

# Sebeos

## Translated from Classical Armenian by Robert Bedrosian

### *History, Chapters 29-30* *Source [1](#)*

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#### Chapter 29.

*The return of the Cross to holy Jerusalem. The determination of the boundary between the two kings. Forced by Mzhezh Gnuni, Ezzr accepts the Council of Chalcedon. The plot of Mezhezh with Rhatovm against aspet Varaztirots' and the latter's flight. The king swears to him and he goes to the palace and is exalted. The evil plot of At'alarikos with the princes against his father. The exposure of the plot and the plotters' deaths. The exile of Varaztirots'. The bravery of Dawit' Saharhuni, who becomes Curopalate. The deeds of T'eodoros, lord of Rshtunik'.*

Now when the holy Cross of the Lord had fallen to the venerable, pious, and blessed king Heraclius, he enthusiastically [116] and joyfully assembled his troops. Then, taking all the royal attendants and revering the blessed, miraculous and divine discovery, they took [the Cross] back to the holy city of Jerusalem. They also took there all the vessels of the church which had been saved from the enemy, in the city of Byzantium. And there was no small amount of joy on the day they entered Jerusalem, with the sound of sobbing and moaning, an outpouring of tears from their excited and moved hearts, and there was a tightening feeling in the king, the princes, all the troops and the inhabitants in the city. No one was capable of singing the sacred songs due to the tremendous and deep emotion [felt by the] king and the entire multitude. [Heraclius] took [the Cross] and reestablished it in its place; he put each of the vessels of the churches back in its place; and he gave wealth and incense to all the churches and inhabitants of the city [g100].

[Heraclius] himself then took to the road heading directly for Syrian Mesopotamia in order to personally see to establishing the cities of the borders. The boundary which was confirmed was the same as had been established under Xosrov and Maurice. The Cross of the Lord remained in the [117] heaven-built city until the taking of Jerusalem by the sons of Ishmael At that time it was taken in exile to the capital city [of Constantinople] with all the church vessels.

A general of the Byzantines named Mzhezh Gnuni, from the country of Armenia, arrived next and personally took control of all the country of the borders. He told

the *kat'oghikos* Eyr to come to him in the country of the borders and to take the sacrament of communion with the emperor. "Otherwise," he said, "we shall get ourselves another *kat'oghikos* and you will hold sway in the Iranian sector." The *kat'oghikos*, since he was unable to leave the country of his jurisdiction, requested a statement of faith from the emperor. A volume written by the emperor himself was quickly sent to him in which [the emperor] cursed Nestorius and all heretics, but he did not curse the Council of Chalcedon. The *kat'oghikos* went to the country of Asorestan, saw the emperor and communed after his fashion. As a gift, [Eyr] requested from the emperor the salt [mine] at Koghb, which he received. Then he returned to his home in great pomp. Subsequently, he resided with the Byzantine army, doing as the general wished. He arranged the orders of soldiers and the distribution of granaries for the entire country.

[118] Now *aspēt* Varaztirots' (son of the great Xosrov Shum, styled Jawitean Xosrov [Forever Loyal to Xosrov] by the kings) completely built up the entire land of Armenia. But he did not submit to the great prince named Xorhox Ormazd of the Atrpatakan land, nor to his son and successor, Rostom, who [also] was a prince in the Atrpatakan area. There was great agitation between the two. Then the Byzantine general Mzhezsh started to slander the *aspēt* to prince Rostom, who was in Atrpatakan: "Let him not stay in Armenia, otherwise, there will be great agitation between the two kings." And he sent [g101] his brother Garik'pet to go and winter in Dwin; and then they would arrest the *aspēt* and depart. However, because all the Iranian troops liked the *aspēt*, one of the great princes there informed him, saying: "Look out for yourself, for they are going to arrest you, tomorrow." So *aspēt* took his wife and children and fled at night to Taron. When he got there, he assembled his troops. [Varaztirots'] requested an oath from emperor Heraclius, that he not be alienated from his own land. Accepting [the emperor's] oath as genuine, he went to him in Asorestan. Then emperor Heraclius swore to him: "Stay with me for a brief time, then I shall dispatch you to your country with great honor." And [Heraclius] exalted him more than all the patricians in his realm. When [Varaztirots'] went to the palace, he gave him a royal mansion, a silver throne, [119] and an extremely large amount of treasure. Furthermore, [Varaztirots'] son, Smbat, was the beloved chamberlain of Heraclius.

Here is [an account of] the evil accomplished by the son of emperor Heraclius named At'alarik [Heracleonas, 638-41]. This concerns the great crime which deeply wounded his father's heart, broke a marvellous individual, made the beauty of his face fade and became the cause of the ruin of himself and of many others. Now [At'alarik], T'eodoros called Magistros, brother of emperor Heraclius' son, many of the grandees of the city, and Vahan Xorhxoruni all had united to kill Heraclius, and to enthrone his son, At'alarik. Included in the deliberation similarly was Varaztirots', son of Smbat Xosrov Shum; however, he did not consent to the slaying of the emperor and his sons. He said, rather: "You say that they are the *locum tenens* of God, therefore there is no need to do that [killing], nor do I unite with you in that plan." Now a certain curator who had been included in the deliberations, fully related the plot to the emperor. When the emperor had

confirmed [the truth of the matter] [g102], he ordered that his son, nephew, and all those with them, be arrested in the morning. The noses and right hands of all of them were cut off. [Heraclius] sent a message [120] to the *aspet*, saying: "Since you did as you did with regard to me and did not want to dip your hand into my blood and the blood of my sons, I shall not reach for you and your sons. Go where I order you, and I will have mercy upon you." Although the sides protested, saying: "Kill him," nonetheless, [Heraclius] did not want to listen to them. Rather he ordered [Varaztirots'], his wife and children taken to the island and city of tribulation named Ak'sor ["Exile"].

Also included in the plot was Dawit' Saharhuni, who was sent to the palace bound, by Mzhezh Gnuni. Bursting his bonds enroute to the palace, [Dawit'] killed the men who were taking him. He then returned and united the troops of Armenia with himself, suddenly attacking and killing Mzhezh Gnuni the Byzantine general, and Varaz Gnel Gnuni. [Dawit'] himself took over the military command with the support and affection of all the troops.

Now at the request of the princes, the emperor made him prince of all the lands and bestowed on him the dignity of curopalate. [Heraclius] confirmed [Dawit'] in his service. He held authority for three years in the greatest luxury. Then, however, he was dishonored by the troops and persecuted; and all the *azats*, being disunited, were the undoing of the country of Armenia.

[121] It was, however, only the pious prince T'eodoros of the Rshtunik' district who continually was organizing the troops of his area, and was on the alert day and night, as his deep wisdom dictated. He wrought not a few slaughters of the enemy, and he built up the island of Aght'amar,[acts which] enlivened many districts [g103].

### **Chapter 30.**

*The elimination of the Sasanian [dynasty] which held sway for 542 years. The birth of Muhammad and the entrance of the sons of Ishmael into the land of Armenia. The death of Heraclius and the reign of Constantine.*

I shall discuss the [line of the] son of Abraham: not the one [born] of a free [woman], but the one born of a serving maid, about whom the quotation from Scripture was fully and truthfully fulfilled, "His hands will be at everyone, and everyone will have their hands at him [Genesis 16. 11,12]."

Twelve peoples [representing] all the tribes of the Jews assembled at the city of Edessa. When they saw that the Iranian troops had departed and left the city in peace, they [122] closed the gates and fortified themselves. They refused entry to troops of the Roman lordship. Thus Heraclius, emperor of the Byzantines, gave the order to besiege it. When

[the Jews] realized that they could not militarily resist him, they promised to make peace. Opening the city gates, they went before him, and [Heraclius] ordered that they should go and stay in their own place. So they departed, taking the road through the desert to Tachkastan to the sons of Ishmael. [The Jews] called [the Arabs] to their aid and familiarized them with the relationship they had through the books of the [Old] Testament. Although [the Arabs] were convinced of their close relationship, they were unable to get a consensus from their multitude, for they were divided from each other by religion. In that period a certain one of them, a man of the sons of Ishmael named Muhammad, a merchant, became prominent. A sermon about the Way of Truth, supposedly at God's command, was revealed to them, and [Muhammad] taught them to recognize the God of Abraham, especially since he was informed and knowledgeable about Mosaic history. Because the command had [g104] come from On High, he ordered them all to assemble together and to unite in faith. Abandoning the reverence of vain things, they turned toward the living God, who had appeared to their father, Abraham. Muhammad legislated that they were not to [123] eat carrion, not to drink wine, not to speak falsehoods, and not to commit adultery. He said: "God promised that country to Abraham and to his son after him, for eternity. And what had been promised was fulfilled during that time when [God] loved Israel. Now, however, you are the sons of Abraham, and God shall fulfill the promise made to Abraham and his son on you. Only love the God of Abraham, and go and take the country which God gave to your father, Abraham. No one can successfully resist you in war, since God is with you."

Then all of them assembled together, from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt [The text is corrupt here. The citation is from Genesis 25.18], and they set out from the P'arhan desert [being] twelve tribes [moving] in the order [of precedence] of the Houses of the patriarchs of their tribe. They were divided into 12,000 men, of which the sons of Israel were in their own tribes, 1,000 to a tribe, to lead them to the country of Israel. They travelled army by army in the order [of precedence] of each patriarchy: Nebaioth, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah [Genesis 25. 13-16]. These are the peoples of Ishmael. They reached Moabite Rabbath, at the borders of [124] Ruben's [land]. The Byzantine army was encamped in Arabia. [The Arabs] fell upon them suddenly, struck them with the sword and put to flight emperor Heraclius' brother, Theodosius. Then they turned and encamped in Arabia.

All the remnants of the sons of Israel then assembled [g105] and united, becoming a large force. After this they dispatched a message to the Byzantine emperor, saying: "God gave that country as the inherited property [*i kaluats zharhangut'ean*] of Abraham and of his sons after him. We are the sons of Abraham. It is too much that you hold our country. Leave in peace, and we shall demand from you what you have seized, plus interest. The emperor rejected this. He did not provide a fitting response to the message but rather said: "The country is mine. Your inheritance is the desert. So go in peace to your country." And [Heraclius] started organizing brigades, as many as 70,000 [troops] giving them as a general, a certain one of his faithful eunuchs. He ordered that they were to go

to Arabia, stipulating that they were not to engage them [125] in war, but rather to keep on the alert until he could assemble his other troops and send them to help. Now [the Byzantines] reached the Jordan and crossed into Arabia. Leaving their campsite on the riverbank, [the Byzantines] went on foot to attack [the Arabs'] camp. [The Arabs], however, had placed part of their army in ambushes here and there, lodging the multitude in dwellings around the camp. Then they drove in herds of camels which they penned around the camp and the tents, tying them at the foot with rope. Such was the fortification of their camp. The beasts were fatigued from the journey, and so [the Byzantines] were able to cut through the camp fortification, and started to kill [the Arabs]. But suddenly the men in the ambushes sprung from their places and fell upon them. Awe of the Lord came over the Byzantine troops, and they turned in flight before them. But they were unable to flee because of the quicksand which buried them to the legs. There was great anxiety caused by the heat of the sun and the enemy's sword was upon them. All the generals fell and perished. More than 2,000 men were slain. A few survivors fled to the place of refuge.

[The Arabs] crossed the Jordan and encamped at Jericho. Then dread of them came over the inhabitants of the country, and all of them submitted [g106]. That night the Jerusalemites took [126] the Cross of the Lord and all the vessels of the churches of God, and fled with them by boat to the palace at Constantinople. [The Jerusalemites] requested an oath [from the Arabs] and then submitted.

The emperor of the Byzantines was no longer able to assemble his troops against them. [The Arabs] divided their army into three parts. One part went to Egypt, taking [territory] as far as Alexandria. The second part went north [to war] against the Byzantine empire. In the twinkling of an eye they had seized [territory stretching] from the sea to the shores of the great Euphrates river, as well as Edessa and all the cities of Mesopotamia, on the other side of the [Euphrates] river. The third part [of the Arab army] was sent to the east, against the kingdom of Iran.

In that period the kingdom of Iran grew weaker, and their army was divided into three parts. Then the Ishmaelite troops who were gathered in the east, went and besieged Ctesiphon, since the king of Iran resided there. Troops from the land of Media [Marats'], some 80,000 armed men under their general Rostom assembled and went against [the Arabs] in battle. Then [the Arabs] left the city and crossed to the other side of [127] the Tigris river. [The Iranians] also crossed the river, pursuing them. And they did not stop until they reached their borders, at the village called Hert'ichan. [The Arabs] continued to pursue them, [eventually] going and encamping in the plain. Present were Mushegh Mamikonean, son of Dawit', the general of Armenia with 3,000 armed men, and also prince Grigor, lord of Siwnik', with 1,000 men. [The Iranian and Arab armies] attacked each other, and the Iranian forces fled before them. But [the Arabs] pursued them, putting them to the sword. All the principal *naxarars* died, as did general Rostom. They killed Mushegh and two of his sister's sons, as well as Grigor, the lord of Siwnik', along with one son. Some [of the Iranian troops] escaped and fled back to their own land. The

remnants of the Iranian forces assembled in Atrpatakan at one spot and made Xorhoxazat their general. Then they hurried to Ctesiphon and took the treasury of the [g107] kingdom, the inhabitants of the cities, and their king, and then hurried to get back to Atrpatakan. But as soon as they had departed and gone some distance, the Ishmaelite army unexpectedly came upon them. Horrified, [the Iranians] abandoned the treasury and the inhabitants of the city, and fled. Their king also fled, winding up with the southern troops. Now [the Arabs] took the entire treasury and returned to Ctesiphon, taking the inhabitants of the cities along too. [128] And they pillaged the entire country.

The venerable Heraclius ended his life in ripe old age. He reigned for 30 years [610-40/41]. [Heraclius] made his son Constantine swear to have clemency upon all those transgressors whom he had ordered exiled. He made him vow to send each back to his place, and to bring back the *aspet*, his wife and son, and to establish him in his former rank. "Should he want to go to his land, as I have sworn—and may my oath not be false—release him, and let him go in peace."

Heraclius died and his son Constantine ruled. But no one was chosen as general of the land of Armenia, since the princes were disunited and quit each other's presence.

The polluting army [of the Arabs] arose from Asorestan and came through the valley route to the land of Taron. They took [Taron], Bznunik' and Aghiovit and then, going to the Berkri valley via Ordspoy and Gogovit, poured into Ayrarat. None of the Armenian troops was able to carry the bad news to the *awan* of Dwin. There were, however, three of the princes who went and gathered the dispersed troops: T'eodoros Vahewuni, [129] Xach'ean Arhaweghean, and Shapuh Amatuni. They fled to Dwin, reached the Metsamor bridge, crossed it, destroyed it, and then they went to take the bad news to the *awan*. All the people of the land had assembled in the fortress, and they had come in harvest time for the vineyards.

T'eodoros went to the city of Naxchawan. The enemy Busha reached Metsamawr bridge but was unable to cross over [g108]. However, [the Arabs] had as a guide Vardik, prince of Mekk', who was called Aknik ["Little Eyes"]. Crossing the Metsamawr bridge, they raided the entire country. They accumulated a very great amount of loot and captives, then came and encamped by the edge of the Xosrakert forest.

On the fifth day [of the Arabs' sojourn], on a Friday, the 30th of the month of Tre [Tre: the fourth month in the Armenian calendar, November], they came against the city [of Dwin] and it was betrayed into their hands. For they set fires here and there, and drove away the guards on the wall by smoke and by shooting arrows. They then erected ladders, scaled the wall and, once inside, opened the city gates. The army of the enemy poured inside and put most of the city to the sword. Then, taking the loot and booty of the city, they departed and encamped at their same campsite. After passing some days there, they arose and departed by the same route they had come. They had a multitude of captives with them, some [130] 35,000 souls. Now the prince of Armenia, the lord of

Rshtunik', who had been concealed in an ambushade in the district of Gogovit, went against [the Arabs] with few troops. But he was unable to resist, and so fled before them. [The Arabs] pursued [Rshtunik's troops] killing many of them. Then they went to Asorestan. This occurred in the days of *kat'oghikos* Ezr.

As a result of that battle, an order came from the emperor [granting] the military command and the dignity of patrician to T'eodoros, lord of Rshtunik'.

All this took place as a result of *kat'oghikos* Nerses who succeeded Ezr on the *kat'oghikosal* throne.

When the sons of Ishmael had arisen and issued from the desert of Sinai, their king Amrh ['Umar] did not accompany them. But when [the Arabs] had militarily routed both kingdoms, seizing from Egypt to the great Taurus mountain, from the Western Sea [the Atlantic Ocean] to Media and Xuzhastan, they then emerged with the royal army [and went] to the [g109] natural borders of the holdings of Ishmael. Then the [Arab] [131] king gave an order to assemble boats and many sailors and to navigate southwardly, going east to Pars, to Sagastan, to Sind, to Srman, to the land of Turan and to Makuran as far as the borders of India. The troops swiftly prepared and implemented the command. They burned every country, taking loot and booty. They then turned and made expeditions on the waves of the sea, and reached their own places.

We heard this [account] from men [who had returned] from captivity in Xuzhastan Tachkastan, who themselves had been eye-witnesses to the events described and narrated them to us.