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«Tajik» and Other Names to Denote Muslims in Armenian Historical Sources as a Reflection of the Cognition of a Different Ethnic-confessional Community

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Abstract: *In the course of history, peoples and tribes have given each other designations on the basis of distinctive features, qualities and circumstances. The pretext for the creation of such names was the geographical area, special qualities of a particular people, religious affiliation or epic genesis. With the beginning of the Arab conquests and campaigns in the middle of the 7th century CE, Armenia fell under Arab domination becoming part of the Arab Caliphate within the next decade. The aim of the paper is to present what names were given to Muslims in what historical context, how these names reflected the perception of a different ethnoreligious community.*

Key words: History, Armenia, Armenian Written Sources, Tajik, Arabs, Ishmaelites, Muslims

Introduction

In the course of history, peoples and tribes have given each other designations on the basis of distinctive features, qualities and circumstances. The pretext for the creation of such names was the geographical area (e.g. Normans), special qualities of a particular people (barbarian, zindj, people of Archers – Mongols, among others), religious affiliation (e.g. Magi – Iranians, Moor), epic genesis (Ashkenazi, Ishmaelites), and certain others.

With the beginning of the Arab conquests and campaigns in the middle of the 7th century CE, Armenia fell under Arab domination becoming part of the Arab Caliphate within the next decade. It has been of much interest to observe how the Arabs and later Muslim conquerors were perceived in the Armenian historical environment and how this has been reflected in the Armenian sources.

Therefore, the aim of the paper is to present what names were given to Muslims in what historical context, how these names reflected the perception of a different

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ethnoreligious community, which of these names were characteristic of the Armenian historical reality, and other related issues.

«Tajik»

The use of the term «Tajik» in Armenian sources is extremely interesting. «Tajik» could mean Arab (Arabic) as well: “Meruzhan got on the Tajik horse and ran away [Merowžann i tačik ji nsteal p‘axč‘ēr]”¹ or “He sent Tajik camels to Armenia [Tačik owłtowk‘ arjakē i Hays]”² in the *Patmut‘iwn Hayoc‘* (the *Epic Histories*, 5th c.). In the early Islamic period, «Tajik» denoted Muslim Arabs by Sebeos (7th c.) “And I will not put in your fortresses not amirs, and not Tačik warriors”,³ and later Muslims (Persians, Turks, and others) in general, e.g. in the work of Matevos Uṙhayetsi (Matthew of Edessa, 12th c.) “And in 952-953 there was a great famine in many places. But in the south of the world, in the lands of Tajik, there was great oppression, and it was especially terrible in Mesopotamia”.⁴

A question arises why the denomination was «Tajik». As Barthold notes, the Bedouin tribe which was geographically the closest to Sasanian Empire (3rd-7th c.) was the Tai tribe, who also built the city Hira, which was subsequently the capital of an Arab principality, a vassal dependence on Persia.⁵ He notes that in the 3rd century CE, one of the Syrian authors (unknown?), writing in Edessa, used the word «Tai», along with the word «Saracens», to refer to all Bedouins in general, and in the Muslim era, there are later forms – «tazik» and «tazi» from which later was formed the Turkish «tejik» and Armenian «Tajik».⁶ «Tajik» in the Pahlavi language signified an Arab or fast.⁷ What is interesting is that both meanings of the word were borrowed in Armenian back in the early Middle Ages. According to Acharian, in the Armenian sources of the 5th-7th centuries CE, there are such phrases as «Tajik camel», and «Tajik horse», indicating the rapidity of these animals; alternatively, under the term «Tajik» they (e.g. P‘awstos Buzand or Sebeos) meant the Arabs of Mesopotamia.⁸ The identification of the «Tajik» with the Arab is also clearly seen in the following example from this colophone of Armenian dreamteller (dated 1222) “Philosopher Arakel translated this dreamteller from **Tajik-Arabic** into Armenian [Zays Erazahans i **tačik arap** gre' i hay gir mekneal Ar'aqel imastase'r]”, or in another example from the Armenian translation of the Chronicle of Mika'el Rabo (Michael the Syrian)

¹ P‘awstos Buzand (1832) 157.

² P‘awstos Buzand (1832) 166.

³ Sebeos (1851) 216.

⁴ Matevos Uṙhayetsi (1869) 1.

⁵ Fisher & Wood, 2016.

⁶ Barthold, 1963: 455-6.

⁷ MacKenzie, 1971: 83.

⁸ Acharian, 1926: 366.

“(from here) begins the kingdom of the Arabs, who are Tājiks” [skizbn ar'ne' t'agaworowt'ean **Arabkac**, or en **Tačikq**]”.⁹

The usage and interpretation of the term «Tājik» as a synonym to Muslim or Arab, peculiar to the Armenian sources, has quite an peculiar explanation. With the spread of Islam and the Arab conquests in 630-650, the conquered local, other peoples (Persians, Turks and Armenians) associated the Arab with the Muslim. It follows that an Arab is the same as a Muslim, and vice versa. Further, as Islam spreads to other peoples, Iranians, Turks, etc. also become Muslims, i.e. a Turk or Persian also becomes similar to an Arab Muslim, or, as correctly noted by Barthold, “(those) who adopted Islam thus became an Arab”.¹⁰ And from the above-mentioned material we can deduce following ‘equation’: if a «Tājik» = Arab, and an Arab = Muslim, then a «Tājik» = Muslim; it follows that other Muslim peoples (Turks, Persians) can have be «Tājik». So if a Muslim (Turks, Persians) = a «Tājik», so a Turk = a «Tājik».¹¹

The transition of the term «Tājik» from Arabs to Turks (Seljuks) in 12th -13th centuries is beautifully captured in the following text as translated from Armenian of the history of Mika'el Rabo: “And the **Arabs**, who until then **were called Tājiks** after their leader **Taya**, mingled with the Turks, and became one people because of religion, and were called by the same name”.¹² Here is another example from the history of Mxit'ar Ayrivanec'i (Mekhithar of Ani): “**Turks and Tājiks** united and put their chief in Baghdad and called him caliph [Miabanec'an t'owrk'n ew tačikn ew z'azgapetn iwreanc' edin 'i Baldat ev xalifay anvanec'in]”.¹³

«Tājik» came to be used to refer to the Ottoman Turks. A case in point is an anonymous Armenian chronicle (17th-18th c.) in which we find one very interesting expression, «Mahmetakan Tājik», where «Tājik» indicates ethnicity (Ottoman Turk) and «Mahmetakan» (i.e. Muslim, Mahomeddan), the religious affiliation.¹⁴

In dictionaries of the 19th century the term «Tājik» is often used in the ambivalent sense as a Turk and a Muslim. For example, in the German-Armenian dictionary of that time the words «Turk» and «Tājik» are found together, and the verb «**tačkanal**», that is to become a «Tājik», is translated in the sense «to become a Muslim»; as well as this, the geographical term «Tājkastan», that is, the «country of Tājik» is given.¹⁵

One can also draw an interesting parallel with the Georgian medieval reality. In the Georgian historical written sources the term «Spars» (Persian) was used simi-

⁹ *Hayeren Dzeragreri Hishatakaranner* (1984) 131, 161-2.

¹⁰ Barthold, 1963: 456.

¹¹ In the text of the article and in the examples given, the word *Turk* refers to the Seljuk Turks, or later the Ottoman Turks.

¹² *Recueil des historiens des croisades* (1869) 325-6.

¹³ Mxit'ar Ayrivanec'i (1867) 74.

¹⁴ *Manr žamanakagrowt' yownner* (1956) 415.

¹⁵ Koylawean, 1844: 1420.

larly to the term «Tajik». The term «Spars» in Medieval Georgian literature has not only an ethnic meaning, but also a religious one. Gabashvili showed on the basis of hagio-graphic sources that this word means Muslims.¹⁶ However, based on the study of the Lives of St. Efstavios of Mtskheta and St. Nino, Chkhartivshili came to the conclusion that the term «Spars» could mean not only Muslim but also non-Christian. In some cases it is really a Musulman, in others a pagan, or simply a non-Christian.¹⁷

«Ismaelac'i» or «Hagarac'i»

Historically, according to biblical tradition, Hagar was an Egyptian maid of Sarah, who became Abraham's concubine while he was childless and bore him a son, Ishmael. As Isaac, Abraham's son by Sarah, began to grow up, Hagar and Ishmael were banished from Abraham's house. Hagar went south and settled in the Arabian Desert, with Ishmael later becoming the ancestor of the Arab tribes called Ishmaelites (after his name) and Hagarites (after his mother).

One of the most common names in Armenian medieval reality was the term «Ishmaelites», used as a descriptive term to refer to Muslims. For example, following the use of the names «Ishmael», «Ishmael army», and «nation of Ishmaelites» by the historian Ghevond (Łewond / Leontius, 8th c.),¹⁸ one can conclude that back in the 8th century CE this term was already used to name Muslims in general. When Ismaili was used to mean Muslim, this trend continued throughout the following centuries, up to the late Middle Ages. For example, in the 14th century CE, scribe Grigor Yerets (Gregory the Priest) mentions the form “Ishmaelites and Magians”,¹⁹ (applying them to Muslims and apparently to Mongols professing shamanism or Buddhism) or “the wicked nation of Ishmael and the sons of the slave Hagar [anōrēn azgn Ismayēli ev ałaxnacın ordik'n Hagarow]”.²⁰ In scribe Daniel Altamaretsi's words, “the nation of Ishmael was enamored and converted the entire nation of Mongols to false faith”.²¹

At the same period, another scribe named Nater writes in the memorial record of *Bible* manuscript (dated 1341): “And all fled from the districts and the cities, all Christians and Ishmaelites”.²² In this mention of Nater “from Christians and Ishmaelites”, it becomes obvious that the author means Muslims by the term «Ishmaelites», contrasting them with Christians. However, the term «Is-maelac'i» (Ishmaelite) later underwent a new evolution and came to also carry the meaning of ethnicity, and under the term, «Ismaelac'i» Arabs, Mamluks, Ottoman Turks, and

¹⁶ Gabashvili, 1983: 88.

¹⁷ Chkhartishvili, 1994: 22-5.

¹⁸ Ghevond (1857) 22, 23, 24.

¹⁹ *Hayeren Dzeragreri Hishatakaranner* (1950) 268.

²⁰ *Hayeren Dzeragreri Hishatakaranner* (1984) 710.

²¹ *Hayeren Dzeragreri Hishatakaranner* (1950) 47.

²² *Hayeren Dzeragreri Hishatakaranner* (1950) 327.

others could be denoted. For example, “The unfaithful troops of the Ishmaelites (Egyptian Mamluks) entered the country of Cilicia”²³ and “in the bitter and evil time (1305), offended and persecuted by the people of Ishmael, in this year (1305) Egyptian troops (Mamluks) entered Cilicia”.²⁴

Another author, Iohannes, most likely means Arabs in his text of memorial record of the *Bible* (dated 1298): “and the people of the world were dominated by the nation of Archers [Mongols] and race of Persians, Turks, Ishmaelites”.²⁵

In his colophon yet another scribe Andreas (dated 1492), under the Ishmaelites, means the Ottomans: “was honored by the king of the Ishmaelites, the one who reigned in the city of Amasya”.²⁶

«Sarakinos»

According to Daniel, under the term «Saracen», the medieval European initially perceived the Arab Muslims, and then the rest of the Muslims in general (Turks, Persians, and others).²⁷ According to Kahf and Retsö, first in Byzantine historiography and literature (since 8th c.), and later (since 12th c.), in medieval Latin literature, «Saracen» became synonymous with the term «Muslim».²⁸

Also of great interest are the mentions of another term in Armenian sources, «Sarakinos». «Sarakinos» (Saracens) could indicate both religious affiliation, for example “some of them are Christians, such as Armenians and Assyrians, and the rest are Saracens by law and religion”,²⁹ and also ethnic affiliation denoting Arabs “it is said that Saracens came out to attack”,³⁰ or “there are different peoples in the Assyrian country, such as Armenians, Greeks, Yacobites, Nestorians and Saracens [Yerkrin Asoroc‘ bnaken zanazan azgk‘, aysink‘n Yoynk‘, Hayk‘, Yakobikk‘, Nestorakank‘ ev Sarakinok‘]”.³¹ It should be noted that there is a coincidence in the usage of the this term between the Armenian authors Ghevond and Het‘owm (Hayton of Corycus, 1240-1310).

«Mowsowlman» and other forms of borrowed Arabic word Muslimun

Without stopping at the explanation of the term «Mahmetakan / mohammedan», let us note that contrary to the popular idea that the term

²³ Hayeren Dzeragreri *Hishatakaranner* (1984) 355.

²⁴ Hayeren Dzeragreri *Hishatakaranner* (1950) 34.

²⁵ Hayeren Dzeragreri *Hishatakaranner* (1984) 832.

²⁶ Hayeren Dzeragreri *Hishatakaranner* (1967) 189.

²⁷ Daniel, 1979: 53.

²⁸ Kahf, 1999: 181; Retsö, 2003: 96.

²⁹ Het‘owm (1842) 17.

³⁰ Ghevond (1887) 5.

³¹ Het‘owm (1842) 21.

«Mahtmetakan» was more applicable for the Armenian historical milieu to denote Muslims,³² it should be mentioned that the form of a path – the name «Muslim» with some slight distortions – was also quite common in Armenian literature and sources. In Hovhannes Erznkac’ii’s (John of Erznka, 1230-1293) work we find the form «məsurman»; Matevos Uṙhayetsi,³³ and Arakel Davrizhetc’i (Arakel of Tabriz, 1590-1670) use the form «mowsowrman»,³⁴ Vardan Bard’rberdc’i (Vardan Areveltsi / Vardan the Easterner, 1198-1271) makes use of the form «msliman»;³⁵ another version, «mslman», is to be found in the *History* of Step’annos (Stepanos Orbelyan, 1250/60-1304),³⁶ and also here is the form «Mowsliman» in the *History of Stambul* of Yeremia Ch’elep̄ii K’eomiwrchean (Eremia Chelebi Komurjian, 1637-1695).³⁷ It is noteworthy that already in the 1st half of the 19th century, the term «Mahmedakan / Mahommedan» was interpreted with the help of the word «mowsowlman» (Muslim) in Armenian dictionaries, as in the case of this mid-19th century French-Armenian-Turkish dictionary, when the form «Mahommetan / Muslim» is explained and translated with the help of the form «myowsowlman».³⁸ By comparison, in other languages, for example in the vocabulary of the Russian language of the 11th-17th centuries, the forms «Magometanin / Mohammedan» and «Musulmanin / Muslim» also appear side by side.³⁹ A fascinating detail: Armenian sources already in the 16th century distinguish the Shiites. The chronographer Barsegh Ardjishec’i (Barsegh of Ardjesh) calls them “the people of the Danishmans,⁴⁰ who are called Imamites, they are from the country of Artavil (Ardabil), they are those who are called red-headed⁴¹ Sophies”.⁴²

Transformation of an ethnonym into a confessionym

It is interesting to note that not only is there the use of a confessional term to denote specific peoples, as discussed in the article, but there is also the reverse process, although this phenomenon is not extraordinary and peculiar only to Armenian historical realities.

³² Armenian medieval authors of different periods used the term Mahmetakan for Muslims. See *The Law-code* (2000) 72; Dadoyan, 2021: 21, 240-3, 262-3, 284, 325.

³³ Matevos Uṙhayetsi (1869) 459.

³⁴ Arakel Davrizhetc’i (1669) 162.

³⁵ Vardan Bard’rberdc’i (1861) 154.

³⁶ Step’annos (1910) 425.

³⁷ Yeremia Ch’elep̄ii K’eomiwrchean (1913) 48, 84.

³⁸ Aughe, 1840: 435.

³⁹ Ragasova & Khusnutdinov, 2017: 24-9.

⁴⁰ Danishmand means “teacher, learned man, scholar of Islamic jurisprudence”, the original Persian, dashiman. In it is not quite clear why the author of the historical chronicle calls the Safavids and their followers danishmans. Perhaps, as in the Chinese historical sources, the Danishmans meant the religious scholar or the Muslims. See Dilon, 2013: 22.

⁴¹ Qizilbash from the Turkic qizil-red, bash-head, and Sofi-Sufi means the Safavids.

⁴² *Manr zamanakagrowt’ yowwner* (1953) 126.

In the record of the manuscript of 1366 (*Book of Lamentation*, Grigor Narekatsi / Gregory of Narek) there is an interesting phrasing “and many people from severe oppression and persecution became Turks [ev bazowmk‘ vasn darn tanjanac‘n darjan t’owrk‘]”.⁴³ This shows the reverse process, where the «Turk» is already perceived as a synonym for the word «Muslim». In comparison, in the Georgian historical milieu, the word «Persian» was used in the same way instead of and as a synonym to the term «Muslim». This can be well noticed from this record about capture of Tiflis Muslim emirate of 1122 by the King of Georgia David the Builder (1089-1125): “The following year the King in the very first attack captured Tbilisi, which for four hundred years had been in the possession of the Persians”.⁴⁴ In the late 19th century French-Armenian dictionary the phrase «prendre le turban» (literally “to take up the turban”, that is, to embrace Islam) is explained and translated as “to become a Turk, to become a Tajik” (tajkanal, t’urkanal).⁴⁵ In the same vein, the term Arab was used as a synonym of «Muslim» in the first centuries of the Caliphate, for example in the message to the Arab governor of Turkestan Ashras the dhikkhans (landowning feudal lords of the old Iranian nobility) of Bukhara, in response to a demand to pay taxes, told Ashras that “Who will you take the kharaj from, now that all the people have become Arabs?”,⁴⁶ that is, they became Muslims.⁴⁷

Conclusions

In the Medieval Armenian reality, such names given to Muslims as «məsəlman» (also «mowsliman» / «msowrman» / «mowsowrman» – i.e. Muslim), «Ismaelac’i» (i.e. Ishmaelite), «Tajik», «Sarakin» (i.e. Saracen), «Mahmedakan» (i.e. Mahomeddan), and «Hagarac’i» (i.e. Hagarian) were widely applied. These names had both a specific meaning, indicating religious affiliation, and, depending on the historical period, they also had another, dual meaning, referring to ethnic affiliation. In addition to the fact that the Muslims were referred to by terms already known in Christian states and societies («Saracen», «Mohammedan», «Ishmaelite», and others.), the term «Tajik» was also used quite extensively. Note also that religious affiliation became so important that religious names often referred to concrete peoples, and interestingly enough, the opposite process was also observed, when it was so known that a particular people professed Islam, and the ethnic name referred to religious affiliation when referring to Muslims in general.

⁴³ *Hayeren Dzeragreri Hishatakaraner* (1950) 473.

⁴⁴ *Kartlis Tskhovreba* (2012) 181.

⁴⁵ Biwandats’i, 1884: 1251.

⁴⁶ al-Ṭabarī (1989) 47.

⁴⁷ Barthold, 1963: 456.

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