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Heresies: On an Armenian prayer to the sun.

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According to Yovhan of Odzun, titled *imastaser* (“the Philosopher”, d. 728), a theologian who wrote a tract *Enddem Pawghikeants’* “Against the Paulicians”,¹ the latter heretics *zaregahn aghach’el kamets’eal asen, arewik lusik* “when they wish to beseech the Sun, say ‘Little sun, little light’”. The *Oskip’orik* (a thirteenth-century miscellany containing texts of various periods) reports virtually the same text, though the “heretics” in question are designated differently: *Manik’ets’ik’ erdnun yaregahn, ew asen: lusik, arewik k’aghts’rik, li es tiezerok’* “the Manichaeans swear by the sun and say ‘Little light, little Sun, little sweet one— you are full of the world.’”² The differences between the two testimonia are not great, but the latter gives us a just little more of the text and describes the formula as an *oath* (verb *erdn-um*; noun *erdumn*, pl. *erdmunk’*) rather than a prayer. If further verses followed, they are unfortunately not attested. But the one precious verse we have is tantalizing enough to warrant close analysis. After all, Armenian literature does not afford very many texts that are identified explicitly as native and non-Christian. As to the identity of its original reciters, one must keep in mind that medieval Armenian writers were generally clerics with a strongly held ideological position and social role; they tended to paint with a broad brush when depicting, generally in disparaging hues at that, what they considered heterodox beliefs. So their writings sometimes lump together indiscriminately Manichaeans, Christian dissident sects, and others. Most any of these could conceivably have addressed a prayer to the sun now and then, or sworn by it— the Manichaeans had a sun god in their bafflingly vast pantheon of mythical beings.

But one long ago proposed a more likely single source for the prayer: there were Armenians who preserved some of the Zoroastrian heritage of the pre-Christian era and called themselves *Arewardik’*, or “Children of the Sun”. I will proceed from the assumption that this prayer to— or oath invoking— the sun was in fact theirs. It would have ample ancient precedent in the country. Movses Khorenats’i in his *History of the Armenians* mentions the custom of swearing by the sun twice, with reference to both pre- and early-Christian Armenia. In book 2.19 he writes that Hyrcanus asked for an oath from Barzap’ran, clan leader (*nahapet*) of the Armenian canton of Rshtunik’. (This would be in the mid-first century BCE; the

¹ See Abp. Norayr Pogharean (Bogharian), *Hay groghner* [“Armenian Writers”], Jerusalem: St. James’, 1970, pp. 98-102.

² J.R. Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Iranian Series, 1987, pp. 213, 524, and ch. 16 for a general discussion of the *Arewardik’*.

Rshuni noble's name is Iranian means "high glory" and may refer to the dynastic sacred fire of the Parthian Arsacid dynasty, *Adur Burzen Mihr*, the Fire of High Mithra. Mithra is "high, lofty" because of his place with the Sun-god in heaven.) The latter *erdnu nma yaregahn ew yamenayn pashtamuns iwreants' erknyains ew erkrayins, ew yarew Artashezi ew Tigranay* "swears to him by the solar orb and by all things heavenly and earthly that they venerate, and by the sun of Artashez and Tigran." And in 3.22, with reference to the events of the fourth century CE, in newly baptized Armenia, *Erdnoyr Vardan yarewn ark'ayi*, "Vardan swore by the sun of the king."³ To this day in Armenian *arev* "sun" is a way of referring to a person's life, soul, or fortune; so it is common to swear *arevid merrnem*, "may I die for your sun". Light is another important, obvious, and related metaphor, so one common expression for "I bring you good news," "Congratulations," or the like is *ach'k'id luys*, lit. "light to your eyes." Light, eyes, and sun form a pattern of homologies nigh universal to the human race (and probably to most terrestrial beings); but it may be argued that in Armenia, whose religious pre-Christian substratum is Zoroastrian, the particular emphasis on light in the language, and in religious culture in particular, may be a survival of the older religion, that placed (and still places) the symbolism of fire and the sun at its very center.

From what little is known of the Arewordik', they preserved a number of telltale Zoroastrian beliefs and observances; and the sun, which the little prayer addresses so reverently and lovingly, is fittingly part of the name by which the Christian sources designate them. (Their beliefs were probably related to those of the Shamsis in northern Syria, whose name contains Arabic *shams*, "sun". But we still do not know what they called themselves.) The greatest of all fires for the Zoroastrians, for whom fire is the pre-eminent living symbol and focus (no pun intended) of the faith. It embodies the light, warmth, life, and power of the supreme divinity Ahura Mazda, the Lord Wisdom, Creator of heaven and earth. Zoroastrians invoke the sun, Middle Persian *Khwarshed*, and the closely associated *yazata* (spiritual being worthy of reverence) Mithra, *Mihr* in Middle Iranian, thrice daily in litanies (*niyayishn*) that are recited together. In Muslim Persian, *mehr* endures as a common noun, for the sun and for loving kindness; it is because of the latter meaning used as a proper name for girls;⁴ and tradition remembers the autumn feast *jashn-e Mehregan*. The old Armenian calendar has a month named Meheki, from *Mihrakan. Our Arewordi prayer does not mention Mihr (or as he was in medieval Armenian, Mher) by name, yet his presence loomed large in Armenian culture and lore, even long after the baptism of most of the nation early in the fourth century. Mithra is, as the guardian of covenants, the divinity most closely attached to human concerns; and he is in many ways the most human of the Zoroastrian *yazatas*, the only one whose portrayal as a human being in a fixed form— with a rayed nimbus— is stable and universal throughout the Iranian world over a

³ See also Fr. Vardan Hats'uni, *Erdmunk' hin Hayots' mej* ["Oaths in Ancient Armenia"], Venice: S. Lazzaro, 1932, p. 52 et seq.

⁴ Such an association may be why the meticulous Herodotus misidentified Mithra as a goddess.

millennium. One recalls that Mithra is the only Iranian divinity around whom an entire new faith took shape, the mystery religion of Mithraism in the Roman empire. It would even seem that the liberation struggle against the Arabs in the eighth and ninth centuries CE coalesced around a revival of the reverence for Mithra— two out of the four heroes of the great epic cycle of Sasun, the millennial folk composition that gave voice to that struggle, are named Mher, that is, Mithra. In a recent study I have placed the anti-Arab uprising and the heroic epic that crystallized around it beginning in the eighth century, to contemporary events in the Iranian world east of Armenia, where a Mithraic revival, as it were, also took place. The revival in that period of pre-Islamic and, it would seem, also pre-Christian national identity at precisely that time might also argue a “late” date for the *History of the Armenians* of Movses Khorenats'i, which is, in contrast to the earlier histories, such a treasure house of pre-Christian lore— lore that its compiler cherished, at that. We know already *how* the epic evolved and what ancient features it brought together. Looking at the Sasun cycle in that context answers the other question: *Why?*⁵

This little invocation, or perhaps fragment of a longer one, if there was originally more— seems clearly to be a folk prayer, the vernacular composition of unlettered people, not a version of a pre-existing prayer, say, in Avestan— the Old Iranian sacred language of the Zoroastrian sacred books.⁶ Its Classical Armenian aspect, as we shall see presently, is ungrammatical, so it does not have the character of a literal or even slightly garbled citation of an old text from a book. Rather it seems a vernacular verse that bears the external influence of the high speech of Christian liturgy: it is *parole*, touched by *langue*. But that does not mean it is not poetically sophisticated in its way; and an examination of its structure will suggest, I think, that it is artful indeed. Let us try an analysis of the six words that constitute the longer version. They can be evenly divided into two hemistichs of three words each: seven syllables in the first; six in the second. The caesura feels naturally placed, as the first three words are a compact unit of two nouns (little light, little sun) and a noun or adjective (little sweet [one?]), with no verbs. All are diminutives,

⁵ See J.R. Russell, “Mithra,” forthcoming in a special volume of *Iran and the Caucasus*, Erevan and Leiden, dedicated to the proceedings of a conference held at the Collège de France, Paris, October 2015.

⁶ There is a fragment of a Sogdian Zoroastrian text containing a version of the Ashem Vohu prayer, somewhat changed in transmission over time, in either very old Avestan or another form of Old Iranian (see Sarah Stewart, ed., *The Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2013, pp. 93-94 and pl. 27). This would be an attestation of local variants of the *manthra spenta*, the holy word, of the sort one might have hoped to find among Armenian Zoroastrians. But by the time Odznets'i was writing, these had perhaps already been forgotten, or else were not recited in the presence of Christians, who do not observe Zoroastrian laws of purity and whose physical presence might therefore have been believed to violate their sanctity. It is also possible that the believers in Aramazd/Ahura Mazda also did not wish to expose their cherished words to mockery and disrespect.

and all bear a stress on the final syllable: *-ík, -ík, -ík*. All are vocatives: little light, little sun, little sweet one. The second part of the verse could stand as an independent declarative statement: it has implicit subject with verb and thus is contrastively different. Its sound pattern underscores that contrast. The hemistich begins with two terse monosyllables: the first is *lí*, “full”; the second of them, the enclitic verb *es* “thou art” with implied subject— so *lí es*. These terse words are followed, balanced, by the final long drawn out word of the line, the four-syllable */tíyazerók’/* (inserting the onglide *-y-*: there is no hiatus between *i* and *e*). Its first syllable, *tí-*, “god, divine”, resonates alliteratively but also semantically with the first word of the hemistich, *lí*, “full”— for divinity is a pleroma, a fullness. And the *k* of the final syllable *-ók’* recapitulates the three-fold *k* of the three substantives of the first part, indeed emphasizing it by its aspiration, while the vowel *o* marks a differentiation from the repeated *i* of *-ík* and *li*.

The addition of the diminutive (the Arm. suffix is *-ík*), so important to the structure of this brief verse, is common in affection and also in reverence in the Indo-European languages, cf. Rus. *царь батюшка* “Tsar Little Father”. The threefold invocation of a divinity that we see in this Armenian folk prayer is also an ancient and important Indo-European feature that likewise survives in the Russian honorific, not for what is above but for what is below— *Мать сыра земля* “Mother Damp Earth”. The latter indeed corresponds very closely to the threefold Zoroastrian honorific given the goddess of the waters and of female fecundity and purity in the Avesta: *aredvi sura anahita*, “damp powerful undefiled”. The final epithet of the triad became the goddess’ proper name, attested in Armenian as *Anahit* and as *Nahid* in modern Persian.⁷ One will have more to say about triads in their Christian context presently; and perhaps the most important expression of this idea in human religious culture is the Christian Holy Trinity itself. But with more specific reference to the Zoroastrians and the Armenian Children of the Sun, one notes that St. Nerses *Shnorhali* (“the Graceful”), who was concerned with the conversion of the Arewordik’ to Christianity, might have composed at least one strophe of his credal poem *Hawatov khostovanim*, “I confess in faith”, with a view to attracting them, since it seems to echo the Zoroastrian moral triad of good thoughts, words, and deeds (Av. *humata hukhta hvarshata*). The standard Zoroastrian prayer *Vispa humata*, which declares that the three virtues bring salvation, might suggest that recitation of the triad, with its rhythmic breathing of the initial *h-*, served as a *mantra* Zoroastrian priests used to help go into trance and overcome the terrors of the unconscious and the dangers of the road as they undertook shamanic journeys through the Otherworld. Today, many modern Zoroastrians consider the triad, whether in Avestan as above, as Middle-Persianized *humat, hukht, hvarshat*, or as

⁷ For a discussion of this, see J.R. Russell, “The Word *chragamah* and the Rites of the Armenian Goddess,” *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 5, 1990-1991, pp. 157-172.

Persian *pendar-e nik, goftar-e nik, kerdar-e nik*, to be the defining tenet of their religion as a whole.⁸

The sun stands in heaven, and one might have expected in the one verse of our possibly Arewordi prayer to encounter not *tiezerk'*, which means the universe or the world in its entirety, but the more common Arm. *erkink'*, "heaven". The latter, as the standard term in Armenian,⁹ is paired with rhyming *erkir*, "earth", in what is likely to be the most ancient poetical text preserved in writing in the language: the song of the birth of the god Vahagn (Avestan Verethraghna, Middle Iranian Bahram), preserved in the *History of the Armenians* of Movses Khorenats'i. It is encountered frequently and forever thereafter in most every imaginable poetic form. The alliterative and thematic association of the two words among native speakers is so strong that it exerts a kind of subconscious gravitational pull—the words for heaven and earth sound similar to each other, as a kind of pair, in a private language that an Armenian invented in the 18th century— this despite his obvious and deliberate effort to make his new tongue not sound like his native Armenian. In the language they are *rōšmēxe* ("earth") and *rōčki* ("heaven"), with the initial un-trilled r that is extremely rare in Armenian words. He invented an alphabet based on the Armenian script, partly for his invented tongue and partly for the transcription of a number of magical spells and stories of herbal lore. The script is pleasingly similar in appearance to Georgian cursive *mkhedruli*; and some of the sounds of his invented tongue, *rshtuni* (a word meaning here secret language, after the argot of Armenian traveling merchants hailing from the province of Rshtunik'), resemble

⁸ On St. Nerses' credo, see J.R. Russell, "A Credo for the Children of the Sun," *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 4, 1988-1989, pp. 157-160; on the possible use in the Sasanian period of *humata, hukhta, hvarshata* as a shamanistic mantra see J.R. Russell, "An Armenological Note on Kartīr's Vision," *Dasturji Dr. Hormazdyar Dastur Kayoji Mirza Birth Centenary Memorial Volume*, Udvada (Gujarat, India): Dastur Kayoji Mirza Institute, 2010, pp. 253-258.

⁹ The less common word for the sky, *anjrpēt*, "ruler of the waterless", seems to be a term for the airy region intermediate (cf. Skt. *antariksha*, "ruler of the in between") between the solid earth and the upper waters that in Biblical cosmology were released during the Deluge but are now held back (see Genesis 1.7). Psalm 148.4 exults, *Halleluhu shemei ha-shamayim/ ve-ha-mayim asher me'al ha-shamayim* "Praise Him, heavens of the heavens/ And the waters that are above the heavens." Cf. Ps. 104.3 *Ha-miqra va-mayim 'alilotav/ Ha-sam 'avim rekhuvo* "Who founds the beams of Your upper chambers in the waters,/ Who makes the clouds His chariot." In the Mishnaic tractate *Chagiga* the three travelers to heaven are warned not to say "Water, water!" when they see the marble (Heb. *shayish*) of the divine *hekhalot*, "mansions, halls". The floor of the palace of Solomon, in legend, was made of plates of glass beneath which was water, to produce perhaps a similar effect. In Armenian mystical theology, the "final curtain" between this world and heaven is *loytsn matsuats*, "liquid made solid"— the marble, as solidified water, that Rabbi Akiva and his companions beheld, perhaps. See J.R. Russell, "Liturgical Mysticism and the Narek," *Revue des Etudes Arméniennes* 26, 1996-1997, pp. 427-439.

those of Georgian. He lived most likely in Georgia, then the center of Armenian life in the Transcaucasus, and was thus acquainted with the local language, which, though rich in Iranian and Armenian loans, is decidedly not Indo-European.¹⁰

In the fragmentary prayer studied here, perhaps *tiezerk'* was used with honorific intent. The late Prof. Charles Dowsett suggested the word is to be analyzed as **ti-*, a root which he argues meant at first “divide, apportion”, and *ezer*, “boundary”, ending in *pluralis tantum* in *-k'*. It would have originally meant “boundary of a plot of land” and its meaning developed from there to “inhabited world”, expanding thence to “universe”. One may cite two common examples for the sense of honor and superiority that *ti-* confers. The first is the honorific *ter*, “lord”, from **ti-ayr*; the second its heterosexual partner, *tikin* “lady”. The former is to this day the appellation of an Armenian priest; and it carries on in American-Armenian surnames like Der Hovannessian, literally “son of Father John”. The latter, *tikin*, is attested in Agathangelos’ narrative of the conversion of the Armenians as a title or cult epithet of the goddess Anahit, evidently translating an Iranian term. Nowadays it just means “missus”; for “mister”, we can thank the Crusaders for Armenian *baron*. The anachronistic Classical plural is used in formal address, so “Ladies and Gentlemen” becomes the *Dignayk' yev baronayk'* familiar to anyone who has sat through a public speech. (One transcribes the Western form since except for Iran, Eastern Armenian was communized and for some decades employed only *enkerner*, “comrades”.)

By the Middle Ages the process of dialect variation in Armenian just alluded to, which had begun in ancient times and of course is still continuing— as tends to happen with many living languages— might have led to the mutual voicing and devoicing of the palatals *d* and *t* that one observes in the Western and Eastern forms of the modern language today. So perhaps after a time, in westerly cantons of the Armenian mountain fastnesses, the reciters of the Arewordi prayer might have heard in *tiezerk'*, pronounced by some */diyezerk'/*, also the pagan term for a divinity, Classical Arm. *di-k'*. We find it in the pre-Christian toponym *Dits'avan* (“Place of the gods”), and in *diwc'-azn* “gods’ [noble] progeny”, i.e., “hero” (for which the Greek loan *heros* is used interchangeably). Dowsett posed as a semantic parallel to **ti-k'*, “apportion(er?)” the Vedic *bhaga-*, “*idem*”, which comes to mean “god” in Indian and Iranian. One may cite the Russian loan *Бор* and the immensely productive Iranian-in-Armenian *bag-* “god” of Bagawan “Place of the god(s)”, an alternative name for *Dits'avan supra, bagin* “(pagan) shrine”, Bag(a)rat “god-given [cf. Gk. Theodoros]”, etc. In the Armenian version of the Bible, *tiezerk'* regularly translates the Greek *oikoumene* “world, universe” of the Septuagint; twice, in Psalms, it renders *ta perata*

¹⁰ J.R. Russell, “Armenian Secret and Invented Languages and Argots,” *Acta Linguistica Petropolitana*, Transactions of the Institute for Linguistic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Vol. VIII, part 3, St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2012, pp. 602-684; and C.J.F. Dowsett, “Arm. *ter*, *tikin*, *tiezerk'*,” *Mémorial du Cinquantenaire, 1914-1964*, École des langues orientales anciennes de l’Institut Catholique de Paris: Paris, 1964, pp. 135-145.

tes ges, “the ends/extremes of the earth”. The word just might have been used for what its authors perceived as possible overtones of pre-Christian antiquity and non-Christian sanctity, though it has a respectable place in Christian usage as well.

Whatever the case with *tiezerk'*, the preceding phrase “you are full of” and the use of the Classical Armenian instrumental plural for “world” itself in our invocation leaves no room for doubt at all. It points, not to any Zoroastrian or other pre-Christian source, but to a patterning upon, and borrowing from, the Sanctus in the Anamnesis (*yishatakñ*) of the Divine Liturgy (*pataraq*) of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The passage is very famous and is well known, indeed, to adherents of most Christian confessions: *Surb, surb, surb ter zorut'eants' li en erkink' ew erkir p'arrok' k'o: orhnut'iwn i bardzuns. Orhneald or ekir ew galots'd es anuamb Tearnn: Ovsanna i bardzuns.* “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, **the heavens and earth are full of your glory**. Blessed are you who came and are to come in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the heights.”¹¹ This passage derives from the throne vision of Isaiah 6.3, used in the Jewish “angelic” liturgy of the *Qedusha* [“Sanctification”] that is chanted during the repetition out loud of the silent ‘*Amida* (lit., “Standing”) prayer: *Qadosh, qadosh, qadosh Adonai tseva'ot melo kol ha-arets kevodo*, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, all the earth is full of His glory.”¹² The Christian usage is different from the original Hebrew, and felicitously so for Armenian, since in that language is used the alliterative heaven and earth pair so cherished by the language. The Christian prayer has *li en* “they are full”; our strophe has *li es*. The re-use of the instrumental plural in *-ok'* (in *p'arrok'*, “glory”, a loan from Old Iranian *farnah-*) clearly patterns the Arewordi prayer on the Christian one. The Arewordi usage is perhaps ungrammatical, too, since one has to stretch the grammar to make the prayer mean what one thinks the Arewordik' might have intended it to mean: “O sun, the world is full of you” (not, “O sun, you are full of the world”). Space or the universe as we behold it in the daytime is filled with the light of the sun; the sun is not filled with it.¹³ The Arewordik', who most likely had no access to a high social position or to education, might not have understood Classical Armenian any better than other peasants did. There is some irony in this, since as preservers of a pre-Christian faith they were closer in their traditions and beliefs to its sources than the country's patron saint Gregory the Illuminator, the inventor of the alphabet St. Mesrop Mashtots', and the others who had co-opted their language to Christian usage. The latter is replete with densely meaningful Zoroastrian terms

¹¹ Abp. Tiran Nersoyan, ed., *Pataragamatoys' Hayastaneyts' Arrak'elakan Ughghap'arr Ekeghets'woy* [Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church], New York: Delphic Press, 1950, p. 66.

¹² This prayer is also commonly called that of the *Shemoneh 'esrei*, “Eighteen [Benedictions]” and is regarded as a substitute for the Temple sacrifice.

¹³ Armenian has various words for the sun, and in the poem on Vahagn's birth the god's eyes are *aregakunk'*, “solar orbs”. Another term, *arp'i*, probably related to the root *erew-* “appear”, may mean not just the sun itself but the sunlight that fills the daytime sky. So the heavens are full of the sun. Iranian miniature painters sometimes paint the sky gold to reflect this understanding of sunlight.

like *p'arrk'*. One must also consider the possibility that there is no grammatical error and they meant exactly what they are reported to have said. It would seem that after the Armenian Genocide there are no Children of the Sun around any longer to explain; but let us conjecture for a moment that *p'arrk'*, *farnah-*, Av. *khvarenah-*, was understood to mean, among other things, solar radiance, which is both spatial (radiance, after all, has to radiate) and supernal. Might *tiezerk'* then have been meant to stand in for it, perhaps so as to ameliorate somewhat the Christian content (even though the Christian text uses an Iranian word)? If we take the verse, then, as it is, rather than as containing a grammatical mistake, it might be rendered thus: "Beloved light! Beloved sun, sweet! Thou art replete with the vast divine spaces!" The Zoroastrian texts speak of Ahura Mazda as reigning in *roshn anagran*, "unbounded radiance", so the same brilliant vision might lend a reflection of its light to our verse.

Why is the Sanctus the particular prayer that seems to have left its mark on the Arewordi strophe? Its source is in a vision of angels, and in the song of Armenian rite, usually performed by a woman with a beautiful voice, one can sense the still solemn sweetness of their beating wings. The threefold repetition of the word "holy" (*surb*) would also have attracted common folk in whose language, folklore, and mental conceptions triads, as we have already observed, are a basic element and building block, a *topos*. This observation might explain also why it was that late medieval Armenians chose the Trisagion (Gk., "thrice holy")— and in particular the version of the formula that is chanted the feasts of the Cross— *Surb Astuac, surb ew hzor, surb ew anmah, or khach'ets'ar vasn mer, oghormea mez* "Holy God, holy and powerful, holy and immortal, who was crucified for us, have mercy on us"¹⁴ as the pivotal prayer to translate into *mareren* ("Median", i.e., Kurdish) in the 17th century. This was done perhaps in order to attract proselytes of Iranian speech.¹⁵ Threefold words and things have a familiar and pleasant resonance to the ear attuned to archetypal poetic forms, threefold invocations are like spells (cf. the Zoroastrian triad discussed above, and perhaps the three virtues in Hebrew *infra*), spells are believed to have power and thereby gain respect and attention, and power is attractive to anybody looking for a new religion. If his old faith still possessed the attraction of supernatural power and efficacy for him, why would he abandon it? This particular form of the Trisagion (for there are several, depending upon the occasion) also specifically mentions the Cross, the defining symbol of the faith. The

¹⁴ *Pataragamatoys'* (Divine Liturgy), *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹⁵ On the prayer, see J.R. Russell, "On Armeno-Iranian Interaction in the Medieval Period," in R. Gyselen, ed., *Au carrefour des religions. Mélanges offerts à Philippe Gignoux. Res Orientales*, Vol. VII, 1994, pp. 235-238. Conversion from Islam to Christianity in the Muslim world was and is fraught with extreme danger, and pressure to abjure one's faith went in the other direction. But one may cite, for instance, the case of T'ukhman, a Kurdish youth of Diyarbakir who was baptized an Armenian Christian in the 18th century and suffered martyrdom for it. See J.R. Russell, "The Armenian Shrines of the Black Youth (*t'ux manuk*)," *Le Muséon* 111, fasc. 3-4, 1998, pp. 319-343, esp. pp. 322-324.

others do not. In the Conversion of St. Cyprian, which in the Middle Ages became a very popular talismanic text in Armenian folk belief and remains so to this day as the *Kiprianos*, the sorcerer Cyprian of Antioch abandons his pagan beliefs after a spell fails and the demons explain to him the superior power of the Cross. He promptly converts to Christianity. The motivation for his action seems scarcely to have been altruistic; and indeed as one reads on, his acceptance of the new dispensation proved to be a shrewd career move for him— he went on, not to assume the crown of martyrdom (unlike his namesake, St. Cyprian of Carthage, with whom he is not infrequently confused) but the miter of a bishop.¹⁶ Still, the *historiola* illustrates the particular Armenian reverence for the Cross, which some Christian neighbors remarked upon as excessive. Turkish naturally acquired many Armenian loan words; but it is perhaps indicative of the Armenians' stress on the sacred sign that it is the Armenian word for the Cross, *khach'*, rather than some transmitted form of Arabic *salib*, or Greek *stavros*, that was borrowed into Turkish as *hach* and became the standard term for the symbol.¹⁷

¹⁶ The cynical materialism of Cyprian's conversion corresponds well to the practical concerns of a magician. It does not matter whether the rite is for good or ill, divine or demonic, so long as it works. His name is therefore associated with grimoires (manuals of black and white magic, from an old French word for grammar): in the 18th century a short text, the *Ciprianillo*, was popular in Spain; or one might employ the *Cypriani Clavis Inferni sive Magia Alba et Nigra approbata Metratona* to open (with the Kabbalistic archangel Metatron's assistance) the gates of hell. See Owen Davies, *Grimoires: A History of Magic Books*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 32-33 and 114-125 with fig. 9.

¹⁷ See J.R. Russell, "The Armenians, the Holy Cross, and Dionysius Bar Salibi," *St. Nersess Theological Review* 8, 2004, pp. 1-12. The territory of historical Armenia was dotted with *khach'k'ars*, "Cross-stones", as ubiquitous as the gaunt colossi of the *moai* of Rapa Nui (Easter Island) and as defining of the culture of the land. They are named in lists on talismanic scrolls where the direction of the writing itself forms crosses (see J.R. Russell, "The Armenian Magical Scroll and Outsider Art," *Iran and the Caucasus* Vol. 15.1-2, Jubilee Volume, Leiden and Erevan, 2011, pp. 5-47.) Armenians baptized crosses and there was a folk belief that they then came to life and possessed power. This is reflected in an oikotype of the "Boil, little pot, boil!" folktale, about a magical Cross that slays unbelievers: see J.R. Russell, "Raiders of the Holy Cross: The Ballad of the *Karos Khach'* and the Nexus between Ecclesiastical Literature and Folk Tradition in Mediaeval Armenia," in J.J.S. Weitenberg, ed., *New Approaches to Medieval Armenian Language and Literature*, Dutch Studies in Armenian Language and Literature 3, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995, pp. 79-93. In 1997 I visited the village of Shushants' near Van. An ancestor of the Armenian-American playwright Herand Markarian had been the local priest; but when we came to the site of the church all that remained was a pit with a few stones at the bottom. A Kurd of the village told us that he had helped destroy the building in the early 1950s: he and other Muslims believed the cross to be an evil *isharet* ("sign, symbol") of great power: the Armenians and their symbols had to be eliminated lest they destroy the Muslims first. As one will observe presently, Christians tended to regard the Jews

What of the appellation *k'aghts'rik*, “little sweet one”? The Armenian word for “sweet” is cognate with the English and thus goes back to the earliest Indo-European stratum of the language; the modern synonym *anush*, from Classical *anoysh*, is a Middle Iranian loan meaning “immortal”, hence ambrosia (lit., immortal [wine]), with the secondary sense of “sweet” emerging from there. But the source is neither proto-Indo-European nor Iranian, one thinks, but again the Armenian liturgy, in this case the Hymn of Praise before Communion. *Matik' arr Ter ew arrek' zloys. Aleluia./ Chashakets'ek' ew tesek' zi k'aghts'r e Ter. Aleluia.* “Come near to the Lord and take the light. Halleluyah./ Taste and see that the Lord is sweet. Halleluyah.”¹⁸ It is telling also that the Christian hymn juxtaposes light and sweetness, which are found together in the Arewordi text as well. Several Armenian folk prayers recited at sunrise do the same. From Vardenis/Chakherlu, *Bari lusi k'aghts'r K'ristos,/ Du oghormanas, du gt'as,/ Du p'orts'enk'nerats' azat enes,/ Du anp'orts'ank' pahes, ter Astvats* “Sweet Christ of the good light,/ Have mercy, have pity,/ Free [us] from trials,/ Keep us untried, Lord God.” A longer prayer, from Mush/Bulanekh, begins *Orshnyal i Astvats,/ Orshnyal i bari lusu k'aghts'rik K'ristos* “Blessed is God,/ Blessed is sweet little Christ of the good light,” with the same diminutive for “sweet” as in the Arewordi invocation. Another such prayer, from Van/Andzak, pairs light and sun as the Arewordi one does: *Luse lusats'av/ Arev parts'rats'av/ Tiroch' zorut'enov/ Trakhti trrner pats'van,/ Tzhokhk'i trrner kots'van,/ Art'arner urkhets'an/ Meghavorner tanjvets'an* “The light lightened,/ The sun rose high/ By the Lord's power/ The gates of paradise opened,/ The gates of hell were closed,/ The righteous rejoiced,/ The sinners suffered torment.” Another prayer, from Rshtunik', pairs sweetness and light: *Los losats'av,/ Ter k'aghts'rats'av:/ Baru drrner bats'vav,/ Oghermut'en shatats'av./ K'ristos, ch'e khanis k'u akh im srten:/ K'u akh-amot'ov dzi shakhes, pakhes/ Ter, du es steghtse; ch'e koruses,/ Ter du es shine; ch'e kortsanes;/ K'u ardar chambkheneru veren/ Zi khangist makhem tas* “The light lightened,/ The Lord sweetened:/ The gates of good opened;/ Mercy abounded./ Christ, remove not your fear from my heart:/ By fear of you and shame before you, care for and keep me./ Lord, you have created; do not cause perdition./ Lord, you

and the language and symbols of Judaism as likewise powerful in a malefic way, and went on to appropriate them to texts and rituals of magic.

¹⁸ *Pataragamatoys'* (Divine Liturgy), *op. cit.*, p. 88. The Arm. *k'aghts'r* “sweet” translates Gk. *chrestos*, which has a range of meanings including “good, merciful, bountiful” of God and persons and “sweet” of fruits. The original Hebrew, of Ps. 34.9, has *ta'amu u-re'u ki tov Hashem* “Taste ye and see that the Lord is good.” The further implication, relevant to Communion, that He is literally edible, is a Christian interpretation of the verb, which the Psalmist probably intended to mean “consider, try out,” not “eat”— he is enjoining Israel to examine, ponder, and remember God's specific beneficences, not to devour Him. Rabbinic teachings point out that God begins the Ten Commandments not by introducing Himself to the assembled Children of Israel generally and theoretically as Creator of heaven and earth, but immediately and intimately as the liberator from Egyptian bondage.

have made; do not destroy./ [Let me walk] upon your righteous paths/ That you may grant a peaceful death.”¹⁹

These examples can be multiplied, but the texts cited are sufficient to demonstrate an interesting point. The Arewordi prayer is distinguishable from the Christian ones cited mainly in the **absence** from it of explicitly Christian terms— of words such as *K’ristos*, “Christ”, or *Astvats* “God”. To be sure, there are other marked terms in these Christian prayers that are of Iranian origin and that Arewordik’ might have used. *Drakht* “Paradise”, an Iranian loan meaning “tree”, and *dzhokhk’*, “Hell”, a specifically Zoroastrian term meaning “worst existence”, and even *orhn-em* “bless”, from the Iranian *afrin-*, are among innumerable other lexical items of religious import that were adapted from local Zoroastrianism to Christian use from the beginnings of written Armenian in the fifth century. At that time Armenia’s powerful neighbor to the southeast was, of course, the militantly Zoroastrian Sasanian Empire. There was a numerous, strong, and generally tolerated Christian community in Iran and its possessions, then; and treaties with Constantinople guaranteed toleration of Zoroastrians in Byzantine lands. But it would seem Christians did not honor those agreements and Zoroastrians in Anatolia were reduced to an impoverished and clandestine existence. Presumably the Zoroastrian Armenians fared little better.

Although the Arewordik’ preserved some Zoroastrian beliefs, there is no evidence of their having known Avestan prayers or the names of *yazatas*, unlike, for instance, the *magousaioi* of neighboring Cappadocia, who according to St. Basil knew a form of the name of Zurvan, the supernatural personification of time.²⁰ They had a kind of religious leader called a *hazerpet* (“chiliarch”), but little else of what makes up the material life of a religious community endured. The Arewordik’ recited the prayers of their decimated, isolated faith, a religion that had lost its temples, sacred implements, vestments, liturgical language and holy books and was reduced, one might say, to the bare essentials, to *the declaration of what it was not*: their prayer invokes light, sweetness, sun in the manner of the folk prayers of other Armenians, and these prayers are strongly influenced by the usages of the Apostolic Church to whom those other Armenians belonged— but Christ is absent.

One is reminded here of Arthur A. Cohen’s haunting short story, “The Last Jew on Earth: A Fable,” published in *Commentary*, November 1972, in which all the world has accepted the Roman church, save for a single man, a Spanish *converso*. (We shall have more to say presently about real life conversos— Iberian Jews who were baptized, some of retained in secret what they might remember of Judaism, or

¹⁹ Sargis Harut’yunyan, ed., *Hay hmayakan ev zhoghovrdakan aghot’k’ner* [Armenian Incantations and Folk Prayers], Erevan: Erevan University Press, 2006, pp. 191-195.

²⁰ See J.R. Russell, “Two Roads Diverged: Ancient Cappadocia and Ancient Armenia,” in R.G. Hovannisian, ed., *Armenian Kesaria/Kayseri and Cappadocia*, UCLA Armenian History and Culture Series, Historic Armenian Cities and Provinces 12, Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2013, pp. 33-42.

a changed form of it.) His family has long since forgotten the Hebrew language; they possess only an old document in which they swear allegiance to their true faith. They read it once on year, on the Shabbat before Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The man, Don Rafael, is discovered and brought before an astonished crowd: “The old priest limped to his side and spoke: ‘The world awaits you. Speak the recantation and then hand the document to the Cardinal and kneel before him.’ Don Rafael bowed his head in salutation to the Cardinal and moved toward the microphones. There was silence, but for the gentle patter of the rain. Don Rafael passed a hand lightly over his forehead and touched his eyes in a gesture of friendship toward himself. He paused and breathed deeply. He began. ‘I believe in one God, Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth,’ and he paused, ‘and . . . and . . . that is what I believe, that is the only belief I share with you.’ Cries. ‘No, no!’ ‘And the rest that I believe is what I have learned from my father and my father’s father and all those in the generations of fathers which stretch back in the history of time to Moses, my first master. . . . And so much more, if you would like to hear about it.’ Don Rafael paused. He would have continued and told the history of the generations of Israel, but he was not allowed. The microphones went dead.” Don Rafael’s religion has been reduced, thus, to the subtraction of what he does believe from the Catholic credo.

The Arewordi community was, though evidently not subject to active persecution, still something of a Don Rafael. It was an isolate, a survivor in a nation that was itself for the most part, and for the long stretch of its recorded history, an Christian island in an often turbulent and perilous Muslim sea. For in the Arab Caliphate and later in Ottoman Turkey the Armenians constituted a *millet* (“nation”), that is, a community granted the degrading but tolerated status of *dhimmis* but also allowed semi-autonomous status in some spheres of life— marriage, family, burial, etc.— under the governance of their religious authorities, who were answerable to the Sultan. Armenian identity was thus socially and legally inseparable from Christian identity. This was so much the case than the very idea of a non-Christian Armenian identity was and generally still is well nigh unthinkable and incomprehensible: an Armenian convert to any other religion lost his language and identity within a generation.²¹ But the Arewordik’ were speakers of Armenian who lived on their ancestral land, an island within an island, a culturally impoverished people subsisting with no legal status or definition. The words and rites of the Christian faith had surrounded them for many centuries and they patterned what was evidently an important invocation (since, as we have seen, two sources report variants of it independently) on Christian liturgical usages. This influence or

²¹ Prof. Seta Dadoyan’s groundbreaking research on the Fatimid Armenians demonstrates this well. The only Armenian community that was converted to Islam but is known to have retained its language was that of the region of Hamshen in the mountains south of the Black Sea coast within Turkish territory. (Other Hamshen Armenians who refused conversion fled northwards to safety in Sukhumi, in Christian Georgia.) Elsewhere, an Armenian who became a Muslim became in time also a speaker *exclusively* of Kurdish, Turkish, or Arabic.

emulation was unwitting and subconscious, or, less likely, was accepted by design as a kind of camouflage. (If so, it was scarcely effective.) There is no evidence to suggest that the Children of the Sun were Christian converts on the surface who practiced their authentic rites privately and secretly held to their original beliefs. But a comparison may, with those caveats, be drawn nonetheless to another group.

In the centuries before and following the mass expulsion of their community from Spain in 1492, many Sephardic Jews converted to Catholicism rather than leave their homeland. Various scholars, notably the father of the present Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, have persuasively argued in recent years that Christian anti-Semitism was not always theological alone but often had a biological aspect as well, long before the Nazis. This dimension was perhaps present even *ab initio* in embryonic form— if one considers some of the vicious tirades of St. John Chrysostom against the Jews in the fourth century. In the medieval Iberian peninsula, at least, Jews were believed to have an inherently pernicious racial identity that did not change with baptism: the “New Christians” or *conversos* (also called, disparagingly, Marranos), lacked what was called the *limpieza de sangre* “purity of blood” of Old Christians. This meant that even converts who believed sincerely in their new religion and became successful in Spanish society still bore an ineradicable stigma. Such conversos often went on to deal creatively with their enforced marginal status, as innovative Christian believers, thinkers, and even explorers— among these luminaries are St. Theresa of Avila, San Juan de la Cruz, and companions of Christopher Columbus. They looked inward and stressed the inner and intangible aspects of faith and the person, rather than the external signs of ancestry and status; or, outwardly, they sailed forth to find new lands. In the case of Armenian sectarians such as T’ondrakets’is and Paulicians, one has found over the years that descendants of adherents of these “heretical” confessions have tended to move away from the Apostolic Church, embracing Protestantism and freethinking, or, in Russian Armenia, making common cause with exiled Russian sectarians— the Subbotniks and Molokans.²²

But to return to the example of the Inquisition, many other conversos, while presenting themselves as Catholics in public, held privately and inwardly to the tenets of their original faith: there is only one God, Jesus is not divine, the “Old” Testament is true and not the “New”, and Moses stands alone as the foremost of the prophets. They attempted to practice what they remembered of Jewish rites handed down to them, lighting Sabbath candles secretly in a cellar or inner room, or finding subtle ways symbolically to abstain from eating pork. Clandestine faith was more than a social necessity: to be discovered or denounced to the Inquisition meant certain arrest and torture, followed by imprisonment or death. And though they

²² See J.R. Russell, “The Last of the Paulicians,” *Hask hayagitakan taregirk’*, vol. 7-8, Antelias, Lebanon, 1995-1996, pp. 33-47. In the spring of 2009 I made the acquaintance of an Armenian-American from California named Josa who had settled in Mevasseret Tsion, a suburb of Jerusalem, Israel, with her husband, a Protestant archaeologist from Mississippi.

soon forgot the Hebrew language and had no access to Rabbinic texts, the conversos passed their beliefs on to their children for many generations: the Holy Office of the Inquisition itself was closed only in 1819, and it was well over a century after that before Judaism began again to be practiced openly in Spain.

It was inevitable that over time the secret Judaizing prayers of the Marranos acquired Catholic features of style and content: sometimes they might pray before a picture of Moses or another prophet, much as Catholics employed iconic images, though Judaism forbids the use of such representations. Their philosophical emphasis on salvation is also a Catholic feature, as Prof. Yirmiyahu Yovel has persuasively and illuminatingly argued. For normative Judaism stresses performance of the Commandments and loving adherence to God and the Covenant. The hope for salvation is important, but Jews do not accept the ideas of original sin and the prospect of damnation in the way Christians do; so salvation is generally seen as communal and national restoration of the Land of Israel, the Temple service, and the advent of Messianic kingship. Personal salvation is not the central concern of the religion in the way it is for Christians. The conversos, then, in expressing anxiety about salvation from sin and damnation as the centerpiece of some devotions, had absorbed aspects of the surrounding Catholic faith and the language and style of its prayers into their beliefs and practices. The Armenian Children of the Sun seem to have done something similar in their prayer to the Sun on the liturgy of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Indeed it would be indistinguishable from a Christian folk prayer of the dawn but for what it does not have— any reference to Christ, the Hebrew Bible, or the Gospel.

A prayer of one community of crypto-Jews, I would suggest, seem to reflect a pagan view of the journey to the Otherworld after death that is extremely archaic and presumably had endured underground among Iberian gentiles. One clandestine group might thus have felt a kind of affinity and sympathy with another,²³ even as Armenian T'ondrakets'is and Russian Molokans found mutual affirmation, consolation, and the support that comes in numbers, in each other's company. Let us consider the Marrano prayer. Gitlitz reports that in early 20th-century Portugal, it was a custom of the *cristãos novos* to put a coin in the mouth of the deceased, or to pass it over his mouth (either way it is Charon's obol, and no currency of Judaism!)— and then give it to the poor. This would be a rationalization of the pagan custom, transforming it to *tsedáqa*, "charity". The latter, with *teshúva* "repentance" and *tefilla* "prayer", form the triad of virtues that *ma'avirin et ro'a gezera*, "turn away the evil decree" on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.²⁴ Then the mourners recited

²³ See David M. Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996; and Yirmiyahu Yovel, *The Other Within: The Marranos, Split Identity and Emerging Modernity*, Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2009.

²⁴ The words comprising triad have a poetic assonance, with stress on the penultimate syllable and a final *-ah* for all. They point to acts with salvific power: one is reminded of the Zoroastrian "good thoughts, good words, good deeds"

thrice: Ao Vale de Josafat irás/ um leão encontrarás;// Se te pedir carne, dá-lhe páo;/ Se te pedir senha, dá-lhe dinheiro;// Se te procurar de que lei és,/ Diz-lhe que és de Moisés.// Que te deixe passar,/ livre e desembaraçado// Para onde Deus te deixar,/ para onde Deus te mandar.// Se perguntar quem te compôs/ diz-lhe que foi uma hebreia// que neste mundo ficou,/ que te fez o que sabia,// não te fez o que devia. “You’ll go to the valley of Jehosephat/ and find a lion there.// If he asks you for meat, give him bread;/ if he asks you for a sign, give him money.// If he inquires which law is yours,/ tell him the law of Moses.// May he let you pass by/ freely and untrammelled// where God allows,/ where God orders.// If he asks you who made you,/ tell him it was a Jewish woman// who brought you into this world:/ may he do to you what he knows how// and not do to you what he should.”²⁵ The prayer is replete with explicitly Jewish symbolism. The valley of Jehosephat outside the walls of Jerusalem is where Jews believe the dead will be resurrected. The lion recalls the lion of Judah. Bread and meat may refer to the variant meanings in Hebrew of *lechem* “bread” and Arabic *lahm* “meat” and thus recall a time when both languages were known in the Iberian peninsula. Moses alone is named as a religious figure (not Jesus or any Christian saint), and the mother of the deceased is identified as a Jewish woman.

But these Jewish references still re-frame the entirely pagan theme— one utterly alien to normative Judaism— of a journey to the next world on which the imperiled soul must be equipped with the necessary directions, bribes, and passwords it needs to reach a place of bliss. The text explained all these is chanted here on earth as it departs from the body. The Tibetan *Bardo Thodol* gives a Buddhist cast to the same tradition, co-opting what was plainly a pre-Buddhist belief and ritual. The *locus classicus* for such texts is the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*. We find a similar itinerary in the famous ancient Greek Petelia tablet, which Jane Harrison discussed long ago: ΕΥΡΗΣΕΙΣ Δ’ ΑΙΔΑΟ ΔΟΜΩΝ ΕΠ’ ΑΡΙΣΤΕΡΑ ΚΡΗΝΗΝ/ ΠΑΡ Δ’ ΑΥΤΗΙ ΕΣΤΗΚΥΙΑΝ ΚΥΠΑΡΙΣΣΟΝ./ ΤΑΥΤΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΚΡΗΝΗΣ ΜΗΔΕ ΣΧΕΔΟΝ ΕΜΠΕΛΑΣΕΙΑΣ./ ΕΥΡΗΣΕΙΣ Δ’ ΕΤΕΡΑΝ ΤΗΣ ΜΝΗΜΟΣΥΝΗΣ ΑΠΟ ΛΙΜΝΗΣ/ ΨΥΧΡΟΝ ΥΔΩΡ ΠΡΟΡΕΟΝ, ΦΥΛΑΚΕΣ Δ’ ΕΠΙΠΡΟΣΘΕΝ ΕΑΣΙΝ./ ΕΙΠΕΙΝ. ΓΗΣ ΠΑΙΣ ΕΙΜΙ ΚΑΙ ΟΥΡΑΝΟΥ ΑΣΤΕΡΟΕΝΤΟΣ,/ ΑΥΤΑΡ ΕΜΟΙ ΓΕΝΟΣ ΟΥΡΑΝΙΟΝ. ΤΟΔΕ Δ’ ΙΣΤΕ ΚΑΙ ΑΥΤΟΙ./ ΔΙΨΗΙ Δ’ ΕΙΜΙ ΑΥΗ ΚΑΙ ΑΠΟΛΛΥΜΑΙ. ΑΛΛΑ ΔΟΤ’ ΑΙΨΑ/ ΨΥΧΡΟΝ ΥΔΩΡ ΠΡΟΡΕΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΜΝΗΜΟΣΥΝΗΣ ΑΠ(Ο ΛΙΜΝ)ΗΣ/ ΚΑΙ ΤΟΤ’ ΕΠΕΙΤ’ Α(ΛΛΟΙΣΙ ΜΕΘ’) ΗΡΩΕΣΣΙΝ ΑΝΑΞΕΙΣ... “You will find to the left of the house of Hades a wellspring/ and by the side of it a white cypress standing:/ to this wellspring do not come near./ You will find though another by the lake of Memory,/ cold water flowing forth, and guardians before it are./ Say: I am a son of Earth and of Heaven starry,/ but my race is Heavenly. This you yourselves know./ I am parched with thirst and perish. But give quickly/ cold water flowing forth from the lake of Memory./ And they will give you to drink from the divine lake/ and then with the

discussed earlier. It is noteworthy that for both Jews and Zoroastrians, it is deeds (*hvarshta*, *tsedaqa*) that matter most— it is no use to repent in prayer on Yom Kippur the wrong done a person unless one has first sought his forgiveness!

²⁵ Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit*, *op. cit.*, p. 285 and p. 307 n. 48.

other Heroes you will have lordship.”²⁶ This text is not unique in the varieties of ancient Greek religion but citation of it is sufficient to prove the pagan and non-Jewish origin of the custom that underlay the Judaized prayer of the Portuguese New Christians.

As one might expect, the language of the prayers of adherents of secret and forbidden religions has points of similarity to the spells of magic. Christian folk magic used to beneficent ends— the arts of healers, for instance— lies oftentimes just within the bounds of social acceptance. Sorcery and black magic are beyond and thus practiced clandestinely. But these practices have a social role: love spells, or spells designed to thwart the designs of enemies, may be malefic in intent but are a sort of steam valve, useful in releasing tension. It is better to have a magician write a curse on a rival suitor than to go out and kill him; better to invoke the wrath of supernatural beings on the boss than to “go postal”, as Americans say of disgruntled mailmen who suddenly arrive at work one day, God forbid, with a gun. So in modern Erevan one can engage the services of magicians who will write a curse and put it in a tree trunk, or insert a counter-clockwise rendering in feathers of the Christian scythe-sun of eternity, in an enemy’s pillow. It is difficult to discern whether the people derided by the fifth-century Eznik of Koghb as *heshmakapasht*, “worshippers of Wrath”,²⁷ practiced actual demonolatry. Does anybody deliberately worship a being whose purpose is to harm one? Nowadays there are such people: one can easily obtain a “Satanic Bible” or acquire the liturgy of a “Black Mass”. But those very terms illustrate well the dependence of the presumed devil-worshiper on the very beliefs and institutions that he is inverting. Magicians often use Jewish symbols and Hebrew letters and words, borrowing from another group on the margins; and Christian anti-Semites associate Jews with the symbols and images of satanism, such as upside-down pentacles and black men with the heads and feet of goats and of course long horns.

I mention all this simply because writing spells seems to have been a kind of sideline to bring in a little extra income for adherents of forbidden or marginal religions willing to bend their own morality and take advantage of the curious and the credulous. In Muslim lands, it was wine taverns that were the domain of *kafirs* as

²⁶ Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903, p. 659 and discussion p. 572 *et seq.*

²⁷ Arm. **heshmak*, compare Geor. *heshmaki* “demon” and Pers. *kheshm*, “wrath”, is the archdemon *Aeshma Daeva*, the Heb. Ashmedai and Eng. Asmodeus of the apocryphal Book of Tobit, a pleasantly quirky Persian-style romance (and an ancestor, one thinks, of Restoration comedy) set in Nineveh and Hamadan: see J.R. Russell, “God is Good: Tobit and Iran,” *Iran and the Caucasus V*, Tehran, 2001, pp. 1-6. On some Armenian spells and their folk associations see J.R. Russell, “Languages of Men, Languages of Demons,” in publication, *Festschrift Michael Stone*, ed. Theo Van Lint.

well— and a different sort of esoteric religious mystique formed around those.²⁸ From the mid-16th century Marranos settled in the region of the Bordeaux Parliament, contiguous to their ancestral land of Spain; and it is recorded that in the mid-18th century gentile Spaniards were still making trips to Bayonne hoping to learn magic from them.²⁹ These lessons were presumably not *gratis*, unlike the month-long introductory offer available from a pair of fallen angels and their cat in the Mountains of Darkness beyond the river Sambatyon.³⁰ So perhaps if one were in search of an Awordi in medieval Armenia, finding out where the local witch lived might be a good place to start, perhaps after a few drinks in the company of friendly Sufis at the local Magian bar.³¹

²⁸ In Muslim Iran, the Zoroastrians found another niche in a business that was also tolerated for its social function of release of tension but officially frowned upon: running a bar. Persian poetry abounds with esoteric treatments of the *maykadeh*, “temple of wine”, *pir-e moghan* “Magian elder” (the bartender), and the latter’s son— the handsome young *mogh bachche* “Magian boy” who served as *saqi* “cupbearer”. The boy becomes the metaphor for God, the Beloved; passionate love (*eshq*) and drunkenness (*masti*), the ecstatic state of the mystic worshipper. On the subject generally, see E. Yarshater, “The theme of wine-drinking and the concept of the beloved in early Persian poetry,” *Studia Islamica* 13, 1960, pp. 43-53.

²⁹ Owen Davies, *Grimoires*, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-113.

³⁰ See J.R. Russell, “Hārūt and Mārūt: The Armenian Zoroastrian Demonic Twins in the *Qur’ān* Who Invented Fiction,” in S. Tokhtasev and P. Luria, eds., *Commentationes Iranicae: Sbornik statei k 90-letiyu V.A. Livshitsa*, St. Petersburg: Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences and Nestor-Historia, 2013, pp. 469-480.

³¹ In Constantinople at the turn of the century one might visit a hashish den instead and witness the modern permutation of a pagan ritual, of the sort we have discussed, right there. For it was the custom for the musicians to throw three grains of hashish in the fire and sing in modern Greek, *Ya sou Khare! Na kharis to mavro sou skotadhi*. “Greetings, Charon— may you enjoy your black darkness!” There is a play on the name of the ferryman of Hades, Charon, and *kharo*, “enjoy”. Prof. Martin Schwartz, the prominent Iranist and ethnomusicologist, and a friend and teacher, showed this to me (and played it on one of his precious antique gramophone recordings) about thirty years ago at his home in Berkeley.