

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF ARMENIA
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NIKOLAY HOVHANNISYAN

**KING OF KINGS TIGRAN THE GREAT
AND THE ARMENIAN EMPIRE
AS EVALUATED BY MODERN
ARAB HISTORIOGRAPHY**



ZANGAK
PUBLISHING HOUSE

YEREVAN 2012

**NIKOLAY HOVAHANNISYAN. KING OF KINGS TIGRAN THE GREAT AND
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HISTORIOGRAPHY, YEREVAN, 2012, 83 PAGES.**

Book review¹

Eduard L. Danielyan, Sc.D. (*in History*)

The book provides detailed analysis of the evaluation of the history of the Armenian Empire of the period of King of Kings Tigran II by modern Arab historiography.

The period of the Tigran's Empire is specified by the civilizing role of the Armenian statehood which included the lands and peoples beyond the borders of the Kingdom of Great Armenia. According to the author of the book, the period of Tigran the Great's reign was the climax of the Armenian statehood, armed forces, town building, architecture and culture, when appeared "the first in history Armenian Empire on the world political map. The historical role of Tigran the Great is not confined within the Armenian borders, but goes over and beyond, embracing an entire geopolitical region" (p. 5).

Until the present this period of the Armenian history was mainly researched in Armenian and European historiographies. N.Hovahannisyanyan's book is the first research work presenting modern studies of the Arab historiography on the state and political activities of the Armenian King of Kings Tigran II the Great. The author explains such an interest to the Armenian Empire by worldwide historical significance of Tigran the Great's phenomenon.

Over fifty year long the author's research work in the field of Arab studies revealed the fact of reflection of "all the critical periods and landmarks in Armenian history in Arab historiography. In this respect the author especially paid attention to the four-volume monograph "History of Arab Countries" published in the beginning of the 21st century, which brought him to a conclusion that, generally there are three inner motivations in Arab historiography to study Armenian history.

The author presents the following motivations of Arab historiography by means of complete analysis of Arab researches (Egyptian, Syrian and Lebanese):

(1) neighbourhood in the region of Front Asia, which remains a hub of world politics. "The history of all the nations in the region was being "cooked" in this "pot", some of these peoples, like Sumerians, Assyrians, Akkadians, Hittites, Hurrians and others, irrevocably vanished from the historical arena, while others keep on their historical march. Armenians and Arabs belong among the latter".

¹ "Լրաբեր" հասարակական գիտությունների, 2013, N 1, էջ 350-353:

(2) Several facts are mentioned to show that during different periods of history Armenians and Arabs appeared to be within one state: (a) Tigran II the Great's Armenian Empire, which included also some "Arab countries"; (b) the kingdom of Abgar V of Edessa, whom the Father of Armenian historiography Movses Khorenatsi called Armenian King; (c) during the Arab Chaliphate and later; (d) since the 16th century, when "all the Arab countries" and in 17th century "Western Armenia were conquered by the Ottoman hordes, and remained under the Ottoman despotic rule up until 1918" (p.7-8).

(3) The serious interest of Arab historiography towards Armenia was demonstrated since the 9th century, and particularly when Armenia restored its independence and statehood and "Baghdad recognized the independence of Bagratid Armenia". Thus medieval Arab historians and geographers "devoted numbers of pages in their works and travel notes to Armenia and Armenians, their history, geography, economy, towns and traditions... Such interest of Arab historiography continued in the subsequent centuries too". The vivid interest of Arab researchers in Armenian history "led to the formation of Arab Armenology". The author underlines that the Arab authors examining Armenian history as in whole as well its individual historical periods and episodes, at the same time contributed "to the study of the Armenian genocide of 1915" (p. 9-10).

N.Hovhannisyan pays attention to the fact that modern Arab historians, directed by the methodology of periodization, studying almost all aspects of Tigran the Great's activity and especially important issues connected with his foreign policy, evaluated the Armenian Empire's significance on the background of the whole Armenian history. The author analyses voluminous work "History of the Armenian people from the beginning to the Present Days" by the Arab historian Fouad Hassan Hafiz. The first period of Armenian history is titled "Antique Armenia before King Tigran the Great's Epoch". It is important that the Arab historian observes the roots of the Armenian history as in Movses Khorenatsi's story about Hayk, as well as the Armenian statehood in the depth of millennia considering the Tigran the Great's period as its climax. Thus, he mentions the periods of history of Nairi and Urartu as ancient parts of the history of the Armenian people. The Arab author pays attention to the Behistun inscription as a source of the 6th century Armenian history. Then he speaks about restoration of Armenia's independence in 189 BC. connected with "establishment of the Artaxiad dynasty and reign of Artaxes I and the succeeding Armenian kings up to Tigran II" (p. 11-12). The second period of Armenia's antique history – "Armenia under King Tigran the Great (95-55 BC)" - Arab historian characterized as "years of colossal importance, even fundamental in the centuries-old history of Armenia; in his opinion, Tigran II's reign should be separated and defined as a distinct era". As notes N.Hovhannisyan, the Arab scholar relating two centuries of history of antique Armenia to the name and activity of Armenian King Tigran the Great, rightly presents him as "the central figure of Artaxid Armenia and an unparalleled statesman" (p. 12).

The author analyses also the voluminous work “Armenians throughout History” by another renowned Arab historian Marwan al-Mudawar who, examining the antique Armenian history, defined the period of the Artaxid dynasty as following the Yervandids’ kingdom. He divided Tigran II’s reign into two periods: “Era of Unification and Prosperity of the Armenia Kingdom”, which was followed by the era of the Armenian Empire.

The author considering the conceptual approaches of the Arab researchers from the point of view of periodization of the antique period of Armenian history, concludes that it “fully confirms the appropriateness of going it within the context of King of Kings Tigran the Great’s kingdom” (p. 14).

N.Hovhannisyan, studying the problem of Arab concept of the ways and historical necessity of transformation of the Armenian kingdom into Armenian Empire, notes that the Arab authors, basing on political and military facts and elucidating the problems at a conceptual level, “give a vast space in their research work to this cluster of issues, which have pivotal significance for them” (p. 15). It is significant that Marwan al-Mudawar considers expansion of the kingdom of Tigran II, in the case of Atropatene and Haqari, in the context of liberation from “the Persian (here must be “Parthian”) domination”. The Arab authors consider Tigran the Great’s conquest of “Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan and Mesopotamia as a major landmark on the way of transforming a kingdom into an empire” (p. 16). The Arab authors analyzing the problem of formation of the Armenian Empire in the context of international relations (at the time, when the Roman state “was too busy with other problems to devote attention and concentrate on the eastern question”), at the same time, were not impartial in their opinion about the conquests of Tigran II. N.Hovhannisyan pays attention to the moral side of the problem, concerning some “Arab lands”, noting that “The Arab authors took a unique position in evaluating the Arab countries’ incorporation into the Armenian Empire”. According to the author, the Arab authors explained such an integration “as a measure of self-defence necessary to ensure Armenia’s safety”. So, “there is no disapproving approach or criticism. They did not politicize the issue” (p. 17-18).

The Arab historians present the territory of the Armenian Empire in its entity. According to Marwan al-Mudawar, Tigran the Great’s “Empire stretched from the Caspian Sea in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west, from the Caucasus in the north to Palestine and Cilicia in the south and the south-west”. N.Hovhannisyan notes, that the modern Arab historians analyzing the key problems of Tigran the Great’s foreign and military policy, the mechanisms of Armenia’s growth, transformation into a powerful Empire and an influential military-political factor, elucidated some basic aspects of the international policy and the reforms, implemented during his reign in Armenia.

The modern Arab authors pay special attention to the title of Tigran the Great in the context of transformation of the Armenian Kingdom into the Armenian Empire. N.Hovhannisyan analyzing the Arab historians’ approaches to the title of Tigran II the

Great – *King of Kings* and *Great King of Asia*, notes that their works “corroborate the undeniable fact that Tigran the Great was one of the greatest international actors in the world arena of the time” (p. 23).

The Arab authors highly evaluating the period of the rise of the Armenia Empire, at the same time objectively approach to the period of its decline, writing that as a result of the fall of the Armenian Empire, Armenia returned into its natural borders (p. 25).

N.Hovhannisyan’s book devoted to the evaluation of King of Kings Tigran the Great and the Armenian Empire by modern Arab historiography is an important contribution to the Armenology and Oriental studies, and will be helpful for widening the field of the studies of the history of the Armenian statehood and, particularly, of the period of King of Kings Tigran the Great.