is heard, the sky opens, and a brilliant light descends upon the earth. In the open heaven, immortal waters are seen, and a host of angels with wings of fire descends in light, led by a “terrible figure” wielding a hammer. The light descends to the earth in the city center, striking the ground, accompanied by sounds and rumblings from beneath. A luminous pillar appears in the city center, crowned by a radiant cross. Three additional luminaries appear at the sites of martyrdom for holy virgins, and the four lights converge, revealing the divine throne above them. The subsequent part of the vision presents the spatio-temporal aspect – the vision of the future – where black goats in holy waters transform into white lambs, multiplying and spreading. However, some of them metamorphose into snarling wolves, initiating the slaughter of the flocks.

In the vision's interpretation, the angel relays God's message to the Illuminator, unveiling the language of Christian symbolism: the pillar of light symbolizes the Christian church, uniting all peoples in faith. The central pillar signifies the location of the temple of God (Echmiadzin), and the other three pillars will be constructed where chapels of the saints will stand. The black goats transforming into white lambs in the second part of the vision represent sinful individuals cleansed through baptism. Those turning into wolves once again and preying on the sheep are those who turn away from God.

According to Agahangelos, Gregory the Illuminator, following the vision and guided by God's word, establishes the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and churches dedicated to the holy virgins in the locations indicated by the angel. It is noteworthy, that in the canonical vision of Agahangelos, St. Gregory sees an angel with a hammer, but national traditions based on its later weave new narratives, suggesting that it is Christ who descends from heaven with a hammer to reveal the construction site of Etchmiadzin. The church's name, "Ej" (descended) "Miadzin" (Son of God), originates from this, [Khachatryan, 2012, 58]. Subsequent literary works or paintings featuring Christ draw inspiration from these newly woven narratives.

Beyond the canonical Christian symbolic interpretation within the vision, alternative analyses have also been proposed. Sargis Harutyunyan, for instance, examined it through the lens of mythic criticism [Harutyunyan, 2017, 36–37], while S. La Porta viewed its second part in an apocalyptic context [La Porta, 2014, 296–312].

In contrast to the pagan dream of Azhdahak, where Christian author Khorenatsi made no attempt to conceal the mythical layers and archetypes, presenting them unchanged as the dream's imaginary reality, Agathangelos presents a saint's vision – a waking dream sent by God. In this context, every sign is revealed, particularly from an exegetical perspective. However, within the framework of the Christian solid system, the dream's archetypal layers are also discernible, exhibiting various parallels with the pagan dream of Azhdahak.

If in Azhdahak's dream the axis mundi takes the form of a clear archetype of the mountain, here the archetype of the center of the world becomes its biblical realization – a pillar of light descending from the sky, creating a heaven-world-hell parallel. Above the pillar, heaven opens, centering in the city and reaching down to hell, with notable parallels to the voices from hell. The existence of hell at the foot of the light is also noted in extratextual circumstances. On the one hand, the proof of such a perception of the fact are the ruins of the ancient pagan temple found in the base of Etchmiadzin [Bazoyan, 2002, 24], which from the point of view of the Christian people should have been perceived as hell, on the other hand – the later folk legends, according to which the place of construction of Echmiadzin was originally mud and inhabited by evils expelled by the Illuminator [Harutyunyan, 2017, 37].

In subsequent Christian interpretations (images, texts), the light becomes a symbol of Christ, who with a hammer (building, creation, beginning) in his hand points the Illuminator to the construction site of Etchmiadzin, the cathedral of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the earthly center of light. Christ thus becomes a symbol of masculinity, creation, and the church – a representation of motherhood (one of the canonized expressions of the great mother archetype), both providing the foundation of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The presentation of the church as the bride and Christ as the bridegroom in the Bible is not accidental in this context [Poladean, 1957, 87].

Turning to the presentation of St. Gregory's history in the book "History of Armenia", Issavertents provides a detailed and extensive account of the conversion of the Armenian world to Christianity, paying significant attention to various aspects of the story, such as the tortures of the Illuminator, him being brought out of the deep pit, the baptism of the people, etc. However, the famous vision of St. Gregory appears to be somewhat overshadowed. Issavertents briefly narrates, "Immediately after Trdat and Gregory returned to Vagharshapat, the construction of the Etchmiadzin church began in the place that Gregory had personally pointed out. The place was shown to him by God in a vision. From that moment on, that church is considered the patriarchal seat of Armenia, around which the people rallied after the loss of statehood" [Issavertents, 1888, 80].

A similar logic is reflected in the book's engravings. Issavertents commissioned Italian artists to engrave various episodes of the history of Trdat and the Illuminator, such as the presentation of Khosrovidukht to Trdat (return to the homeland) [Issavertents, 1888, 74], Trdat and Saint Hripsime [Issavertents, 1888, 79], St. Gregory leaving from the pit [Issavertents, 1888, 79] and finding the dead body of the saint by shepherds [Issavertents, 1888, 84]. However, the image of the famous vision of the Illuminator, widely popular in the iconography of the Armenian Apostolic Church, does not find a place in this book.

This circumstance can be explained in two ways. First, Agatanghegos alters the details of the saint's vision extensively. Since Issavertents touches on that story very

briefly, installing an engraving would have been pointless and incomprehensible to foreign readers. The second explanation considers the situation in a broader context, spanning the 17–19th centuries. In Catholic Italy, depictions of the vision of St. Gregory at Etchmiadzin are not encountered, likely because the cathedral of Etchmiadzin is a direct symbol of the apostolic faith. Therefore, in the Catholic environment, there may have been reluctance to address such theological issues. Issavertents did not avoid addressing that question but probably lacked a successful visual example of the vision, as it was not common in European art. Instead, from the episodes of the Illuminator's life, the book includes engravings depicting him getting out of the pit (illus. 2) and the shepherds finding the saint's dead body (illus. 3).

These two episodes were common in European art and were depicted numerous times, especially in the medallions of one-page engravings [Devrikyan, 2022]. Unlike Europe, the engravings of St. Gregory created in Armenia in the 18th century mostly represent the vision, with fewer depictions of his tortures. Notably, in contrast to the publications and orders of the Mekhitarist Fathers, in the yearbooks and commissioned paintings of the Armenian Apostolic Church, the image of the vision of the Illuminator is highly popular [Vardanyan, 2014, 15]. Symbolizing the creation of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church and God's guidance this imagery has proliferated widely in both Eastern Armenian and Western Armenian iconography.

Conclusions

Hence, dream and vision emerge as pivotal genres in medieval literature. Throughout Armenian historiography of the 5th century, there is a prevalence of dreams prophesying the future. Christian historians, in their works, predominantly explore the Christian theme of dreams, portraying visions experienced by saints, church figures, or believers as messages from God. The singular deviation from this pattern is Azhdahak's dream, featured in Khorenatsi's "History of the Armenians" – a distinctive archetypal mural painted with pagan characters and a mythical worldview. In this dream, various symbolic realizations of archetypes such as the mountain, the cosmic center, the great mother, and the child of God manifest themselves, including Mount Ararat, the sacred treasure, mother of God, dragon mother, the nulliparous virgin, and dragon-warrior hero.



Illus. 2. Gregory the Illuminator Leaving the Pit [Issavertents, 1888, 78].



Illus. 3. Shepherds Finding the Dead Body of St. Gregory [Issavertents, 1888, 85].

Within Agathanghegos's "History of the Armenians" the waking vision of Gregory the Illuminator takes center stage. In this vision, aligned with the Christian worldview, the symbolic history of identifying the location of Etchmiadzin unfolds. The archetype of the cosmic mountain is actualized through the descent of light and a pillar from heaven, while the archetype of the great mother is represented by symbols associated with the holy church.

These visions, well-known since the Middle Ages, find a notable expression in the French book-album "History of Armenia" by Hakobos Issavertents, a member of the Mekhitarist Congregation. When depicting a pagan dream, Issavertents meticulously presents the story in all its facets, accentuating the archetypal symbolic system and supplementing the narrative with a painting by Italian artist Zasso that openly depicts mythical symbols. However, Issavertents adopts a different approach to another dream – that of Gregory the Illuminator Lusavorch – woven with expressions of the Christian value system. He merely references it in the text and, in contrast, does not provide any realization of the vision next to various engravings dedicated to the topic. This choice may be influenced by both religious and artistic considerations. On one hand, it reflects the Mekhitarist Fathers' reverence for Etchmiadzin as a symbol of the apostolic creed. On the other hand, the absence of similar depictions of the Illuminator in European culture, unlike the Armenian school, likely played a decisive role in the selection of the subject and images.

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