Violence against Women in T’ovma Mecop’ec’i’s
History of Tamerlane and His Descendants (15th c.)

David Zakarian

1 Introduction

T’ovma Mecop’ec’i’s History of Tamerlane and His Descendants is one of the most important historical sources for the study of the Timurid invasions of the Caucasus and adjacent territories. Moreover, it is a valuable source for the socio-political history of Armenia and, to a lesser degree, of Georgia, also providing significant insights into the history of the Aqqouyunlu and Qaraqoyunlu Turkic tribes, which were formidable powers in the region in the period described in the work. The narrative begins with the first Timurid invasion of the Caucasus, which happened in 1386, and finishes in about 1440s with the devastation of Georgia by Jahanshah Qaraqoyunlu. Mecop’ec’i’s History is the only text of considerable length which was composed by a Christian cleric who was a contemporary of the events. It contains a large number of eyewitness accounts and anecdotal evidence and reveals the perspective of a Christian monk and his immediate circle on the conquest and control of Armenia, Georgia, and of neighbouring regions by various foreign powers.

There is abundant evidence suggesting that Timur and his descendants’ conquest and rule was characterised by excessive violence. One Armenian colophon, preserved in the Gospel manuscript at the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg (SABEV P 1010–465), copied and illuminated by a certain scribe Cerun in Ostan in 1395, insightfully describes the tactics that were used by the Timurids. In particular, he stresses that those who would submit themselves to

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1 It is a great pleasure and an honour to have had the opportunity to contribute to Professor Theo Maarten van Lint’s Festschrift both as an editor and an author. I feel specially privileged to be able to call him my teacher and my friend.

2 For the Armenian text, Levon S. Xač’ikyan’s 1999 critical edition of the text will be used (hereinafter TM, followed by the chapter and page number); all the translations of this and other texts into English are mine unless otherwise indicated.

3 See, for instance, Anooshahr 2012, 276–277. For a very different perspective on Timurid history, see Binbaş 2016.
the Timurids voluntarily would be spared, while those who dared to confront and resist them were always punished for their audacity:

... this was copied in the city of Ostan under the auspices of the Surb Astuacacin [Holy Mother of God] and the Saint Step’annos [Stephen] the Protomartyr, during the pontificate of tēr Davit’ in Alt’amar [Davit’ III, Armenian Catholicos of Alt’amar (1393–1433)] and the conquest of Lank T’amur [Timur], who appeared from the East this year and conquered the entire world. He would provide great rewards to whoever obeyed him, and whoever disobeyed him, he would trample upon them and subject their land to devastation.4

The Timurids were apparently inspired by the example of Chinggis Khan’s “use of selective and theatrical violence against cities that rebelled”,5 and Mecop’ec’i’s History is replete with such descriptions of violence inflicted on the Armenians and the representatives of different ethnic groups that inhabited the Armenian plateau at the time. Religion appeared to play a minor role in the Timurid strategy of conquest,6 for their ultimate goal was to force the enemy into submission in order to extract the payment of tribute and to exploit all the seized resources, both human and material. Mass murders, enslavement, and forced migration of large groups of people were instrumental in the depopulation of Armenia and Georgia7 and the emergence of new diasporic centres, especially in eastern Europe, in this period.8

There are several passages in T’ovma Mecop’ec’i’s History which contain descriptions of violence perpetrated against women. The examination of these episodes will, on the one hand, reveal certain recurring patterns of violent treatment of Armenian women living under foreign rule; on the other hand, it will allow us to observe how these calamities were interpreted by the Armenian cleric and were incorporated in his narrative to fit the main aims of his work.

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4 Yuzbashian 2005, 248: … գրեցաւսաիղականութիւնյունից ինչ զավոլուքն էին Սուրբ Աստուա֊ծածնինեւ Սերբոյն Ստեփաննոսի Իհայրապետութիւննեւ Թիռմին Թամուրի զատերը զամարակարգիչ կորպուսնեւ ինչ զավոլուքից կորպուսնեւ ինչ կատարենում կերպում ծավառիքը ինչ կատարելու համար և ով որ ոչ զավոլուքից ու զավոլուքից ինչը միս որ ու նրանցից լինիքներ պարզագիրկից նամ տրամագայն զավոլուքից ինչը հասվածում էին նրանցից ինչը հասվածում էին.
5 Manz 2020, 90.
6 For a brief discussion of Timurid religious policies, see Anooshahr 2012, 275–278.
7 See, for instance, Mesxia 1954, 358–360 and TM, vii, 18–19.
8 See, for instance, Ayvazyan et al. 2003, 277 (Poland), 440 (Romania), 587–588 (Ukraine).
2 Mecop’ec’i’s History and Its Objectives

In the introductory paragraph of his History Mecop’ec’i unequivocally states that his intention is to educate the present and future generations by providing an accurate account of the events that are happening at present, that happened in the past, and that featured “the wicked, faithless kings of the East who brought destruction to the Armenian people in recent times”; Mecop’ec’i believes that it is essential that the vardapets (the doctors of the church) “give an account of the past, speak about the present, comprehend the future, and issue warnings.”

Mecop’ec’i’s narrative consists of eyewitness accounts and stories that circulated in his milieu, which are presented in a way that informs his readers about the important events that shaped his time. He also provides interpretations of these events and endeavours to teach lessons, which will instil Christian values into his audience. One of his primary goals is to defend the Armenian Church against the proselytising activities of the Catholic missionaries and the Catholic Armenian Fratres Unitores, who had been active in the area since 1330.

Another issue Mecop’ec’i wishes to address is the divisions within the Armenian Church.

Being a learned cleric himself, it is not surprising that Mecop’ec’i’s narrative is imbued with numerous allusions to biblical passages. The apocalyptic element is especially ubiquitous, for all the calamities are presented as a divine punishment which befell the Armenian people as a consequence of a multi-
tude of sins and an unrighteous lifestyle. In particular, the narrated events are interpreted with the help of images and vocabulary borrowed from the books of Revelation, Daniel, and others. The adversary is virtually always Satan, the Antichrist (Նեռն), which, as a rule, performs its evil deeds through the leaders of the conquering army.

Mecop’ec’i also creates role models for emulation. He includes in his narrative several accounts of the martyrdom of Christians, particularly focusing on the deaths of the Armenian clergy at the hands of local rulers. These stories eulogise the sacrifice of pious monks and priests; they intend to teach a moral lesson to the present and future generations and serve as a reproach to the indolent and deceitful clergy who are repeatedly chastised in his narrative.

It is within this context that we need to look into Mecop’ec’i’s description of violence towards women, for he deploys the same approach and applies the same criteria to the interpretation of these episodes.

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12 For instance, TM, LIII, 162–163: ուղեցեր, մանուրացված երիտասարդ ու հարցային իրավիճակ, ու կարողանալու երիտասարդ ու Կարմիր աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողանալու աշխատակցություն, ու կարողա

13 In addition to references to Judgement Day and the Lamb of God discussed below, see also TM, LIII with frequent allusions to various books from the Old Testament and TM, LXI, 216 mentioning Gog and Magog (Ezek 38 and 39; Rev 20).

14 In addition to references to Judgement Day and the Lamb of God discussed below, see also TM, XXIX, 104: անսային աշխատակցություն [Թամուր] (“the precursor of Antichrist, the merciless tyrant [Timur]”); TM, XXXII, 109: և աշխատակցություն [Թամուր] (“the evil dragon and the precursor of Antichrist Timur”); TM, LXIII, 142: անսային աշխատակցություն [Թամուր] (“by the evil tyrant and the foul and iniquitous precursor of Antichrist [Iskandar Qaraqoy- unlu]”).

15 See TM, XXII, 60–65 (martyrdom of Grigor Xlat’ec’i, Yakob Ovsanc’i, Lazar Bališec’i, and T’ovma from the monastery of Putlik); LXI, 189–191 (martyrdom of a landowner, Zak’aria, and Muratšah of Arckē).
3 Brief Mentions of Violence against Women

As mentioned above, Mecop'ec'i's History is full of descriptions of violence perpetrated by the conquering powers, some of which are quite graphic. For instance, there is a gruesome image of someone being put into a copper cauldron and cooked alive by the founder of the Timurid Empire Timur the Lame: in this manner, he punished a general who betrayed him. Likewise, there is a mention of the massacres of inhabitants of Damascus and Baghdad in 1401, when Timur ordered that in each city his army decapitate 700,000 people and build fortresses of flesh by piling the severed heads one on top of the other. The numbers are apparently exaggerated for the sake of effect, but the phenomenon itself seems to match the general practice of the Timurids. In many cases, we also encounter a different pattern of action, when men are slaughtered and women and children are driven into slavery. The same pattern of conquest, with certain differences, was also deployed by the Turkic tribes that often challenged the hegemony of the Timurids in the region.

There are several brief mentions of acts of violence inflicted on women in Mecop'ec'i's History. These accounts are incorporated in the general picture of


17 *TM*, XXVIII, 100–102: էւ զԷԴԻԼը ի պղնձի Թամուրը երեխա՝ «այսօր (700,000) մարդկայնք ան եւ սուրիվերայեդեալ

18 For the gendered treatment of the enemy in different times and geographical contexts, see, *inter alia*, Valentina Calzolari's contribution to this volume with regards to the Armenian Genocide, as well as Zakarian 2021, pp. 194–207, in connection with the 4th- and 5th-century confrontations between the Armenians and Sasanian Iran.
devastation and affliction that the Armenians endured and, as in other cases, are presented through imagery borrowed from apocalyptic literature. There is no particular emphasis on the gender of the victims of the violence but rather on the excessiveness and gratuitousness of violence itself. The perpetrators of violence are either the Timurids or the local Muslim overlords, primarily the Kurds and the Qaraqoyunlu Turkmen tribesmen.

The main motive that emerges from these accounts is that of women and their children being led into captivity while men are slaughtered. This pattern is especially common when describing the invasions of the Timurids. The first such example is found in Chapter xvi, when Mecop’ec’i relates the conquest of the fortress of Van during Timur’s first incursion into Armenia in 1386–1387. The Kurdish emir of Van, Ezdin, and the city’s Christian population refuse to surrender the fortress to Timur, but after a siege of forty days, Van passes into the hands of the Timurids, who carry out an appalling massacre of the local population. For T’ovma this was a tragedy bearing a resemblance to doomsday:

Alas, this disaster and the bitter affliction! Here could the fear and the dread of the Day of Judgement, the weeping and lamenting of the entire fortress be witnessed, for an order had come from the evil tyrant [Timur] that women and children be taken into captivity and that [male] believers and unbelievers be pushed down from the fortress. They immediately carried out his evil command and began to push everyone down. So much did the pile of corpses rise that those hurled last did not die.19

Mecop’ec’i’s account confirms scribe Cerun’s aforementioned words that the Timurids would cruelly crush any sort of resistance. Women and children are spared, but they are enslaved and driven into foreign lands.

With a similar evocation of Judgement Day, Mecop’ec’i describes the devastating military campaign in the province of Arčēš of another Timurid, whom T’ovma calls Jōngay, claiming that he was Šahrux’s son, that is Timur’s grandson. By order of this Jōngay the landlords of the area are murdered, many a man is converted to Islam, while women and children are driven into captivity.20

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19 *TM*, xvi, 38–39: Աւա՜ղ աղէտիս եւ դառն կսկծիս։ Աստ է տեսանել զահ եւ զերկիւղ աւուրնդատաստանին ։ Զլալուﬓեւզողբուﬓաﬔնայնբերդին ։ Զիհրամանեղեւի չար բռնաւորէն զկանայս եւ զմանկունս առնուլ ի գերութիւն ։ Եւ զհաւատացեալ եւ զանհաւատիբերդէնիվայրընկենուլ։ Իսկնոքաառժամայնկատարեցին զչարհրա֊մանսնորա ։ սկսանառհասարակզաﬔնեսեանիվայրընկենուլ։ Եւայնքանբարձրա֊ցաւﬔռեալն ։ ﬕնչզիվերջինանկեալքնոչﬔռանէին  …

20 *TM*, xlix, 153–154: Եւ չար զաւակն եւ որդին կորսեան [որդի Շահռուհին Ջօնգայ] ։ Աստ է տեսանել զահ եւ զերկիւղ աւուրնդատաստանին ։ Զլալուﬓեւզողբուﬓաﬔնայնբերդին ։ Զիհրամանեղեւի չար բռնաւորէն զկանայս եւ զմանկունս առնուլ ի գերութիւն ։ Եւ զհաւատացեալ եւ զանհաւատիբերդէնիվայրընկենուլ։ Իսկնոքաառժամայնկատարեցին զչարհրա֊մանսնորա ։ սկսանառհասարակզաﬔնեսեանիվայրընկենուլ։ Եւայնքանբարձրա֊ցաւﬔռեալն ։ ﬕնչզիվերջինանկեալքնոչﬔռանէին  …
In 1394 the same fate awaited the women of Amit’ (Amid / Diyarbakir). Timur conquered the city: “with ineffable and unutterable sufferings he killed the grandees with sword and fire,” and the lay population of the city, men and women alike, were enslaved and sent to various parts of Timur’s vast dominions.\(^{21}\)

According to Mecop’ec’i, the Qaraqoyunlu conquerors’ treatment of captive women was not dissimilar. In 1422 Iskandar Qaraqoyunlu punished the resisting, mainly Christian, inhabitants of the fortress of Ałuank’ near Xlat’ (Ahlat) by having many of them killed, while women and children were enslaved. Some of them were later ransomed, apparently by their next of kin, and managed to return to their homes.\(^{22}\) The practice of selling women is also mentioned in

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\(^{21}\) TM, XXIII, 65–66: `Դարձեալ ի ՊԽԳ. թվականին, խորասանի թագաւոր` Խորա֊ սանայեւեկնԲաղդատայճանապարհաւն, աւերեացզԲաղդատեւզաﬔնայնԱսո֊ րեստանեայսեւզաﬔնայնՄիջագետսԴիարբակին։ԵկնյԱﬕթքաղաք, էառզնա և զﬔծաﬔծքնսարան ընդունել զմանսթլպատէինեւիհաւատոցնբեկէին

\(^{22}\) TM, XI, 138–139: ԲահաՌուսիսար, ուղի Բրահմուսի կողմից թագաւոր ԲահաՌուսիսարի. ՊԿ,gio, բրահմուսյան եղբայր զարգացած, երբզներ համարի և տարիներ զարգացած. առաջնորդ ներկայություն կեղծընել եւ փոխանցած համարի և կեղծընել համարի. Ավելի հետո զարգացում ինչպես երբեմն. ավելի հետո զարգացում ինչպես երբեմն.

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Chapter LXII, when the local Muslim overlord of Amuk fortress Pʻir-Ali sells Christian women at the price of 200–300 \( \text{tʻ ankay} \) (silver coins).\(^{23}\) To understand the actual value of this amount of money, it should be mentioned that in 1449 a \textit{Hymnal} was purchased by an Armenian called Yohanēs at the price of 3 \( \text{tʻ ankay} \);\(^{24}\) yet, Grigor Narekacʻiʼs \textit{Book of Lamentation} was purchased at the price of 30 \( \text{tʻ ankay} \) in 1392,\(^ {25}\) while 3000 \( \text{tʻ ankay} \) was the sum of money required to restore the dome of the church that had collapsed.\(^ {26}\)

Besides being commodified and sold into slavery, women were also subjected to physical violence perpetrated by the conquering powers. Mecopʻecʻi relates an episode when Timur and his army enter the city of Sebastia (Sivas) by reassuring its people with the words “Fear not, for whoever slays you by the sword will have their swords in their hearts.” Yet, when the city gates opened and people came out towards them “with joy and exultation as if released from prison”, Timur immediately sent an evil command to his troops to take captive the poor, to torture the rich and to seize their hidden treasures, to tie the women to the tails of horses and let the horses run. And he gave an order to assemble the countless and numberless sons and daughters in the middle of the plain and like sheaves of grain to thrash them without mercy.\(^ {27}\)

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\(^{23}\) This was the Armenian variant of the Mongol \textit{tanga} (see Darley-Doran 2012 and Davidovich 2001, 130–132).

\(^{24}\) Sanjian 1969, 215: “I [bought this manuscript] for four \textit{Tʻamuri tʻ ankay} from the Čʼalatʼ [Chaghatay], in memory of myself and of my parents, [and] for the enjoyment of my children ...”

\(^{25}\) Sanjian 1969, 110: “and I [Simeon] paid 30 \textit{tʻ ankay} and secured it [Narekacʻiʼs \textit{Book of Lamentation}].”

\(^{26}\) Sanjian 1969, 214: “And he, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, obtained a permit from the baron, offered 3000 \textit{tʻ ankay} to the barons and chieftains, and restored [the dome] ...

\(^{27}\) \textit{TM}, XXIX: “Մի՛երկնչիք, զիովզձեզսրովսպանանէ՝սուրնոցաիսիրտսնոցամտանէ «

Եւ նոցա

բացեալ զքաղաքն

իբրազատեամբ իբրեւժամայնչարհրամանեհասիվերայզօրացիւրոց

իբրազատեամբ գիզաղքատսնգերիառցեն

առցեն,

եւկանայսնյագիսձիոց

առցեն,

կասելից

կասելզնոսաանողորմութեամբ.

Դուցեսենմիացեն

այնպես, որ ծեցվի

երկհազար

սպանանորմութեամբ.”
In this episode, Mecopʽecʽi foregrounds the violence perpetrated against women and the youth in order to emphasise the scale of the destruction and the extent of the barbarity of the Timurid army.\textsuperscript{28}

Finally, Mecopʽecʽi describes a distressful event which he personally witnessed on the island of Lim on Lake Van. Another lord of the fortress of Amuk, Hajibêk, raided the island and extorted large sums of money from the Christian Armenians who had found refuge there. Not only did they rob the refugees of their possessions but they also subjected women and children to brutal physical abuse.\textsuperscript{29}

4 The Woman and Her Son

The longest and most important reference to violence in which a woman is the protagonist is found in Chapter xii of the History, which is fully dedicated to the story of the martyrdom of an unnamed mother and her son. Mecopʽecʽi readily deploys biblical imagery and interprets their tragic demise as a sacrifice. The woman’s deed is extolled, and she is presented as an exemplary role model for emulation.

According to Mecopʽecʽi, the unnamed woman kills her beloved son and commits suicide when she realises that they will be captured by the raiding troops of Timur. Mecopʽecʽi describes her as “a God-fearing and faithful woman from the province of Muš,” a “piteful, chastity-loving, and God-fearing” mother,\textsuperscript{30} and her son as “precious and attractive ... with the face of an angel,

\textsuperscript{28} The image of someone being tied to the tail of a horse and dragged until they die is not new in Armenian literature, for already in the fifth-century anonymous Epic Histories (Buzandaran Patmutʽiwnk’) (hereinafter \textit{bp}) the Armenian bishop of Aluank’ (Caucasian Albania) Grigoris is said to have been killed in the same manner by the pagan people of the north: եւկալանձիﬕաﬔհի, կապեցինկախեցինզմանուկնԳրիգորիսզագւոյ ձիոյն, և արձակեցին ընդ ծովեզեր դաշտին հիւսիսական ծովուն ﬔծի, արտաքոյ իւրեանց բանակին ի դաշտին Վատնեայ (\textit{bp}, iii:vi).

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{TM}, XLVII, p. 149: եւյահէնոցակամէաք, զիծոﬖընկղմէրզﬔզտեսանելովեւլսելով զաղէտեւզճիչկանանցեւորդոցնոցա, վասնզիհարկանէինզաﬔնեսեանեւբրա֊ծեծառնէին (p. 29); ողորﬔլի մայրն՝ սրբասէրնեւերկիւղած (p. 30).

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{TM}, XII: կին  երկիւղած և հավատարիմ ի Մուշ գաւառէ (p. 29); նորմութ ունիր առանցում և կռիչինամ (p. 30).
seven or eight years old.” The author interprets the woman’s killing of her beloved son by using the biblical reference to the Lamb of God and comparing this act to God’s sacrifice of his son, Jesus Christ. Mecop’ec’i also explains that by this deed the woman is “returning her debt to the Heavenly Father, who sacrificed his Divine Son, the impeccable Lamb, killing him upon the four-winged cross which was erected on the holy Golgotha.” The woman then kills herself by jumping off the cliff while at the same time “glorifying the name of Jesus Christ”. Mecop’ec’i explains this act by making use of other allusions to biblical imagery. He asserts that for the woman this sacrifice of her son and of her own life was clearly motivated by her religious beliefs because in this way they

would not be deprived of Christ and join Satan, but ... would join God and become a more pleasing sacrifice than that of the father of the faith, the great Abraham, and that of the mother Šamunea, who offered her seven sons as a sacrifice to God, exhorting them to die voluntarily for our God Messiah.

It is evident that the allusions here are to Abraham’s attempted sacrifice of his beloved son Isaac, and to the seventh chapter of the second book of the Maccabees, in which a mother and her seven children are martyred during Antiochus’s persecution.

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31 TM, XII, pp. 29–30: որքեր եմ դու պատասխանում դու իմանալի, քան դապում իրենքայն իրենք լիուս նախորդ հրետանություններ իրենք պատասխանում, որունս պատասխանում վերջին հրետանություն հրետանություն.
32 This imagery of the Lamb of God is found in Rev 5:1–14; Exod 12:1–28; John 1:29, and 1 Cor 5:7.
33 This story is further discussed and interpreted in 4 Maccabees, especially in chapters 8 to 12. For the use of the books of Maccabees in early Armenian historiography to provide an
Mecop’ecki interprets the sacrifice of the Armenian mother as “more pleasing” to God than Abraham’s and the Jewish woman’s sacrifices apparently because the Armenian woman kills her son with her own hand while in Abraham’s case Isaac does not die, and the seven sons of the Jewish woman are killed by their torturers.

In addition to this intertextual interpretation of the death of the mother and her son, Mecop’ecki also creates a link between the Old Testament tradition and Armenian Christianity. Gregory the Illuminator, the first patriarch of Armenia, who converted the Armenian King Trdat III (IV), his household, and the nobles to Christianity at the beginning of the 4th century, thus initiating the conversion of Armenia, is described as “from amongst the corporeal grandsons of the father of faith,” that is of Abraham.\textsuperscript{38}

To dispel any doubts over the veracity of his account Mecop’ecki assures his audience that “the hermit father Dawit’ the monk, the spiritual brother of the blessed hermit Bart’ułimēos of [the congregation of] the Holy Apostles in Łazar monastery” was an eyewitness to this wondrous manifestation of true faith.\textsuperscript{39}

The inclusion of this story early in the History enables Mecop’ecki to provide a representative example of a great Christian virtue that he will reinforce in the subsequent narrative. In this episode, he takes a clear stance against conversion and the betrayal of the patrimonial religion by using the privilege of the omniscient narrator to ascribe these thoughts to the woman who made the ultimate sacrifice for her faith.
In conclusion, T’ovma Mecop’ec’i’s representation and interpretation of violent acts perpetrated against women are done in a way that is conducive to achieving the main goals of his work. In the episode with the woman and her son, T’ovma eulogises their sacrifice made for the preservation of their faith, thus setting an inspiring example of a true Christian virtue. All the other mentions of violence towards women emphasise the enormity of the catastrophe that befell Christians as a result of their and their religious leaders' iniquitous lifestyle. These stories aim at reminding his audience about the forthcoming time of doom and warning them about the consequences of their unrighteous way of living.

The vivid imagery in these stories draws on the tradition of apocalyptic writings. While men are regularly murdered on a whim, women and children are turned into a commodity: displaced from their homes they become slaves in foreign lands and are exploited in various ways. For Mecop’ec’i all these events that led to the destruction of the land and its people are seen as a punishment for the multiple sins committed by every member of society, an idea which he reiterates several times in his narrative.

This pattern of conquest and its formulaic interpretation by the mediaeval Armenian cleric was not unique in any way, but the discussion of these passages allows us to understand the major cause of the depopulation and Islamisation of several regions of historical Armenia, as well as the burgeoning of many Armenian diasporic centres in Eastern Europe in the late 14th and first half of the 15th centuries. The devastating effect of the Timurid invasions, the harsh policies of the local Muslim overlords, and the constant fighting of different factions over the lands inhabited by Armenians brought about their mass exodus, which resulted in a great demographic catastrophe from which the Armenians were to recover in the coming centuries.

Bibliography


e dei suoi successori di T’ovma Mecop’ec’i’, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 83(2), 459–479.


