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ST. MESROP MASHTOTS

(362-440)

Mesrop Mashtots, the distinguished, multi-talented and noble (of noble birth) scholar, Holy Father and military leader, (in the spirit of Military-Monastic Order) Christian preacher and missionary, revivalist of the lost Armenian alphabet. The establisher and the beginner of the Golden Age of Armenian Literature. Founder of new educational institutions throughout Armenia. For his great deeds and accomplishments canonized by the Holy Apostolic Church of Armenia. One of his talented students and followers was Koryun, who later on by the directions of the Church of Armenia wrote and recorded the life and work of St. Mesrop.

St. Mesrop Mashtots was born in the year 362 AD in the town of Hatsekats, in the Taron province of Greater Armenia. After receiving his primary education in his native province of Taron, St. Mesrop, in the year 389 AD was enlisted in the royal garrison of the king in the capital city of Vagharshapat. During his stay in Vagharshapat St. Mesrop quickly noticed the fact that most of the schools and other state institutions were using different languages such as Greek, Pahlavi (Parthian or middle Persian) and Syrian. Greek and Syrian were spoken among the priestly class and were regarded as the Christian languages for preaching mass and other Christian ceremonies that were conducted in churches and amongst the common people. The Armenian Arshakouni court used Greek and Parthian, which were regarded as the official languages of the Royal Court. These languages gradually were making their way in to the common people as well. The forgotten Armenian language and alphabet, which was probably destroyed during the establishment of

Christianity in Armenia, in early Fourth Century AD, was destroyed as a sign of "paganism" along with many other temples, monuments, scriptures, books (which most probably contained the early Armenian alphabet) and anything that reminded the early Christians of pagan past was destroyed and regarded as unholy.

St. Mesrop saw all of the potential danger that could quickly turn into a disastrous situation for the Armenian nation. He also predicted the downfall of the monarchy in the face of unsatisfied nobles, as the great father of Armenian History, Movses Khorenatsi (Moses of Khorene) wrote, "Seeing that the end of the monarchy was near, St. Mesrop took upon himself the task and the responsibility (of the revival of the alphabet). He saw in the creation (revival of the lost) of the common Armenian written language the uniting power and its stand against possible assimilation into the greater "melting pot" of Iran or even Byzantium.

The immense effort by Mesrop Mashtots in this aspect would turn out to be very decisive and just in its due time. Just a few decades later after the creation of the written alphabet, in 405-406 AD, in 428 AD, the Armenian Nakharars (Nobles) rebelled and overthrew the Arshakouni monarchy, with the help of the Persians. The Nakharars hoped that by overthrowing the central government and the monarchy they would gain more de-centralized power, in their own separate states. They were sadly mistaken. The Persians who promised the Nakharars wide array of power and self-control, instead installed marzpanans or marzipans (satrap governors) who would place most of Armenia (the Western parts of Greater Armenia along with Armenia Minor or Lesser Armenia were occupied by the Byzantines-from 387AD) under direct rule of the Persian Sasanid kings.

From 394 AD St. Mesrop, with the help and the blessing of Armenia's Catholicos, Sahak Partev, set out on the mission of spreading the word of God, Christ the Savior to a still great degree pagan or semi-pagan (the word pagan in Latin means village, villagers or peoples of

provinces as oppose to the people of the city who were the early Christians. The people of remote provinces and villages would retain and cling to their pagan ways as far as the late middle ages all over Europe) population of the remote provinces of Greater Armenia in Goghtan, Syunik and Artsakh.

At the beginning St. Mesrop desperately searched for the lost scriptures and scrolls in remote provinces of Armenia, he even visited the provinces of Armenian Mesopotamia and Syria, in the cities of Urha (Edessa) and Amid. There a priest by the name of (v) Oghyump (Olympus), told him that he had in his possession some of the ancient scrolls of Armenian. After carefully reviewing them (the phonetic structure) St. Mesrop realized that the phonetic structure and the Armenian language had greatly shifted and changed from the archaic form of the symbol letters of ancient Armenian. Although it is speculated and suggested by some linguists and historians that St. Mesrop did use some of the letter forms in his the creation of the new alphabet, yet it is highly unlikely that there was an extensive usage of the old structure forms as suggested by some of the classical Armenian historians such as St. Mesrop's biographer and student Koryun, the great Movses Khorenatsi, Ghazar Parpetsi (Lazar of Parp) and many others.

After the creation of the new 36 (later on in the XIII th century two more letters, O and F were added) letter alphabet, which he compiled during his travels throughout Armenia (St. Mesrop very well knew the existence of many dialects in Armenia and he understood the need of a universal creation of a standard Armenian that was compiled during his travels throughout most of Armenia in the East and the West). In 405AD Mesrop Mashtots returned to the capital city of Vagharshapat (St. Echmiatsin) before entering the city he was warmly welcomed by the king of Armenia Vramshapuh Arshakouni, Catholicos Sahak Partev and other eminent members of the Upper Class.

Soon after the establishing of educational institutions to further spread the use of the new alphabet, St. Mesrop embarked on his second Holy task of translating the Holy Bible from the Greek and Syrian into the new Armenian alphabet. With the help of his students and Catholicos Sahak Partev himself, St. Mesrop accomplished one of the best works and accomplishments of his life. St. Mesrop and the Catholicos knew that the translation must be perfect, for the translation was of the Holy Book and The Word of God itself and any incomplete or imperfect translations would be a sin before God. Many of the modern linguists consider the translation of the Bible into Armenian an almost perfect match and have coined it the "Queen of Translations".

After many years of devotion to his people and after creating the alphabet, which became the uniting force for all of the Armenians and forever became an eternal shield against foreign assimilation, St. Mesrop Mashtots made several journeys to the Caucasian Albania and created an alphabet for the peoples and tribes of Caucasian Albania. Unfortunately the alphabet died out along with the ancient and proud people of Albania, who after the Turkic-Mongol invasions were mostly massacred or forcibly converted to Islam and assimilated. He also created an alphabet for the people of Iberia (Georgia) which is in use to this day.

St. Mesrop, after having lived and gone through a truly Christian path of human dedication, compassion and devotion to all of the peoples of God, as he himself called and regarded the people of this common Earth, on February 17, 440 AD gave his life to Lord.

Koryun wrote, "*St. Mesrop found his right place in the Kingdom of God in the heaven, with Our Almighty Savior*". All of the people from all over Armenia, of every class, rank and social standing mourned his passing. St. Mesrop was ceremonially and honorably laid to rest in the town of Oshakan. His tomb, to this day remains a place of pilgrimage by the Armenian people from all over the world. The Armenian people come to pay their respect and to show homage to the great

Armenian scholar, who saved and brought back the Armenian alphabet, thus forever ending the treat of assimilation and securing eternity for his people. A devout Christian preacher and servant of God, who devoted most of his life to the spreading of Christianity throughout all of the peoples and tribes of the Caucasus. St. Mesrop Mashtots, along with brilliant personalities such as King of Kings, Tigran the Great, founder and establisher of the Armenian Empire, the great foe of Rome and Gregory the Illuminator, the establisher and founder of the First Christian Nation of Armenia is one of the most ingenious and eminent personalities and faces in not only Armenian, but has his rightful place in the global world history and human heritage.

Reference: Armenian Highland -- Armenian Enlightenment Chronicle. Web site: www.armenianhighland.com