

ABSTRACT

Armenian-Persian Conflict (449-451): Its Religious Background and Reflection in Early Armenian Historiography

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In 449-451 a conflict took place between Armenia (being at that time under Persian domination with the status of Persian province) and Sasanian Persia. The conflict was caused by efforts of Sasanian king Yazdgard II to convert Armenian population to Zoroastrianism. In order to unify his empire under the auspices of the Persian state religion, Yazdgard II appealed to Armenian magnates to renounce Christianity. Armenian magnates, however, decided to refuse the appeal on the council held in Artashat in 449. Yazdgard II, therefore, summoned the Armenian magnates to his court in Ktesifont to account for their disobedience to him. Magnates were constrained under Yazdgard's threat to outwardly renounce their faith and accept Zoroastrianism. The king sent them back to their homeland with the Magians to spread Zoroastrianism through Armenia. After returning home, however, the Armenian nobility distanced itself from Zoroastrianism and hoping for support from the Byzantine Emperor took a decision to revolt against Persians. The Armenian-Persian conflict culminated in Battle of Avarayr in 451 where Armenians were defeated. In the overall result, however, Armenians reached their goal because the Sasanian Persia allowed them to profess Christianity in Armenia. In the early medieval Armenian historiography, the conflict between Armenia and Persia is described as a fight of the Armenians for their religious freedom. Two protagonists of the early period of Armenian literature, Łazar Pharpeci and Elišē, are the authors of this conception of the national history. Armenians owe to both authors for a concept of history, which became the basis for the formation and strengthening of Armenian national identity in the following centuries. However, this concept was created by Christian authors and is characterized by their tendentious approach. After

a deeper examination of the events described in the works of Łazar Pharpeci and Elišē it becomes clear that the subtext of the Armenian-Persian conflict was not only religious, but also reflected the economic and political interests of the parties concerned.