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The Creation of a “Pious” Image of King Vač’agan II (r. c. 485–523) of Caucasian Albania in the *Tale of Vač’agan* (Early Sixth Century)

The *History of Albania* is by the late tenth-century Armenian historian Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, (also known from historiography and manuscripts as “Kałankatuac’i”) who was from Artsakh.¹ This work is a compilation of numerous writings, both longer and shorter, which come from Artsakh. Since these works were copied in a very literal manner, they have served as the basis for a number of scientific contributions published over the last fifteen years on such texts as the *Tale of Vač’agan*, the *History of Catholicos Viro* by Anonymous Kałankatuac’i, the anonymous *History of the Year 684*, the *Canons of Ałuēn*, among others.

The first of these works was composed at the end of the fifth or the beginning of the sixth century by an eyewitness and has historically been given the title of the *Tale of Vač’agan* (in Armenian “Վաչագանի վերք” – “*Vač’agani Vēp*”; in German *Watschagans Erzählung*; in French *Conte de Vatchagan*; and in Russian “Повесть о Вацгане”). Movsēs Dasxuranc’i copied the *Tale* into chapters XIV and XVI–XXIII of the first book of his *History of Albania*.² The title of one of the chapters – “The life, conduct, and regulations of Ałuank’ defined by King Vač’agan and the discovery of the holy relics” (*Dasx.* 1.16, p. 42) – must have been the original title of the entire book which the tenth-century historian divided up into chapters by inventing new titles for them.

As I have shown in previous publications,³ the *Tale of Vač’agan* is a medieval panegyric text written in a classical style. That is, it is an apologetic hagiography that does not present a chronological arrangement of facts by year but instead describes the laudable deeds of its hero in a logical order. The author’s goal was not to depict a coherent history of Vač’agan and his house but to present key challenges

1 Movsēs Kałankatuac’i, *History of the country of Ałouank’*. Critical text and preface by V. Arakélian, Yerevan, 1983 (in Armenian) (henceforth cited as *Dasx.*); The *History of the Caucasian Albanians* by Movsēs Dasxurançi, translated by C.J.F. Dowsett, Oxford, London, 1961. For more details on the author of the *History of Albania*, cf. A.A. Akopyan, *Albania-Ałuank’ in Graeco-Roman and Ancient Armenian Sources*, Yerevan, 1987, p. 150–272 (in Russian).

2 I published a detailed historico-philological analysis of the *Tale of Vač’agan* in my extensive article in the annual *Handēs Amsorea* of 2003 (A. Hakobyan, *The Tale of Vač’agan and the kingdom of Arsachakunis in Caucasian Albania*, – “Handes Amsorya”, CXVII, Vienna 2003, col. 45–142; [in Armenian]) and its critical text is published in volume III of the collection *The Armenian Authors* in 2004, p. 51–112 (in Armenian).

3 Cf. fn. 2.

that had to be and were mastered by the pious king for the sake of the Christian community and the diocese of the marzpanate kingdom of Caucasian Albania, which was subdued by Sasanian Iran (“... and the regulations of Ałuank’ defined by King Vač’agan”). Thus, the *Tale of Vač’agan* marks the beginning of the depiction of King Vač’agan II of Caucasian Albania as pious, of his veneration, and of his transformation into a legend. In 1970, Nerses Akinian, archimandrite of the Mekhitarist congregation, remarked that this veneration was deepened systematically during the Middle Ages.⁴

It is notable that even now no other representative of this type of an eastern lord described in medieval Armenian literature can compete with Vač’agan’s credentials as a pious Christian ruler as defined in the *Tale of Vač’agan* and other works created at a later date by medieval Armenian authors. The character of Vač’agan the Pious is strikingly superior to all other pious kings and princes who earned the respect and love of the Armenian people and Armenian authors. Due to his veneration and legendary reputation, King Vač’agan almost reached the same level of the ecclesiastical figures who achieved canonisation. The *Tale of Vač’agan* preserves the most detailed account of the state of Caucasian Albania in the early Middle Ages. Even though ten kings from the dynasty of Vač’agan II held power in Caucasian Albania, King Vač’agan is the undisputed hero of the *Tale*. The stylistic peculiarity of the *Tale of Vač’agan* (as either an epic life or an apologetic hagiography) played an important role in the veneration of King Vač’agan, as will be seen in the following analysis of the *Tale*.

The *Tale* describes the beginning of the Arsacid dynasty in Caucasian Albania at the turn of the fourth century with the installation of Vač’agan I the Brave, namesake of the principal hero. Chronologically, this coincides with the reinstallation of the Arsacids at the end of the third century in greater Armenia and the coronation of Tiridates III (r. 298–330) by Emperor Diocletian, which was regulated within the framework of the peace of Nisibis whose negotiations lasted forty years. Information regarding the kings that preceded Vač’agan the Pious is not coherent; often the author is content to mention their names arbitrarily as they occur in different episodes and to add brief comments about them (*Dasx.*, 1.15, p. 41–42). One of the characteristics peculiar to the genre of the panegyric was to present the hero as superior to everyone, even to his own ancestors. This panegyric feature is also present in the *Tale of Vač’agan* (p. 42). The anonymous author does not even make an exception for Vač’ē II (Vač’agan’s uncle), the hero of the anti-Sasanian insurrection of 459–461, on which the Armenian Catholicos Giwt lavishly bestows laudatory epithets (*Dasx.*, 1.11).

Moreover, the historian Elišē conveys a certain number of important details on the “rebel king of Albania” (namely Vač’ē II). These have been copied literally by Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, who also knew the name of the king (*Dasx.*, 1.10). Vač’ē was in-

4 P.N. Akinian, Movsēs Dasxuranc’i (called Kałankatuac’i) and his History of the Ałuank’ (Albanians), Vienna, 1970 (in Armenian), p. 124–127, 140–149.

initially Christian and only became a Zoroastrian under compulsion by Yazdegerd II (r. 449–450). He revolted against the Persians in 459 by converting back to Christianity and forcing his mother (probably his stepmother), who was “Zoroastrian in origin,” and his wife, perhaps his half-sister, to convert to Christianity. The Persian King Peroz (son of Yazdegerd) writes to him: “Liberate my sister... and my niece because they are Zoroastrian in origin and you have converted them to Christianity.” The text continues: “and the marvellous man made... his mother and wife return [to Peroz]” (*Elišē*, 1957, p.198). Vač’ē relinquished power by asking Peroz for permission to keep only the thousand families he received from his father during his infancy (“He asked for what he possessed in his infancy and what his father had given him: the thousand families,” p. 199). These “thousand families” show that Vač’ē was not the oldest son of Esvālēn (*Arsvalēn*, *Ahsvahēn*), the preceding king (a contemporary of Saint Mesrop Maštoc’). If he had been the oldest son, he would have inherited the entire kingdom from his father as opposed to the other sons who would have only inherited land from their father. The oldest son of Esvālēn was probably this Yazdegerd/Yazkert (*Dasx.*, 1.17, p. 48) whose son, Vač’agan, was recognised as the legitimate king twenty-five years later (while it is true that Vač’agan, in the *Tale*, also inherited land in Artsakh, we must remember that his father did not become king). According to the testimony of Elišē, the most probable sequence of events is that the death of Esvālēn must have coincided with the persecutions under Yazdegerd II. It was around this time or around the insurrection of the Vardanides (451) that the Persians refused to recognise the oldest son of Esvālēn as king of Caucasian Albania. Vač’ē had converted to Zoroastrianism (in contrast to his older brother) and married his half-sister. However Vač’ē also revolted some years later due to his fidelity to Christianity (459–461), but according to the *Tale of Vač’agan*, King Peroz decided to abolish royal power in Caucasian Albania after he had repressed this revolt.

Even though Vač’agan’s capital city is not mentioned in the *Tale of Vač’agan*, his court is recounted in a dream of Prince Xočkorik, who was the governor of the city of Tsri (about seventy-five kilometres east of the ancient city of Kapalak), not far from the city Shamakhi on the left riverbank of Kur: “And this man came to the court and he resembled him as if the king had fallen asleep” (*Dasx.*, 1.23, p. 79).⁵ Furthermore, in chapter 1.19 (p. 60) after the same Xočkorik in Tsri discovers relics of some saints, he rides as fast as possible on horseback to the king (“and on horseback, he hurried to come to King Vač’agan the Pious”). Consequently, Vač’agan’s capital cannot be far from Tsri. According to Bagrat Ulubabyan, Vač’agan could have been under siege in the village of Diutakan (Diwtakan, *var.* Giutakan) of Artsakh, which the *History of*

5 Babken Haroutunian argued for the localisation of country of the Čilbk’ (Silvi) in the Shamakhi region in 1971 (B.A. Haroutunyan, About the Question of Localizing Lpink’, *Journal of the University of Yerevan*, 1971, N 1 [in Armenian], p. 122–123). I have discussed in more detail the location of the city of Tsri of the Čilbk in (A. Hakobyan, On the Timing of Arsacid Kingdom’s Downfall in Albania, *Journal of the Institute of Oriental Studies of NAS*, Vol. XXVI, Yerevan, 2008 [in Armenian], not. 27), making it coincide with the modern Armenian village of Saġian, 10 kilometres east of the city Shamakhi.

Catholicos Viro, copied by Movsēs Dasxuranc'i,⁶ mentions is in the valley of the river Trtu (Tartar), close to Kałankatoyk' (*Dasx.*, 2.10, p. 132–133). However, this conclusion is based on the erroneous assumption that Vač'agan is a member of the family of the Aṙanshahiks (and not of the royal house of the Arsacids of Caucasian Albania) and that the familial territory had to be received by the governor Arran, great grandson of Hayk, the eponymous ancestor of the Armenians in Artsakh-Outik' on the right riverbank of the Kur. In reality, Vač'agan was the direct descendent of the royal house of the Arsacids of Caucasian Albania, and the territory should be located on the left riverbank of the Kur. In fact, the village Diutakan in the *Tale of Vač'agan* did not even have a church prior to the construction of the chapel of Saint Pantaleon, and they were obliged to keep the relics of the saints "in a sacred and noble place" (*Dasx.*, 1.23, p. 86).⁷

Chapter 1.15 of the *History of Albania* was erroneously considered a reliable source in the past. According to the *History*, "the city of Perozapat... named today Partav" was built by King Vač'ē II of Caucasian Albania "on the order of King Peroz of Persia."⁸ But Vač'ē revolted immediately after the death of Yazdegerd the Sasanian, and the bloody war of succession began between his sons Hormizd and Peroz. Defeated by Peroz and having surrendered the throne, Vač'ē, therefore, was not able to build a city on the order of the same Peroz. This information from the *History* cannot be corroborated by any source, Armenian or otherwise. In the work entitled the *History of the Year 684*,⁹ which was copied in the *History of Albania*, the capital is named "Peroz-Kavad," which in Middle Persian means "the victorious of Kavad," in eight out of eleven cases (but not Perozapat or Partav, which is the case in only three instances). This further supports the assumption that the city was built by Kavad I (or Qavad, Qobad) the Sasanian (r. 488–496, 498–531). This is also affirmed by Arab historians following the later Sasanian historical tradition (Ibn Khordadbeh, Ibn al-Faqih, Ibn al-Athir, etc.).¹⁰ According to them, Kavad broke down the resistance of the Persian doyens and of his brother Jamasp (496–498) in the beginning of his reign and then defeated the tribes of the Savir Huns of northern Caucasia, who had invaded the regions in the north-east of Iran (503–504). After he had chased them down, he strengthened the defence of the Caucasian

⁶ I published a critical text of the *History of the Catholicos Viro* in *The Armenian Authors*, t. IV, 7th century, Antelias, 2005, p. 371–414 (in Armenian).

⁷ We may add the Iranian term *dutak* = "house," "family," or "extended family". It can be considered as the basis of the toponym Diutakan.

⁸ Cf. K.V. Trever, *Essays on the history and the culture of Caucasian Albania*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1959 (in Russian), p. 217.

⁹ For more details on this trustworthy seventh-century source, see *Akopyan* (cf. fn. 1) 196–201. I published a critical text of the *History of the Year 684* in *The Armenian Authors*, t. V, 7th century, Antelias, 2005, p. 795–895 (in Armenian).

¹⁰ Cf. N.A. Karaulov, *Information of Arab authors on Caucasia, Armenia and Azerbaïdjan*, – Collection of material for the description of towns and tribes in Caucasia (in Russian), t. XXXI, Tbilisi, 1902, p. 15; t. XXXII, Tbilisi, 1903, p. 15; XXXVIII, Tbilisi, 1908, p. 41–43.

region by building the cities of Bailakan and Partav (Berda’a).¹¹ Given this history, the construction of Peroz-Kavad/Partav needs to be dated to the seven-year period of reconciliation between Persia and the Byzantine Empire which began during the first decade of the sixth century (506–512). At this time, Kavad had also received a considerable amount of gold from Emperor Anastasius in an attempt to fortify the Caucasian frontier against the Savir Huns (according to Procopius of Caesarea).¹² As for the variation “Perozapat” on the name “Partav,” it is perhaps the result of a linguistic phenomenon known as the alternation of sounds in the place name “Peroz-Kavad” by a predecessor of Movsēs Dasxuranc’i. This could occur both through a popular and simplistic understanding of the proper noun and by association with the ending “pat” (= wall) of the names of cities familiar to Armenians such as Vałarš-apat. The understanding of Perozapat as “city of Peroz” fostered the false assumption that the city was built on the order of Peroz.

A matter of dating related to a seeming confusion in the *Chronological List of the Catholicoi of Albania* (Dasx., 3.23) should now be cleared up. The inscription of the ecclesiastical Council of Aluēn (Dasx., 1.26),¹³ assembled by Vač’agan the Pious, cannot be taken as evidence for the fact that the catholicosate of Caucasian Albania was transferred from Č’ol/Derbend to Partav in 552. This had probably already taken place under the reign of Vač’agan and the reign of the Catholicos Šup’hałišoy of Caucasian Albania. In all likelihood, the seat of the marzpanat and the catholicosate of Caucasian Albania was transferred from Č’ol to Partav at the beginning of the second decade of the sixth century. Thus, the Council of Aluēn can be dated around the year 510. The creation of the *Tale of Vač’agan*, which conveys much older information, can be dated to the beginning of the sixth century, probably 500–502. At that time, Partav had not yet been built, the country was experiencing a period of peace (before the invasion of the Savirs), “the evil and cursed Persian marzpanas” (cf. Dasx., 1.18, p. 52) were not in the country (their function being delegated to the king of Albania), and the happy period of the marzpanate of Vahan Mamikonean in Armenia continued, while King Vakhtang Gorgasali ruled in Georgia.

Thus, the *Tale* could not have been written immediately after Vač’agan ascended the throne (in all likelihood in autumn 485 in the context of the treaty of Nuarsak between Armenia and Iran). As a medieval work written in classical style, the *Tale* is not organised chronologically but rather by a logical succession of good deeds performed by the hero. The *Tale* seems to have been composed after a long period of time as suggested by several facts recounted about Vač’agan: his ascension to the

¹¹ Khosrow I Anoshirvan, son of Kavad I, fortified this frontier even more by constructing a wall of stones in Č’ol/Derbend. According to J. Marquart, Partav had already been built by Kavad (J. Marquart, *Ērānšahr nach der Geographie des Ps. Mosēs Xorenaçi*, Berlin, 1901, p. 177). Cf. Akopyan (cf. fn. 1) 217.

¹² Procop., pers. 1.7.5.

¹³ I published a critical text of the *Canons of the Council of Alouēn* in *The Armenian Authors*, t. III, 6th Century, Antelias, 2004, p. 127–140 (in Armenian).

throne under the King of Kings Vałarš (Balash; r. 484–488); the restoration of Christianity throughout the entire country; the dissolution of several sects in Artsakh and in Caucasian Albania; the discovery of the relics of Saint Pantaleon and Saint Zachary in the city of Tsri of the Čilbk'/Silvi (on the left riverbank of the Kur); and the discovery of the relics of Saint Grigoris in Amaras (in Artsakh on the right riverbank). Finally, the fact that the biannual celebration of the saints' memory is mentioned (*Dasx.*, 1.23, p. 86) shows that the text was not composed immediately after the discovery of the relics of Grigoris and their arrival in Diutakan. It is clear that the king supported their veneration for several years, as mentioned by the author. The last paragraph of chapter 1.19 – regarding the divine gift of the eldest son, named Pantaleon, to a king who had no offspring – demonstrates that at least nine months must have passed between the discovery of the relics and their display. At the time of the discovery of the relics of Grigoris at Amaras, Vač'agan also had a daughter named Xənc'ik "in the age of adolescence" (*Dasx.*, 1.23, p. 93), that is, eleven or twelve years old, which reveals yet another chronological interval.

In summary, the *Tale of Vač'agan* gives the impression that the term "Albania" ("Ałuank'") acquired a new meaning in Armenia after the fall of the Arsacid dynasty and the creation of the three marzpanates in 428 and after the great administrative reform of the Sasanians. The geographical area encompassed by "Albania" was now semi-circular in shape and included the provinces of Artsakh and Outik' (separated from Armenia by the reform in 428 and reunited in the marzpanate "Albania/Aṙan"). From that time on, the term "Albania" referred to the entire marzpanate, beginning from the Aras River to the mountains of Caucasia and Derbend. According to conception of the world that was characteristic of the Middle Ages, the Armenians of Artsakh and Outik' accepted this denomination of "their" country even though it was under the royal power of Albania with its centre in Kapalak and the spiritual power of the catholicosate of Caucasian Albania with its centre in Č'oł/Derbend. With the passing of time and above all the transfer of the centres of the catholicosate and the marzpanate to Partav on the right riverbank of the Kur, the convergence reached a point where the Armenians of Artsakh and Outik' started to think of themselves as the true masters of Caucasian Albania. They did this by assuming pejorative positions towards smaller ethnicities of Caucasian Albania, who were also Christian and from the left riverbank of the Kur, and by treating them as mountain dwelling barbarians. This stimulated the partial Armenisation of one group amongst them (and even the transformation into Georgians at Hereti), while another group converted to Islam and was thus Iranianised (in Shirvan). Only the Christian Udis (in the surroundings of Kapalak and of Šak'i) preserved their ethnic Caucasian Albanian identity until modern times, in the same way as the peoples speaking the Lezgin language of southern Dagestan and of the northern part of contemporary Azerbaijan (the Lezgins, the Tabasarans, the Tzakhours, the Rutuls, the Aghuls, the Budukh, the Kryz, the Khinalugh, etc.). The multi-ethnic community of "Albania" (Ałuank') remained multi-tribal and no unified ethnos emerged bearing this name. One of the reasons for this was that the Armenians on the right riverbank of the Kur rapidly

adopted the term “Albania/Ałuank” in contrast to the Armenians of the province of Gugark’ who belonged to the marzpanate of Virk’/Iberia. The latter had accepted the propagation of the term Virk’ towards the south with one major exception, for they had known the eastern Kartvelian ethnoses (that is, the Georgian people) under this name for centuries.

These are the social perceptions of this epoch as preserved in the *Tale of Vač’agan* (as well as in the *Canons of Ałuēn*). The numerous ecclesiastical councils convened by Vač’agan II are mentioned; however, it should be noted that the well-known *Canons of Ałuēn*, which introduced the doctrines of the *Book of Armenian Canons* to the country, are the result of a council convened on the right riverbank. The *Tale* does not contain information on direct contact between the centres of Kapałak/Kabala and Č’oł of the church of Caucasian Albania. Instead, it strengthens the veneration of Gregory the Illuminator, the Apostle Thaddaeus, Saint Hripsimē and Gayianē and above all Saint Grigoris, the grandson of Gregory the Illuminator, throughout the entire country and suppresses the cult of Saint Zachary and Saint Pantaleon of Caucasian Albania or, more precisely, of the Kapałak-Č’oł region. The *Tale* does not put much effort into extolling the pontiffs of the preceding era of the Caucasian Albanian church, as it only mentions in one episode the archbishop Yunan who sat in Č’oł (*Dasx.*, 1.23, p. 85) and Šup’hališoy, a supreme archbishop who also held office in Č’oł. Rather the Catholicos Yovhan Mandakuni, whose ring was used to seal the relics of Gregory the Illuminator, Hripsimē, and Gayianē that had been brought into Caucasian Albania, is named “patriarch” (*Dasx.*, 1.21, p. 67). The author does not mention the name of the capital Kapałak of the realm of Caucasian Albania (he only names the city of Tsri on the left riverbank of the Kur and the village of Haku); instead, he sanctifies the ethnically Armenian cult centres on the right riverbank of the Kur for the entire diocese of the realm of Caucasian Albania (Amaras, Darahoĵ, Suhař, K’aruč, Ve[h]kert, Diutakan, etc.). Of all the matters proper to Caucasian Albania, the *Tale of Vač’agan* only sanctifies the Arsacid Vač’agan the Pious himself (with his queen Šušanik, a typical name for women of the Armenian princely house of Mamikoneans), who likely saw the absolute guarantee of his power by politically relying on the Armenian population of the right riverbank as Christians and more worthy of trust. The final part of the *Tale* compares Vač’agan “the Illuminator” to Constantine the Great and the Armenian King Tiridates III, both of whom helped to spread Christianity in their countries (*Dasx.*, 1.23, p. 83) even though they predated him by about two centuries.¹⁴ The Armenians of the right riverbank so successfully established the sanctification of Vač’agan that he continued to be treated as a hero in numerous religious and ethical writings in the following centuries. This king entered the genealogy of the royal houses of Armenia (the Ařanshahiks and

¹⁴ It needs to be remarked that this section of the text focuses on the image of the king. For our topic, it is useful to compare Vač’agan to these two kings. In other sources, no such comparison between Armenian or Albanian kings with Constantine I or Tiridates III can be found, even though these kings occupy an important place in accounts of Armenian history.

the Khatchenians) in popular tales and romantic prose of modern times (see *Anahit and Vač'agan* by Ghazaros Aghayan) and even became a symbol of renewal (as demonstrated by the “Order of Vač'agan the Pious” in Nagorno-Karabagh/Artsakh).

It should be noted that the downfall of Vač'agan II and his reign is not mentioned in any trustworthy source although the year traditionally adopted in the literature is around 510. This date should, however, be moved at least to the middle of the 510s to conform with the information about the Council of Ałuēn. In this case, it would be possible to move the date towards the end of Vač'agan's reign and during the administrative reforms in Sasanian Iran through which King Kavad I abolished royal power in Virk'/Kartli (the date of the dethroning of the Georgian King Gurgen is based on the account of Procopius). Recently discovered numismatic evidence increases the probability of this date. In 1993, F. Gurnet and, in 2003, the Iranologist Ed. Khourchoudian deciphered monograms engraved in two similar coins minted in the year thirty-five of the reign of Kavad (522/3) with the letters 'l'n, that is, “ALAN” or “ARAN.”¹⁵ For the first time, they have demonstrated the link between a monogram of this kind from the year 523 and the downfall of the Caucasian Albanian kingdom, parallel to the downfall of the Georgian kingdom, when both countries were given the modest status of a marzpanate. The Sasanian numismatic material manifests an astonishing logic in this regard; Sasanian coins that bear the inscription *ARM* (= *ARMINA*/Armenia) only occur during the reign of Bahram V Gor (420–438), who abolished Arsacid royalty in Armenia and introduced marzpanate rule. Thus, a period of about thirty-eight years (485–523) can be said to constitute the reign of Vač'agan II the Pious, the last king of the ancient and medieval kingdom of Caucasian Albania. It should also be noted that one cannot, based upon the happy decades of his reign, assume that the last years of his reign were also so (not to mention the examples of Armenia and Georgia). However, this did not prevent the following generations from seeking an increasingly comprehensive picture of the “pious king” Vač'agan and from sanctifying him within the tradition initiated by the *Tale of Vač'agan*.

Vač'agan II is a king who was elevated to the rank of the perfect eastern Christian both by the *Tale of Vač'agan* and by the later oral and written Armenian tradition. Here a few aspects of his depiction as a pious Christian ruler will be identified. First, a pious Christian king has to be capable of finding just solutions to the most complicated geopolitical problems before anything else. According to the *Tale of Vač'agan*, Vač'agan takes a just and “reasonable” position at the end of the great revolt 482–485 of the peoples of the ante-Caucasus against Sasanian Persia. He thereby earns the throne offered to him by the King of Kings Vałarš (Balash), even though he was only half independent.

15 F. Gurnet, A New Sasanian Mintmark?, *Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society*, N. 138, London, 1993, p. 5; E. Khourchoudyan, Armenia and Sasanian Iran, Almati, 2003, p. 190–193 (in Russian).

A pious Christian king also must be loved by all kinds of people under his rule. In the *Tale of Vač'agan*, the king is always at his people's side and he and his wife Šušanik are adored and praised by the great lords and peasants of Caucasian Albania alike (*Dasx.*, 1.22–23). A king of this kind also needs to wage war against all deviations from Christian doctrine. The *Tale of Vač'agan* particularly praises his fight with iron and fire against the members of a sect called the "finger-cutters" (the cutters of little fingers) living on the right riverbank of the Kur as well as against those who believed in different priests, wizards, and witches, in order to make them return to the true faith (*Dasx.*, 1.17).

A pious Christian king needs to love the church and build churches and sanctuaries. Vač'agan took care to build and bless sanctuaries at his newly built residence Artsakh, in Diutakan, in Amaras, and elsewhere (*Dasx.*, 1.20–23). According to one note of Movsēs Daxourantsi, Vač'agan the Pious built churches in Caucasian Albania corresponding to the number of days in a year, that is, 365 churches (*Dasx.*, 3.22). Such a king needed to have vast respect for the canons of the Church and to be open to ecclesiastical concerns. This is demonstrated through the fact that various communications survive from three-quarters of the councils convened during the reign of Vač'agan (*Dasx.*, 1.19, 21, 23, 26).

The king also needs to possess a true devotion to the relics of saints and of Christian martyrs, and Vač'agan made great efforts in this regard. At his request, Yovhan Mandakuni, Catholicos of Armenia, transfers to Caucasian Albania some of the relics of the principal saints of the Armenian Church, including Gregory the Illuminator and the virgins Hripsimē and Gayianē. Vač'agan confirms the discovery of relics of Zachary and Pantaleon the Physician, the principal saints of Albania, on the left riverbank of the Kur in the Čilbk' province (*Dasx.*, 1. 19) and is responsible for the discovery of the relics of Grigoris the Adolescent, one of the most important saints of Albania, in the village of Amaras in Artsakh on the right riverbank of the Kur (*Dasx.*, 1.20–23). Later sources attribute the honour of discovering numerous other saints to Vač'agan.

Finally, a pious Christian king needs to have a passionate love of the school, science, and the sermons of the Christian archimandrites. According to the *Tale of Vač'agan*, the king spares no efforts in this domain either. He opens schools and with the teachers takes part in the education of children personally (*Dasx.*, 1.18). He sends queries to the most renowned scholars of his time, including the deacon Matthew of Artsakh (*Dasx.*, 1.24), the bishop Abraham Mamikonean (*Dasx.*, 1.25), and the bishop Peter of Siunia (Stepanos Orbelean, *History of Syunik/Siunia*, chap. 22).

It would not be an exaggeration to compare the character and image of a pious Christian king created by Armenian authors to that of King Tiridates III, the evangelizer of Armenia, as created by a medieval Armenian author, and that of Constantine the Great, the evangelizer of the Roman Empire. Therefore, after the downfall of Arsacid reign, the creation of three marzpanates of the ante-Caucasus in 428, and the large Sasanian administrative reforms, the term "Albania/Aluank'" acquired a new

meaning that corresponded to a geographical region in the shape of a semi-circle: “Albania/Aṙan.” The term signified from this time on the provinces of Artsakh and Outik’, which had been separated from Armenia by the reform and reunited with it in the marzpanate “Albania/Aṙan.” From that point forward, the term referred to the marzpanate as a whole, spanning from the Aras River to the mountains of Caucasia. These are the societal perceptions of the time that are recorded in the *Tale of Vač’agan* and the *Canons of Aḥuēn*. The *Tale of Vač’agan* was the first work to develop the image of a “pious” King Vač’agan II of Caucasian Albania and contributed to his veneration and his transformation into legend. His veneration was systematically increased during the Middle Ages. King Vač’agan the Pious thus entered into the genealogy of the royal houses of Armenia, into popular tales and into romantic prose of modern times, even becoming a symbol of renewal.